

INTERNATIONAL FALCONER

ISSUE 26 - 2005



Feed the passion

INTERNATIONAL FALCONER

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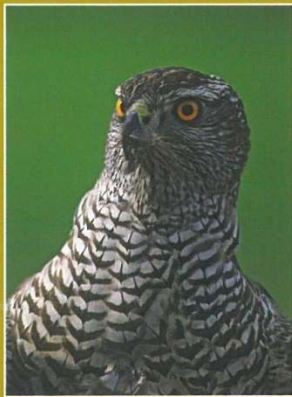
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Cover photo: Adult female goshawk
Photo: Seth Anthony

EDITORIAL



Unless you've been hiding away from civilisation on an island somewhere you'll be familiar with the growing concerns over the last few weeks on bird flu. I suppose as falconers we are somewhat in the front line on this problem – where it's going to end who knows, but it has already, even at this very early stage started to impact on European falconry. Field meets across the continent have been cancelled and I've just heard from a friend in Belgium that there has actually been a restriction placed on falconry in the area that he lives. This sadly is the end of his hawking season before it's really begun.

We're thankfully not at this stage yet here in the UK but it could feasibly be happening in the future – all in all it's a very worrying situation. What with this and all the other political issues facing us one could be forgiven for thinking of golf or maybe stamp collecting as an alternative pastime!

Anyhow, one field meeting that wasn't affected was Opcno 2005 and thanks to the aforementioned Belgian friend Gunter Daes for rushing an excellent selection of photos to us at the eleventh hour for inclusion in this issue.

It is another very late issue for which we apologise but it's been an extremely problematic one on all fronts. The last thing we ever want to do is put an issue out that's sub-standard in any way – our standards are high – and it's important to maintain this even if it means falling behind schedule once in a while.

Until next time.....

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.

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Reviewed by *Nick Kester*

Photo: Gunter Daes

Photo: Seth Anthony

Photo: Terry Anthony

INTERNATIONAL FALCONER



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OBITUARY

It is with great sadness that we report the passing of one the world's top falconers and raptor researchers, Ron Hartley.

Ron was born and educated in Zimbabwe, where he spent his junior years at rural boarding schools, which led to his love of the African outdoors. He did his tertiary education at Petermaritzburg University in South Africa, attaining a BA in English and Geography, hence his great writing abilities. He went on to do a Post Graduate Teaching Diploma at University of Rhodesia.

He returned to the then Rhodesia and took up a teaching post at Umtali Boys High School. At this stage Ron was an avid falconer with a 'B' Grade licence, which allowed him to fly an African hawk-eagle and black sparrowhawks. Ron flew Oswa (female African hawk-eagle) and two black spars, a huge feat but not so for Ron who did everything to the full. Oswa went on many a 'National Call-up', being hunted off the back of military vehicles. The black spars were crazy, mean hunters, much like Ron. He was often likened to his birds, black spars being the closest.

As things settled in the country, he took up lanners and then peregrines, which became his first love, especially females. His favourite in the early years was Whizz Kid, one of the Zimbabwe Falconers' Club's first F1 generation falcons. She was no spectacular flyer, but was extremely reliable, and often hunted after many hours travelling unhooded in a car. Ron would stop at a likely killing field, let 3 pointers out of the boot of his Peugeot 504, and put Whizz into the sky. She killed many a game bird and loved Ron's company. Sadly she killed herself on a fence, whilst out hunting one day at the age of 9.

Ron moved to Falcon College, a rural College for boys, located in the rich Matabeleland bush, surrounded by acacia scrub and sour sand veld, producing a great diversity of wildlife, in particular quarry to hunt. He started the Falcon College Falconry Club, for boys at the school, providing a fantastic opportunity for avid young falconers to study



raptors and their natural history. Many of these young men went on a host of different field trips, from collecting data for DDT research to rafting the infamous Botoka Gorge, below Victoria Falls, doing field work on peregrine and taita falcons. Many of the trips were in remote parts of Zimbabwe, allowing Ron to build on his extensive knowledge of our great outdoors. He was an extremely fit and wiry man, who never did anything at half pace, many a school boy tested Ron's physical abilities in the field, with second place being the highest any youngster achieved. We spent many hours in the wilds, with Ron always trying to keep our enthusiasm lifted, with his booming laugh and passionate interest in nature.

RON HARTLEY 1950 - 2005



In the mid-eighties, Ron leaned towards writing up his data, a lot being collected by members of the Zimbabwe Falconers' Club (ZFC). This data proved to be invaluable, putting the club and Ron, on the local and international falconry map. He nurtured the club's relationship with The Peregrine Fund, allowing its research program to become more professional. Ron steered and fronted the research on raptors in Zimbabwe and in the region. Thousands of hours were spent behind his computer, writing up data, enhanced by his archive of photographs. He was Chairman of the ZFC for many years and ran the club in a very professional manner. He was instrumental in setting up the ZFC's policy document, grading system and

Ron and martial eagle Harriet with cameraman Warren Samuels during filming for the BBC.

research program.

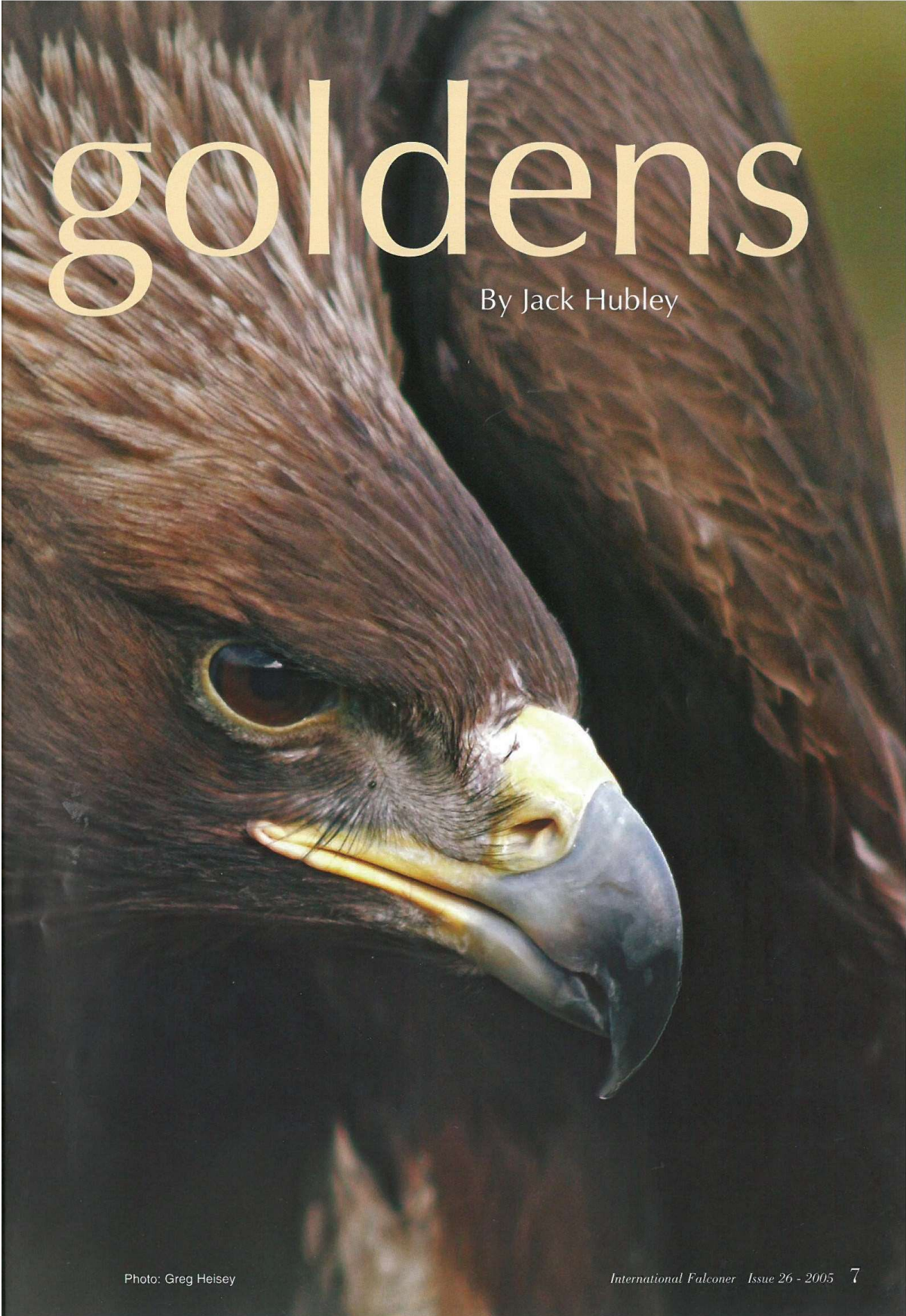
Ron inspired all of us, a man we are all extremely fortunate to have known. He was an insatiably passionate man with immense energy, an extremely hard act to follow. He is missed and will always be in our minds. Our love and thoughts go to his wife Dimps and daughter Emma.

John Grobler
President, Zimbabwe Falconers' Club



Passage

Wherein a naïve but enthusiastic
American falconer contributes to the new
North American “owners manual” on flying
wild-caught golden eagles



goldens

By Jack Hubley

Photo: Greg Heisey

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Passage goldens



Photo: Seth Anthony

I'd seen that look before – when a house cat crossed the driveway in front of her. The big girl cranks herself down to horizontal, head and neck outstretched. When you're on the receiving end of that look, you could swear there were crosshairs in those eyes.

I'd brought this 1-year-old golden eagle 1,800 miles east to Pennsylvania from the plains of Wyoming. But, little more than a month into training, there seemed to be some confusion about the roles here. I was feeling a lot more like a jackrabbit than a "master falconer."

Alpha lives in an indoor/outdoor facility. The barn measures 8x12 feet with an 8-foot opening on the long side. That doorway opens to a 16 x 45-

foot weathering yard. A quarter-inch steel cable runs up the middle from end to end, and Alpha is attached to the cable with a 4-foot leash.

This particular morning would start out much like the others recently. I open the door midway in the weathering yard and walk toward the eagle. She cocks herself and launches from the barn perch. I manage to stop both those big yellow feet with my gauntlet, quickly grabbing the jesses with my right hand and clamping them between the thumb and glove mitt on my left. Those years of acting in high school and college plays are finally paying off and I've fooled her again, acting as if I'm not scared.

Here in the US, hunting with golden eagles is still in its infancy, thanks to federal and state laws that made it nearly impossible to obtain the birds for falconry. Things began to loosen up in the '90s. But even now, access is limited to eagles taken from depredation areas where the birds are a threat to sheep operations that still lamb on open range. Thus far, falconers have been able to trap depredation areas in only one state, Wyoming. So, the aspiring eagle falconer needs plenty of motivation, since the road to acquiring the permits and the birds is a long one, and that's reflected in the numbers. There are only about 30 licensed eagle falconers



in the US, and probably no more than half that number are actively flying eagles on wild game.

Those of us lucky enough to get our hands on the raw material quickly discover that these birds don't come with a manual. British and European falconers have lots of eagle experience, but their birds are captive-bred. The Kazakh eagle-hunters might be ideal mentors if they spoke our language and didn't live on the other side of the planet.

So, what happens when a handful of overzealous, naïve American falconers kidnap wild adolescent eagles and try to turn them into hunting partners? We're slowly finding out.



Above: Alpha at home in her weathering yard, Pennsylvania.

Photo: courtesy Jack Hubley

First lesson: big, they might be; indestructible, they are not. My first eagle, also a female, died of aspergillosis after 10 months in captivity. Other falconers have also lost birds to the dreaded 'asper', leading some to opt for expensive prophylactic drugs as soon as the new bird arrives in the mews.

There was some evidence that Sage, my "sacrificial" eagle, might have started off with problems. Two days after the start of her prophylactic treatment, she lost her appetite and started regurgitating, triggering a change in course; my veterinarian told me to stop the drugs. She quickly

regained her appetite but never seemed strong; a bate would nearly always require a helping hand to regain the fist.

After her death, in the January predawn hours, it took me months to climb out of my emotional hole and decide to try again. And, thanks to Alpha, I'm mighty glad I did.

But, by mid-December of '03, I wasn't so sure this eagle falconry thing was a good idea.

Still gun-shy from my earlier loss of Sage, I took it slow and easy. Alpha spent daylight hours hooded, and her exposure to my big, ugly human face began under low-light conditions.

She conquered her fear of me quickly. On 9th Dec., just three weeks after her capture date, I picked her up late in the afternoon and removed her hood. She looked me square in the eye and lunged at my face. From this point, our training sessions got exciting.

She also seemed to adapt to life on the running line quickly, so I eased her into the daylight, allowing her to remain unhooded into the morning as long as she wasn't bating. Problem was, she soon decided that the weathering yard was hers and I was a trespasser.

Before my luck ran out during

Passage goldens



these morning meet-and-greet collisions I decided to tether her to the barn perch on a 2-foot leash.

Creance work progressed with, what seemed to me, lightning speed. I use a portable setup so that I can expose the bird to many locations before cutting the cord. The eagle flies on a 20-foot leash connected to a 300-foot nylon running line pulled taut

between a T-perch and me. It amazed me how quickly Alpha caught on to this falconry business. But I soon discovered that, unlike elephants, Alpha doesn't like working for peanuts.

Typical conversation between Jack and Alpha:

"What! You made me fly all the way over here for this? A mouse?!"

"Yes, and if you do it again I'll give you another one!"

"Yeah, well, I'll bet there's even more meat under your pale, paper-thin hide!"

So went our training contests. On one particularly "enthusiastic" landing she knocked my glasses quite a distance. So, I hooded her, walked her 60 yards back to the perch then



Photo: Greg Heisey

went in search of my glasses, all the while continuing to talk to her. Big mistake. Alpha homed in on me like a voice-activated missile and launched, hooded, into the air. I shut up and watched in amazement as she sailed directly over my head and feathered down when the leash brought her up short.

On 21st Dec., hoping to reduce the

wear and tear on my glove, arm and psyche, I introduced the lure. I set her on the perch, stepped back 20 yards, popped the lure garnished with half a grey squirrel, and dragged it along the ground. She looked at the lure, looked at me and charged straight to the glove. When I deflected her, she hit the ground, ran to the lure and jumped on it. Success. One or two more

sessions and she loved the thing.

But, even then, the falconer could not relax. When the treat disappeared and the lure was bare, she was on the glove – or whatever happened to be within reach – in a flash. The late Sage might have conditioned me to carrying 10-pound birds, but she had shown none of Alpha's aggression. I could only hope that an introduction to game would change her attitude toward me.

From the beginning, my hope was to have Alpha major in fox hunting, with a minor in Canada geese. Entering her on foxes was a long-term project. As for Canadas, it's hard to swing a dead cat in southeastern Pennsylvania without hitting one. On the other hand, getting a reasonable slip can be a real challenge; two eyes, times 20 geese, comes to 40 very vigilant goose eyes.

But an entry-level course isn't all that difficult to find, since shotgunners hit but don't recover a fair number of wounded birds. So it was that on 17th Jan., nearly two months to the day after Alpha's capture, we found a flock containing two birds that looked healthy enough but couldn't fly.

As with any new venture, Alpha weighed the possibilities carefully before leaving the fist. Most of the flock went airborne, but the two debilitated birds – each with one broken wing – took off on foot. Alpha ate up the 60 yards like a giant goshawk and slammed the first goose ▶

Passage goldens



Photo: courtesy Jack Hubley

Above: Early lure training. No time to relax, once the meat on the lure was gone Alpha was on the glove in a flash.

she came to. The entire feathered train wreck skidded across a frozen creek and came to rest on the far bank. I made in quickly, finished the goose, helped her break in and then sat down for a goose picnic. After her crop began to bulge, I presented a goose drumstick on the glove and she stepped up as if we'd been doing this for years. Picture all of the above unfolding in front of a distant gallery of about 10 hawking pals. Yes, on rare occasions, these birds can actually make us look good! Debilitated goose or not, the two of us were feeling mighty fine that day.

The next morning I opened the weathering yard door and was shocked to find that someone had, apparently,

stolen my eagle and replaced her with her twin sister. This one did not hackle up at my approach. She remained on the perch, and, when I presented the glove she stepped up. No bam, bam! Just step, step.

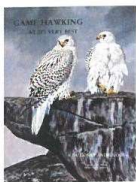
My journal entry for 18th Jan: "We took a walk in the falling snow and sleet. Still no hackling. No binding to the glove. She rode relaxed but yapping at me almost constantly."

In one day, without saying a word, Alpha reminded me what this falconry stuff was all about. A golden eagle was built to hunt, not chase dead mice on a glove.

So ended our first semester with Alpha posting a solid A. The falconer? Well, maybe a C+. The next semester

would be an introduction to fox hunting. From what I could tell during my ramblings in her home territory in Wyoming, the two most common wild canids were coyotes and swift fox. The latter was very similar in appearance to our own eastern red fox but only about half the size. Had my young eagle ever tackled swift fox on her own? And, even if she had, would she be interested in grabbing these new "jumbo foxes" here in the East? That's the subject of Part 2, and just one more reason to renew your subscription! ■

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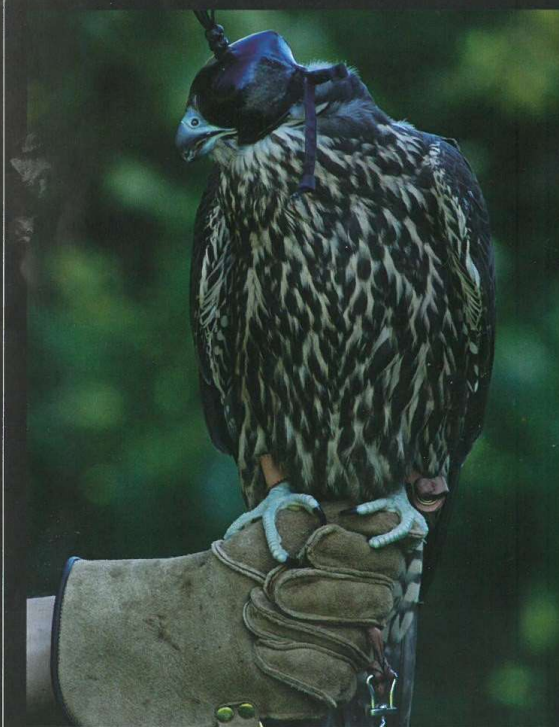
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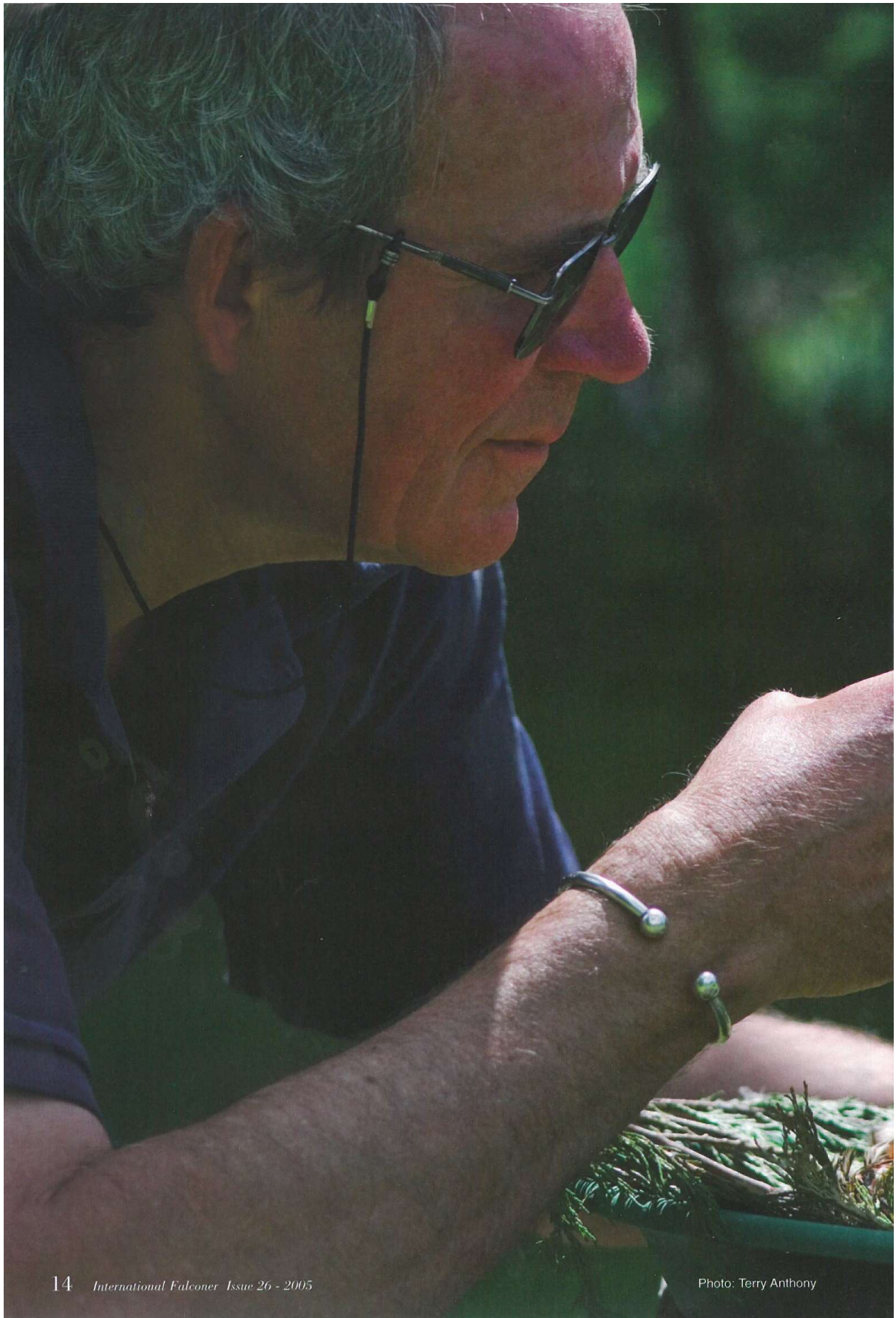
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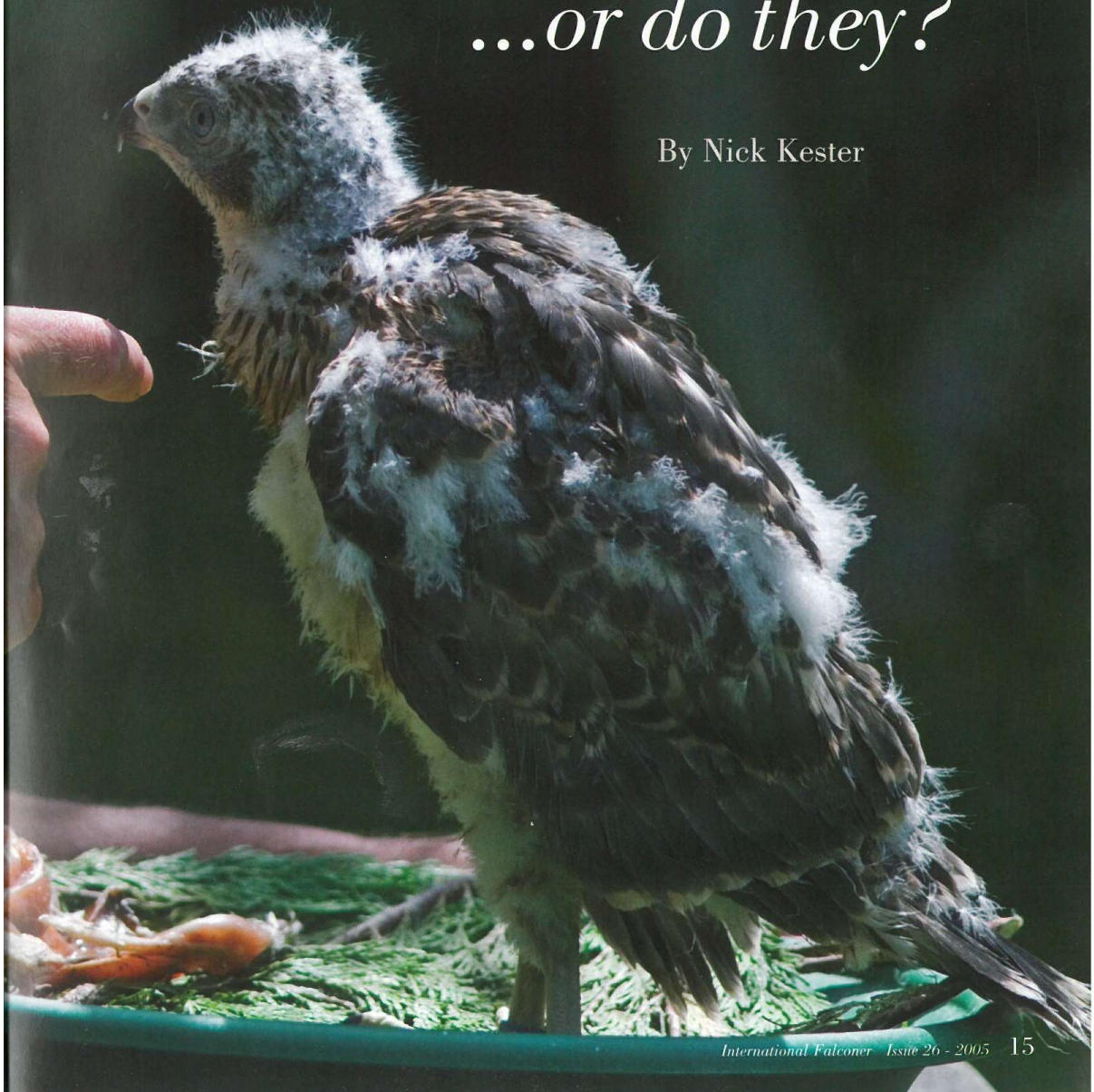
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Everyone wants an imprint gos

...or do they?

By Nick Kester



This is a question that I have put to myself on numerous occasions since collecting a male goshawk from a friend on 6th June this year. Bob had taken charge of my old female prior to my move three years ago on the understanding that if she bred I could select a youngster. Sadly, Phaedra died whilst fostering some young but Bob was good to his promise and, after a delay of a year, largely due to twelve weeks in hospital, I declared myself fit enough to take the plunge.

Here in Wales quarry is limited. Hares are non-existent, rabbits are hard to find, pheasants are limited to small valley shoots but corvids abound. So I reckoned that a tiercel (I believe it is acceptable to so call the male gos, but no other hawk) would do. And stomping around the county with over two pounds on my fist seemed like an equally good reason not to return to a female. Thus the die was cast.

If there is one thing about falconers, and I guess this applies elsewhere, it is an overpowering need to tell me what I should and shouldn't do. With one exception all my hawks have been parent reared. The exception, Phaedra, was a nightmare. She had not been entered in her first year because her owner lived in a row of cottages and her screaming brought threats of noise abatement orders from the neighbours, so he fed her up and let her sit in quiet but worthless comfort. Scared by the experience I vowed to return to parent reared, and often I wish I had stuck to my guns, but there are upsides to everything. An imprint it was to be.

Hawks in the Kester household are given fancy names unless they have already been christened: I believe it is bad luck to change an animal's name. So we have had a succession of Arthurian names such as Morgana, Ninian and, best of all, a redtail called Sir Bors de Gannis. I had reserved Mordred (Arthur's bastard son by his

half-sister) for a male goshawk. This I proudly announced to the office staff during tea break. There was a stunned silence. Whether this was due to a poor literary knowledge or my pronunciation – not at its best since my stroke – I cannot tell. Baldrick questioned one; Bog Roll voiced another, who happens to be Spanish so can be forgiven.

So enter Baldrick, occasionally Bog Roll when my daughter wants to wind me up. Aged fourteen days and even my wife thought him 'sweet'. Kept in an imprint tank all went well. I carted him about and never let him see food arrive from me or anyone else, and listened to the endless streams of advice. In return I will offer only one piece of advice: Note all the received wisdom and then listen to your own. Act on the latter because it will be a mix of the best you are told with a generous helping of instinct thrown in. I can guarantee you will not do this. I didn't, but I offer it all the same.

The goshawk was making rapid progress and I took pictures of Baldrick looking cute in his 'nest' which I e-mailed to family and friends. My daughter e-mailed straight back commenting that a better caption would be "fresh baby goshawk served on a bed of leylandi fronds with side order of minced quail..." She goes to too many posh London restaurants.

The only thing I failed to do, mainly due to a lack of will power, was make him to the hood. I almost did it and in the early days it seemed possible but I was inconsistent and failed which is something I regret.

By five weeks old the down was being replaced by feathers and he was eating a plucked quail, standing on one leg but still lying down a fair amount, and one full bar on his tail was showing. That weekend we weighed him (without jesses) and he tipped the scales at 11b 11oz, which everyone agreed was perfectly acceptable. The office sweepstake on

his weight was won, predictably, by the only person who flew tiercel goshawks with any regularity.

At five weeks we jessed him and not before time as he was bouncing out of his imprint tank, although he was always somewhat surprised to have achieved this. The Diahatsu Fourtrak became mute encrusted and that weekend he flew four paces in the garden. By now he was being fed on the lure and jumping off the garden table to get to it. (Another downside to having a stroke was losing the ability to whistle. I elected to use a vulgar corruption of the falconer's 'Ho!' and he now answered to the more builder's mate 'Oi'.)

As I watched July's Wimbledon Tennis Championship, I was struck by a comment made by Jimmy Connors. "Some games," he said, "are so perfect that they appear in slow motion." Falconry can be like this. But then someone serves a spinner and you are panicked into a move you didn't want to make.

With a few faltering flights Baldrick became bolder and spent much of the evening on a low branch above the vegetable garden. He was easy to entice down into his 'nest' and was willingly carried to the mews where he remained loose for the night. At about this time the conflicting advice came thick and fast: I was going to tame hack him wasn't I? Everyone does it, they always come back, it makes a better hawk, and on and on.

In addition, because he was not hard panned and his joints not hardened up, the hacking advice was overlaid with the "don't tie him down unless you want to risk injury to his bones" wisdom. Eventually Baldrick forced my hand. Although a novice in the flying stakes, he jumped onto the scaffolding that clad the house last summer and laddered up to the roof from which he pointedly refused to return. Then the wind picked up and a gust blew him down the fields past the

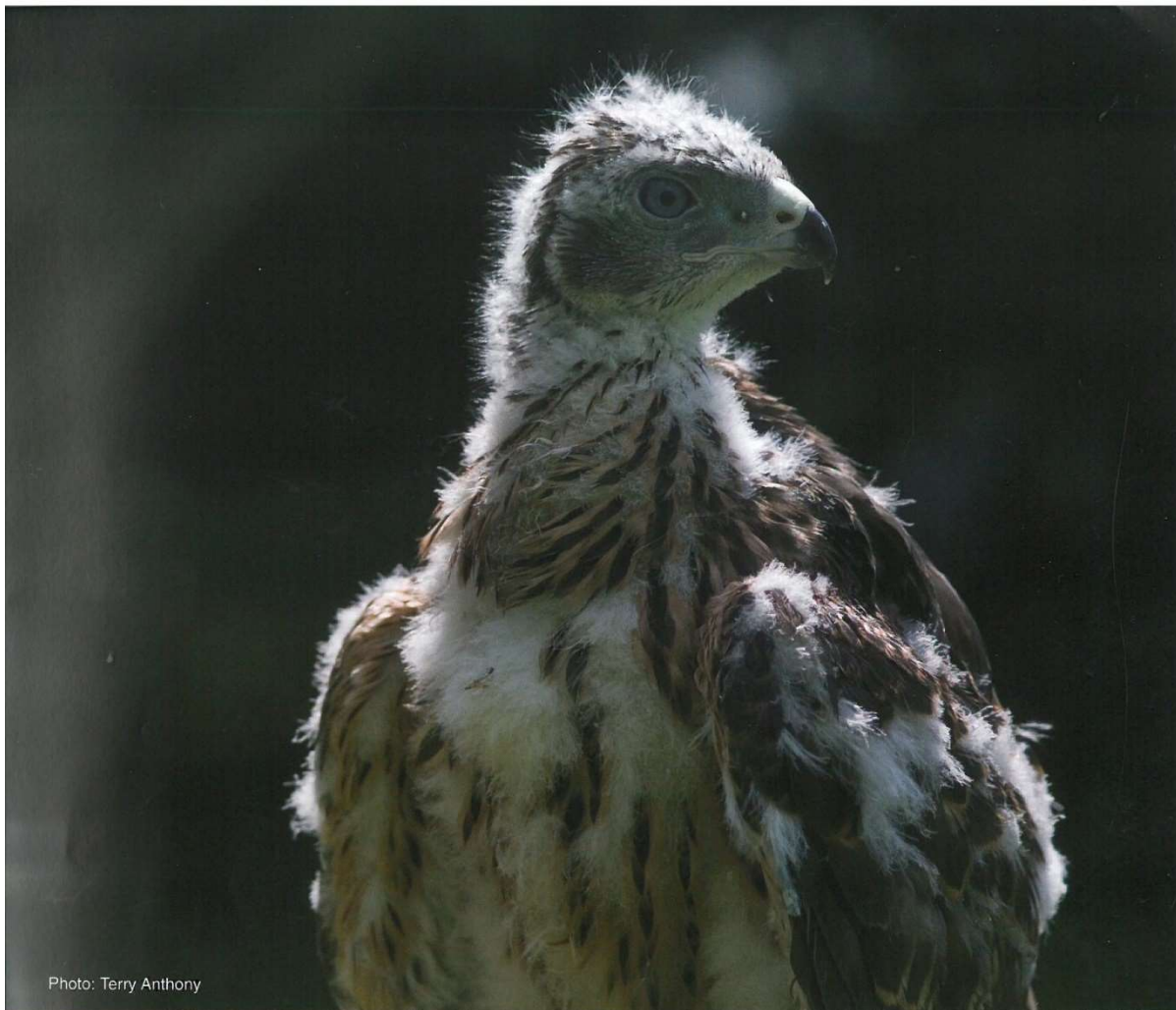


Photo: Terry Anthony

mains electricity power line, on which he had a chance to land, and out of sight. Having had a hawk blown up on one of these infernal devices, my heart was thumping. Eventually I tracked him down and returned him to the mews. The decision was made. He was confined to barracks for at least a fortnight until he could be safely bowed out.

Nine weeks old and very steady on the lawn but he is becoming vocal. Does he associate me with the lure and thus with food? I will never be certain. All I could do was make vague promises to my wife that when he started to kill, he would shut up. Some hope!

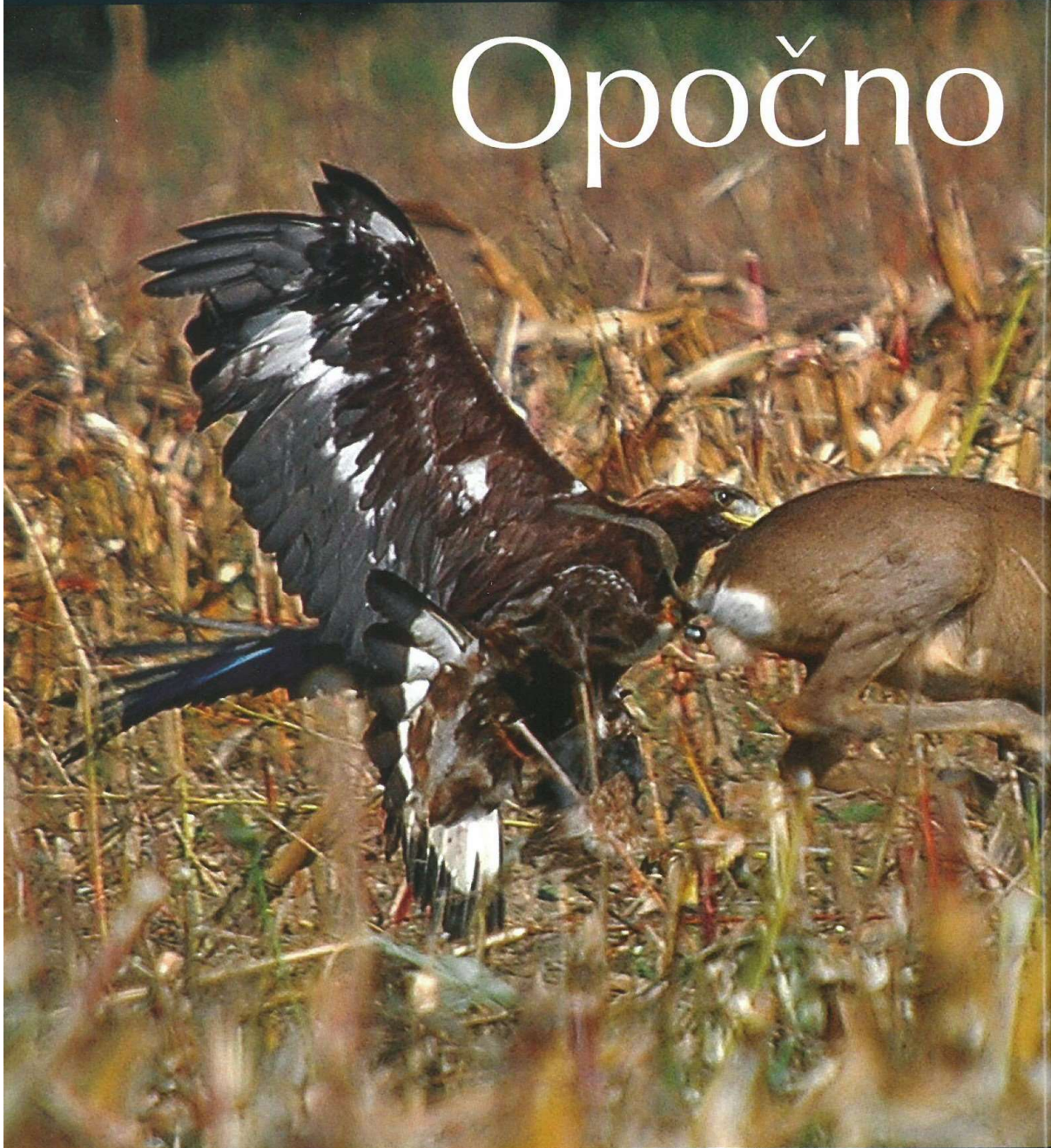
Now for some serious training, but what is flying weight? All hawks have

a flying weight except it seems imprints. I took his weight up and down but it made no real difference. On the last weekend in July I was on Hawk Board duty at the Game Fair, which is possibly the biggest field sports gathering in Europe. I spent time with Jeff Thomas, who flew one of the best imprints I have ever seen, and discovered that his beloved Katy had died. A tragedy that seems to be reserved exclusively for the best. Jeff confided that he rarely weighed Katy and relied on his instinct and her demeanour when picked up. I went home and treated Baldrick the same. Although I did notice that there was a weight over which he became marginally less obedient. (For the record, now that he is entered, he flies

well at 11b 9oz.)

First flights free are always unnerving. I prefer to fly him to the lure, which he is passionately in love with, although the fist is a reasonable alternative but not from a distance. On 'the big day' I walked away from him up the hill and he started to come before I had called. Not good training, so I hid the lure and he flew on past me and over the hedge – towards that blasted power line. Sounding like a Billingsgate fishwife, I yelled 'Oi' and miraculously he turned and came back over the hedge to land energetically on the lure. Cause for much celebration... Now for something to kill, but that will have to come next time. ■

Opočno



Main picture: One of the many golden eagles present at the meet gets to grips with a roe deer.
Top inset: Adult goshawk. Bottom inset: Golden eagle.

IN FOCUS

WITH INTERNATIONAL FALCONER

2005



Falconers from across Europe travelled to the town of Opcno in October to take part in the 37th field meeting of the Czech Falconers' Club. A wide variety of hawks were flown but it was the goshawks and golden eagles that took centre stage. International Falconer's Belgium correspondent *Gunter Daes* was there to capture some of the action.



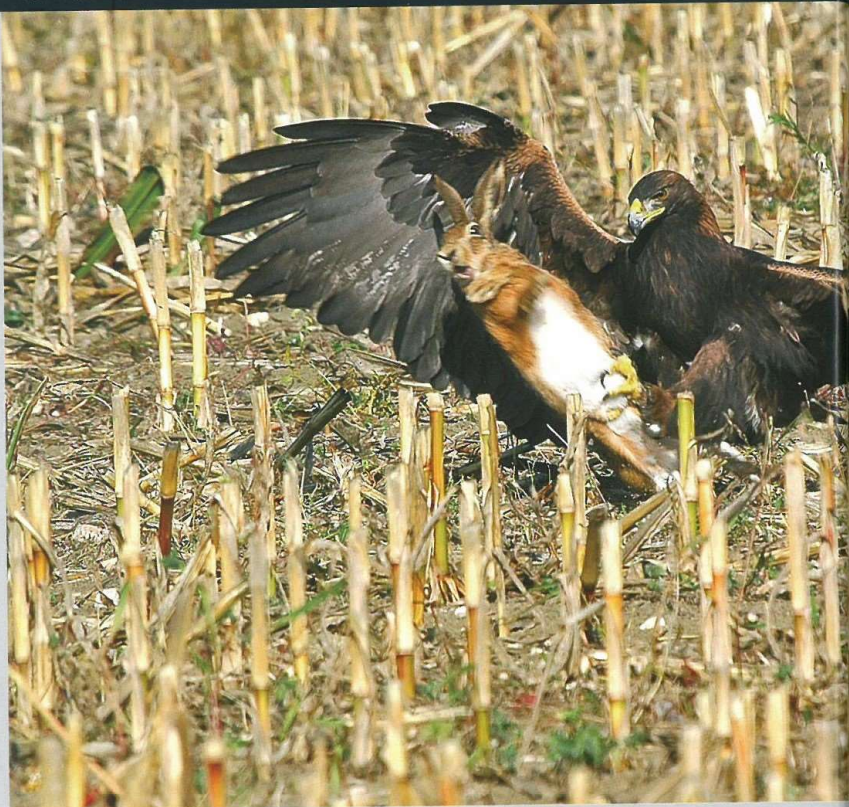
IN FOCUS OPOČNO 2005

Far right: A good number of lady falconers attended the meet.

Right: A golden stops a brown hare in its tracks.

Far bottom right: The huge form of a golden eagle begins to envelop its quarry.

Below: A group of 'eaglehunters' discuss tactics on the stubbles.







Above: The Opecno meet begins in the town square with a display of falconers in medieval costume.

Right: At the end of each day's hawking as a mark of respect, the quarry is laid out in the town square - the traditional 'ctricher' ceremony.

Below: A female goshawk connects with a brown hare.



IN FOCUS ОПОЧНО 2005



Left: Another female goshawk kicks up some dust with a brown hare.

Below: An 'eaglehunter' who slips his golden from horseback.



Use your scales



but read the signs

by Stuart Rossell

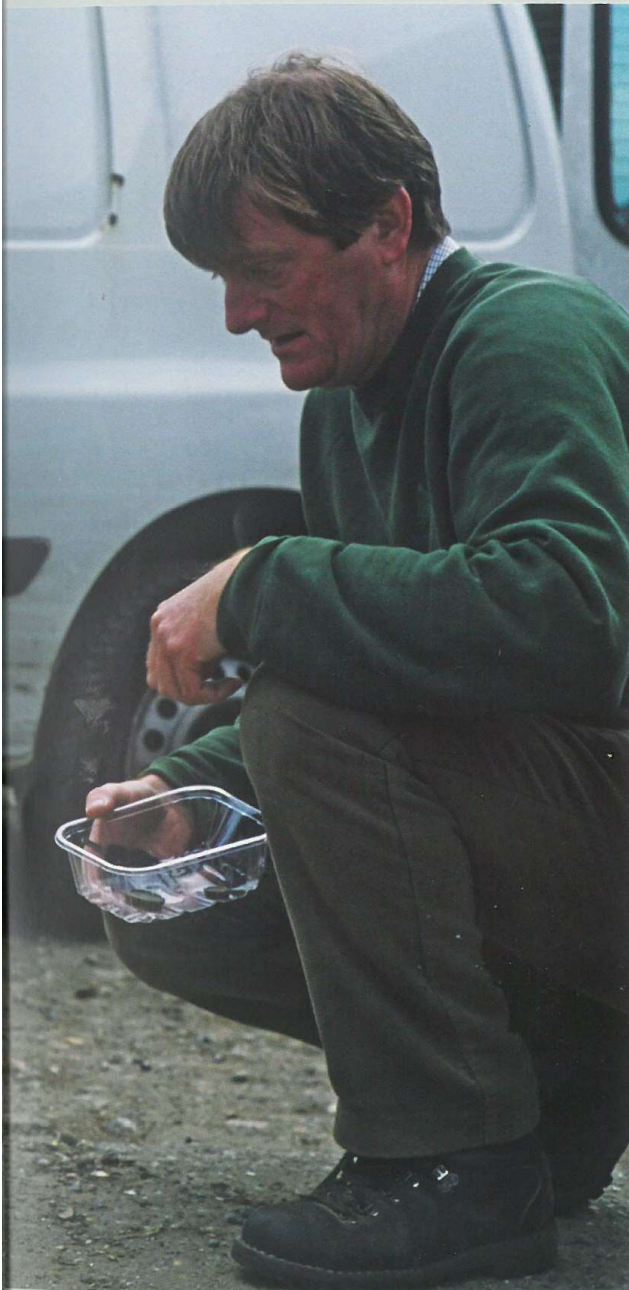


Photo: Seth Anthony

We use the scales to judge when our hawks are at flying weight or, more correctly, in flying condition, and have found, since weighing first became popular some 50 years ago, that if a hawk flies well one day, it will probably also fly well the next day if it is at the same weight. ▶

We refer to our hawk's condition as being either high, low, or just right. Some falconers refer to their hawks as either being too fat or too thin but this is not as accurate a way to describe the hawk's actual condition. With small hawks, any drop in weight below their flying weight can have disastrous effects, but even with larger hawks, a change in weight can affect their performance in the field. However, it should be remembered that the scales are only a way of us converting the condition of a hawk into something tangible that we can understand and monitor, rather like a fuel gauge on a car. Although we can't see how much fuel is in the tank, the gauge tells us it's full and so we know, from previous experience roughly how far we can go before we need to fill up.

The problem comes when the scales say one thing and the hawk is telling us something else. Human nature I suspect, trusts machines a little too much and it can be tempting to think the problem is with the hawk and not our interpretation of it. One year I had been hawking with a falconer in California flying his falcon at pheasants. She was then about three years old and flew very well, catching quarry almost everyday. About 12 months later I had the opportunity to see her fly again and it was obvious something had changed. She was not flying as strongly, not going up as high or as quickly and basically she looked a bit on the low side.

Her weight, as far as the scales told us, was exactly the same as it had been the previous year when she was flying well. Obviously something was wrong. The falconer convened a meeting of all the other falconers out in the field and following a quick discussion in which we all felt her breastbone we all came to the same conclusion, she was too low.

About a week later after some time off and a weight gain of about 30 grams, she was back to her old self again. He had fallen into the trap, as

Some of the signs that a hawk is too high include slow returns to the lure or fist, not trying its best on familiar quarry, and delays in coming into position for a flight or in keeping up with the falconer.

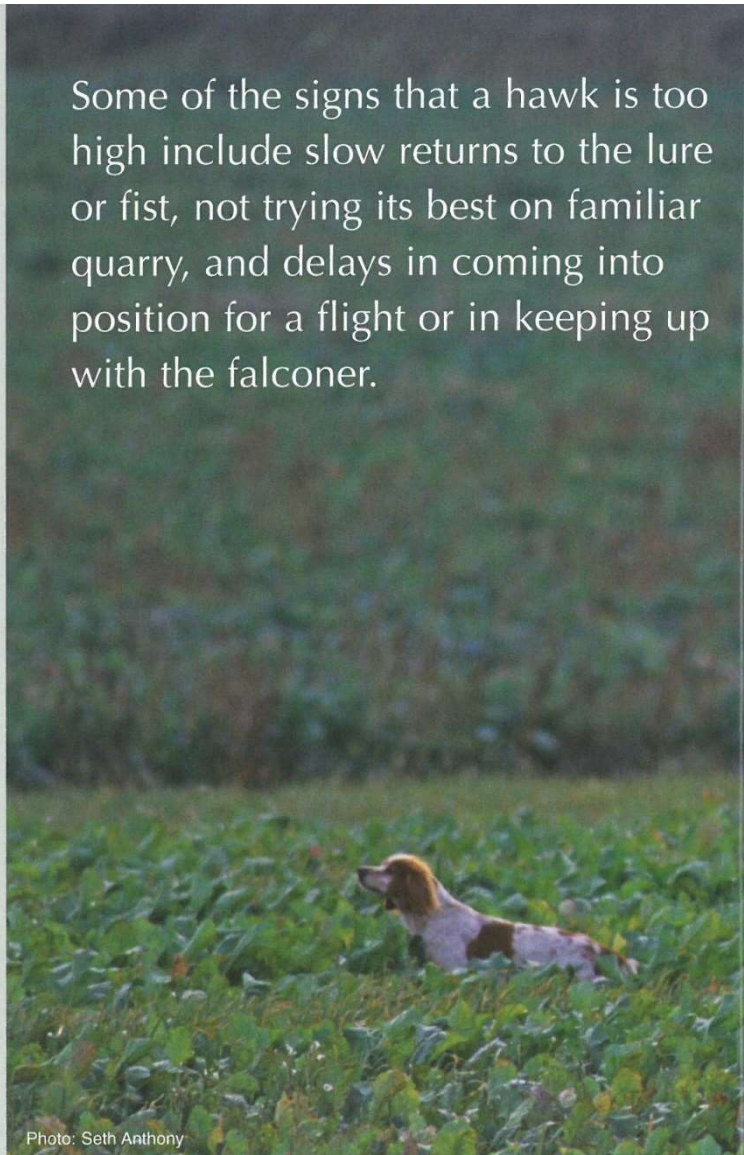


Photo: Seth Anthony

many of us have done, of trusting the scales to tell him the hawk's flying weight instead of listening to her to tell him what condition she was in. It is the reactions of the hawk which should tell us whether she needs to stay level, go up in condition or be reduced. The scales are merely used as a way to measure that.

Often, once a hawk is trained and made, its flying weight will remain the same but outside influences such as weather, temperature, the time of year, length of day, the hawk's age and some other factors such as changes in the environment which we expect it to fly, may well require that we either raise

or lower its condition and weight. If we fail to notice that a hawk, which had been performing well is now, even though its weight is the same, showing signs of being either too high or too low, we could lose it, cause it to become sick and most certainly cause a reduced performance in the field.

A hawk in training tells us her condition by her reactions to us and her environment, her response to training and outwardly by how her breastbone feels to the touch. Falconers feel the breastbone in slightly different ways but the object is the same, to determine how much flesh she is carrying on either side of



her keel. Feeling the breastbone should only take a second or two but it is a habit that is useful to get into even if only once or twice a week. A hawk in really high condition will have very little breastbone protruding. A hawk at the other extreme will have a very sharp breastbone with little muscle on either side. Somewhere in between these two extremes lies the flying weight.

Confusion can arise because some hawks respond to training with a plumper breastbone than others, even their own siblings. There is no set rule on how the breastbone should feel, it can only be used as a rough guide to

tell us whether the hawk is obviously too high or dangerously low. Furthermore, as the hawk becomes established in training its condition can often be raised but this is not always the case. Each hawk needs to be judged as an individual and all the outward signs, as well as how sharp or otherwise the breastbone feels, should be taken together to judge its condition. Some hawks do indeed feel fuller, as judged by the breastbone, than others. I have had my share of each. My black sparrowhawk flew with a very heavy keel and yet still performed well in the field. A sibling, who was also an imprint and as such

might have been expected to fly with a heavier keel, needed to be kept lower to get her to fly properly. Feeling the breastbone alone, without other signs taken into consideration, should not be used to determine the hawk's flying weight.

One outward sign is how the hawk responds to training. In simple terms, if your hawk flew ten feet to you yesterday and today is at the same weight, the same flying ground and nothing untoward has happened, it should do the same thing. If you now gradually increase the distance it is called to you and its response starts to slow down it can only be for one ▶



reason, it lacks the necessary incentive to fly the greater distance. Lowering the hawk's weight should only be done when the falconer is sure it is this, and not insufficient manning, calling the hawk too many times, or increasing the distance the hawk is called too quickly, that is causing the hawk to now hesitate.

Once the hawk is trained and in

the field it will start to settle in to the routine of being flown. Again, the condition the falconer needs to keep the hawk in is influenced by a number of factors. A hawk, especially an accipiter, if flown alone may fly at an increasingly higher condition but if the falconer then decides to fly his hawk in company it may not respond as well. As another example, one of

my falcons, who had been flying wonderfully in the cold, high desert, behaved very badly at the same weight when taken down into the central valley of California where the weather was warmer, quarry more plentiful and the air different. She flew with no sense of purpose at all and to get her to behave properly had to be reduced by nearly 20 grams. At the other end

USE YOUR SCALES - BUT READ THE SIGNS



Photo: Seth Anthony

...if the falconer decides to fly his hawk in company it may not respond as well.

either from the fist or the perch, a prominent breastbone and pulling off flights that look like they might be requiring more energy than the hawk has available. A hawk which is in low condition, whether it shows up on the scales or not, will not recover the instant her weight is raised, it will take a while for her energy levels to return. A hawk in high condition whose weight is dropped may respond well for a few days and then have a relapse and may, perhaps, be in need of another slight reduction.

Because a hawk's life depends on the falconer's correct interpretation of its condition, it is paramount that the falconer monitor it every time it is flown for signs of being too high or too low. If the hawk is where the falconer wants it he/she can use the weight as a key for the following day or days but the weight the scales say are nothing more than a way of confirming condition. The outward signs are far more important and tell a more accurate story. Trust in the scales alone without knowledge or sense to take into consideration these outward signs has led to the loss and death of a number of trained hawks. While I would not want to fly a hawk without using the scales, reliance on them alone to judge the condition of a hawk is a more common fault than many falconers seem to realise. ■

of the scale, a hawk which is suddenly required to fly in colder weather, may not have the energy to fly properly at its usual weight.

A falconer should constantly be on the lookout for signs that his hawk is either too high or too low. Some of the signs that a hawk is too high include slow returns to the lure or fist, not trying its best on familiar quarry, and

delays in coming into position for a flight or in keeping up with the falconer. One subtle sign of high condition that I've often noticed over the years is a hawk's reluctance to sit with both feet squarely on the fist often holding up one foot to the extent of the jess.

Signs of low condition might be a slow, weak wing beat, weak bates,

LETTERS

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Falconers of the world unite – go hawking!

If at other times you go hunting, shooting, or fishing, or all three, enjoy your sport, but when you take to the field with hawk on hand, please be certain in your mind that you are going hawking.

Recently the politicians of UK falconry who look after our interests (Thank goodness!) found it unsatisfactory that to most people the general term 'falconry' is taken to cover every aspect of hawk-keeping, from the best to the worst. They realised they needed another particular term to cover the sport itself – the pursuit of wild quarry with a trained hawk of any species. They came up with a brand-new term: they called it 'field falconry'. Can any of them explain why they didn't just call it 'hawking', as everyone else has done for a thousand years?

It didn't help them at all that these days the Press actually calls all field-sports hunting and all field-

sportsmen hunters. But some countrymen have been corrupted too. Even expert falconers have been known to say they were looking forward to the Hunting Season, when, in Britain anyway, the dates of their own (hawking) season coincide with those of the Shooting Season – August 12th, September 1st, October 1st, and so on. We may go grouse-hawking, duck-hawking, or rabbit-hawking; we may buy hawking scenes and collect hawking books; we wear hawking-gloves and carry hawking-bags. Why shouldn't we look forward to the Hawking Season too, and say so?

In view of the present sad difference of opinion in Britain between fox-hunters and falconers resulting from efforts to circumvent the silly laws, there is all the more reason for us to avoid using the term 'hunting' when we mean 'hawking'.

Believe it or not but a book has recently been published with the title of *Trout Hunting*. I hope when he is out after trout the author, Bob Wyatt, observes the dates of the Fishing Season and not of the Hunting

Season. (When you consider how many books have been written on trout-fishing, you may sympathise with his choice of such a strange title).

Because English-speaking North Americans are quite convinced that all field sports are forms of hunting, they find themselves in worse difficulties with their sporting terms. To distinguish between using a gun and using a bow they have to call one bow-hunting and the other gun-hunting. 'Archery' and 'shooting' do not figure in their vocabulary (unless they use shooting to describe what cops and robbers do to each other). When it comes to hawking they think they have to call that 'hunting' too.

Can anyone doubt that falconers are proud of being what they are? Should they not also take pride in being able to say that what distinguishes them from all other sportsmen is that they go HAWKING?

John Loft
Lincolnshire, England



Setting off for an afternoon's hawking and maybe even a bit of 'field falconry'.

Photo: Seth Anthony

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From dream

*Mark Langley recounts the journey
so far with his first peregrine.*



Photo: courtesy Mark Langley

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to reality



For 30 years I had a dream to train and fly a peregrine falcon; a long time to think, plan, scheme and study. The dream became an obsession. Well I have recently had the opportunity to realise that dream and to successfully hunt rooks and crows in Wiltshire, England. This has involved giving up a high-powered job, renting a cottage near the North Wiltshire downs and ending a 5-year relationship with the latest girlfriend. In order to train, fly and hunt with a longwing properly you need to get rid of all unnecessary distractions.

The peregrine is a very special bird. Often described as an aerial specialist, this falcon is more of a generalist. The gyrfalcon flies down ptarmigan; the kestrel pounces on voles; the hobby plucks dragonflies from a pond surface – these are specialists. The versatile and catholic ‘falcon gentle’ lords it over 150 other bird species (over 200 species in North America). We all know what makes her so special; the speed; the global distribution; the 22 subspecies; the history of falconry, domestication and captive breeding; the pesticide catastrophe; her beauty; her performance in the field. This article aims to provide an overview of my experiences, in order to give a realistic understanding of just how difficult the process is and to outline the necessary ingredients for success.

A secondary, but perhaps a more important objective, is to express in a very personal way, the importance and the very special status of this bird of prey, as a symbol of what conservation is all about. Humanity almost wiped out the peregrine, then realised that the world would be horribly impoverished without her. We then witnessed a superhuman effort to prevent her extinction. In the light of what is happening in the world today and the ongoing folly of human behaviour, we should pay close attention to the lessons of history and act accordingly.

INSPIRATION

My inspiration has come from three main sources. Firstly my ecological researches have concentrated on the importance and complexity of predation. Falconry provides an excellent opportunity to make detailed observations of hunting techniques at first hand. This allows serious scientific data collection on a wide range of subjects, from hunting success rates, behaviour and prey selectivity, to good husbandry, nutrition and fitness.

Secondly the many long hours spent reading

detailed written accounts by Glasier, Woodford, Mavrogordato, EB Michel, Upton and Fox, have been an essential pre-requisite for training a large falcon to hunt successfully. My third source of inspiration is, without doubt the most important and significant. I have been lucky to spend time in the company of an experienced falconer. I have been fortunate enough to witness many flights over the last 5 seasons. My personal experience makes me certain that apprenticeship is essential to the future of falconry. I got quite a lot of criticism, but an equal measure of guidance and encouragement.

To be able to spend time in the field and to actually experience first hand, all of the intricacies involved, is not only a helpful experience, it is an essential one. It is only by actually seeing the process in action, that one can understand and emulate this process. Without a thorough and concentrated level of guidance I believe that a tyro to this art will not only fail but fail badly.

LAND ACQUISITION AND MANAGEMENT

This is perhaps the most important ingredient of all, once the necessary apprenticeship period has been completed. You need a lot of land and you need the right kind of land. It is only when you start to try to find suitable areas that you realise how difficult this is. I was very lucky to gain access to about 5,000 acres spread over four farms. This is not enough! With just one falcon and lots of leisure time, I managed, but I would have been much happier to have found 10,000 acres. Just to give you an idea of the work involved, I spoke to twenty-one landowners, mostly tenant farmers and two gamekeepers, over a period of six months. Lots of petrol and lots of shoe leather.

The best land is where you have abundant rooks, fewer crows, a dearth of woodpigeons, no barbed wire fences and the opportunity to drive cross-country. Oh yes, you also need to be able to see about 3 kilometres (1.5 miles) of completely open country in all directions from your slip. This is a very rare bird indeed!

When using land, help the farmer, respect the land and manage well. This means keeping away when ploughing or sowing or harvesting are in full swing. Keep away when the shoot is on. Respect other land users. I had problems from walkers, dogs, paragliders, hang-gliders, off-road cars, horses, cyclists and shooters. Remember that they have a right to be on footpaths and bridleways, no matter how annoying and disruptive they may be to the falconer.

THE FALCON HERSELF

At a recent British Falconers' Club meet, I was lucky enough to witness a female peregrine, stoop at and fly a cock pheasant. She was fast, aggressive and determined. The pheasant bailed out into a hedge top doing about 60mph flat-out. I expected to find it dead in the hedge bottom. The falcon pitched up close by, looking and sounding very annoyed at losing her prize. I then learned that this hawk would occasionally check at crows and go off to do bloody murder on them. It transpired that this line of falcons was bred at Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) Yeovilton, in the county of Somerset, England. These eyasses have about one-eighth barbery falcon genes and have been great game hawks, but what about trying one at corvids?

I collected my new falcon on 30th June, when she was exactly 63 days old. The timing is critical in the training of a parent-reared bird. She was named Holly. When kitted up her fat weight was 940 grams (33.5 ounces). This seemed to be a small falcon in terms of weight, but all other parameters were average for a female peregrine. In falconry, size is not always a critical factor. Some of the best rook hawks have been small falcons and

even tiercels. It is the aggression, concentration, speed and persistence of this line, that has produced a suitable bird for hunting.

TRAINING – UPS AND DOWNS

Training a peregrine to hunt successfully concentrates the mind like nothing else I have ever experienced or encountered. It is very demanding and labour intensive. Every aspect of training, must be done meticulously and carefully. I found that concentrated effort is needed with even the most basic activities such as carriage on the glove, transport on a car-perch, weighing, hooding, feeding on the fist. None of the numerous small tasks involved can be done half-heartedly or casually. You have to concentrate very hard and all of the time. I was lucky to have a bird that would hood very easily and well. The hood and good hooding are crucial to the training of any hawk, but with a peregrine – this device is absolutely critical to success.

On the plus side, Holly was very responsive and bright, so that her lessons could be staged and progressive. On the down-side she was also willful, obstinate, precocious and at times downright

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Photo: Terry Anthony

wayward. Patience, diligence and fortitude were the only way forward. I found that Holly disliked sitting on a block at ground level and was thoroughly upset by dogs. She was happy to be carried on the glove and given intensive manning lessons with multiple rewards from the hawking bag.

People she would largely ignore, because she got to see a very wide variety early on. The next big stumbling block was the heat. Hot summer weather has the nasty effect of destroying appetite in a falcon. Because of this lack of responsiveness, I kept putting off her first free flight. Eventually at 840 grams (30 ounces), I flew her loose to a black leather shredded glove, with no problems, except that she was a bit confused about how to land!

After twenty days of lure flying to get her fit, she caught and 'killed' 4 dead rooks and a jackdaw. She

was by this stage, capable of forty stoops to the lure, normally in two bouts, but occasionally in one. She was a very good footer, catching the thrown lure or a dead rook about 30-40 feet up and carrying it to earth like the real thing.

After about eighteen days of free-flight to the lure, she suddenly started raking away and landing, even though her weight was correct at 880 grams (31.5 ounces). I can only conclude that she was getting bored and wanted to chase the real thing.

I believe that training a large falcon is much harder than many people would have us believe, simply because of the very high level of commitment, time and single-minded determination required. As with a great meal, you must have all the ingredients and in the right proportions.

SLIPPING, ENTERING AND FIRST KILL

Holly was ready to enter by the first day of September. I immediately noticed that stationery targets were not appealing. She would also peer at crows within 100 feet with a sort of knowing look – almost as if she was scared of them. How wrong can you be? We had the usual irritation of distant woodpigeons feeding in the open or collared doves passing through. I found that if she chased a bird other than a rook or crow, I would shout at her loudly – “leave it” and she would break off immediately to return to the ungarnished lure or even the fist. She very quickly learned that chasing pigeons might be fun, but would not result in dinner.

A small flock of rooks at 50 yards distance were often viewed contemptuously, but a late arrival rook, gliding into the flock would switch all her lights on, followed by an explosion of activity. The adrenalin rush and excitement when a peregrine leaves your glove for a flight is hugely addictive. Young peregrines just love to chase things. This is probably the most charming thing about them. Even after many flights with no kill, the persistence and dogged determination never seem to diminish.

We enjoyed a number of good slips and exciting flights – when she chased horseriders with black skullcaps, brown hares and pipits, by way of variety. We eventually had our first kill on 11th September. The slip was perfect after ten days of practice. We approached a small mixed flock (about 50 birds) on foot, concealed by a small ridge. The falcon was hooded off as the rooks were just rising from the stubble above chalk grassland on a windless summery evening. Holly fetched them

well and selected a high bird (crow) quickly. After a brief tail chase she rose above her victim and put in 4 to 5 hard stoops, before scooping him out of the air at 50 feet, right over my head. Lots of excitement – in fact I was whooping and jumping up and down and getting rather emotional! (I did keep a good 50 feet away from Holly while doing this!

Catching your first rook/crow is a very satisfying and exciting experience. You feel that all the hard work has at last been rewarded.

THE HUNT - A BRIEF SELECTION

Holly had a nasty mishap on 17th September. She collided with a building just as she bound to a rook, cracking a centre talon in half. Lots of blood and ten days of rest.

After this adventure I was very worried that she would be reluctant to chase corvids, so that her season (and career) could be at an end. Once she was fit again, we very luckily found a young rook, on his own, well away from any cover. He was obviously weak and dehydrated (they also suffer with worms, rotavirus and air sacculitis in drought conditions). This bird provided Holly with an easy kill and some much needed encouragement. A few days later and we had our first big and proper flight.

This took her half a mile into a large round basin, where she put about 20 rooks/crows into a big hawthorn tree. After about 20-25 hard stoops, she caught a young crow all by herself. This crow managed to grab her by the face and cut her cere. After this experience, she always masked this quarry, often killing them with frenzied bites to the neck, well before I could reach her.

Some flights were ridiculously easy, with both rook and crow just giving up and bailing out into fences, long grass or nettles. Young Holly simply hovered like a giant kestrel and dropped on them. Others would put into small hawthorn bushes, in the forlorn hope that she would be reluctant to enter cover to nail them. On three or four occasions, Holly caught her prey inside a bush and killed it before I got to her.

Although many of the flights became magpie hawking-style rat-hunts, an equal number were classics in the Mavrogordato/Woodford sense. When I read the account by Jack Mavrogordato of the Adenese haggard catching a rook, I realise that this is the flight I have tried to emulate. We had several such flights: a large flock of rooks/crows, a quarter-mile into wind – feeding peacefully on the stubble. Warm air, gentle breeze – a good

stalk on foot. No cover for a mile-and-a-half in all directions. I caw very gently to the falcon under the hood as a signal that the slip is imminent. The rooks are too far off to spook easily. I gently ease the hood off. Holly has a quick look around to get her bearings, head-bobbing; focusing on the flock. We are both fit and empty for the chase and after a mute she is away, keeping low and downwind of the rooks.

When she is half-way to them the whole flock rise as one – it appears much larger than expected. Three hundred or more corvids lift up and are 100 feet up when she reaches them. What speed! She rises rapidly into the breeze and only 30 seconds into the slip, she has fetched them. She makes a very hard first stoop right through the middle to look for weaklings or those that are lacking in psychological strength. In a flock this size, many have bailed out. She stoops again and again with very high throw-ups; almost as if she is playing with them. All the time she is shepherding them, testing them, intimidating them. I am running hard and suddenly lose sight of her so must stop to scan the flock with binoculars. Several rooks are on the deck, while the falcon is starting to ring up with the flock. As I catch up with them, these birds suddenly rise and the falcon puts in a sizzling corkscrew stoop from 200 feet, snatches a late riser and carries him to the ground. The noise and spectacle of a huge flock skying up over a kill are unforgettable.

On another memorable occasion, Holly chased a group of crows into a Force 9 gale, when one of them landed on top of a group of round straw bales, 20 feet up. The falcon plucked him off the top, like picking a cherry off a cake and carried him 400 yards before landing. Very exciting stuff!

THE RESULTS: AUTUMN / WINTER

Holly received 200-plus days of handling during our first autumn/winter with 8-12 hours of attention per day. She was loose 103 days with a total of 80 hunting days.

She had 119 slips (chases/flights) and 37 kills. She caught (trussed/grounded) and lost 3 birds – all of them crows. She seemed to prefer crows in the end with a head count of 19 crow and 18 rook.

We had a number of mishaps; the broken talon on 17th September; a broken tail feather in November when killing a crow in a bush; and a dislocated toe in December, on colliding with a rook on the ground. On one occasion she caught a

crow on a busy road, with cars doing 60mph in both directions. I vaulted the fence, grabbed the rook with Holly attached and threw the entire bundle into the field! Despite all the hazards, we came through in one piece.

Interestingly, throughout the season, we were shadowed by a wild eyass falcon – very dark and average-sized like Holly. This bird would often chase Holly, trying to get her to play, but I was very relieved and happy to note that my falcon was equally intent on catching herself a meal.

SPRING ROOK HAWKING UPDATE

The spring is the traditional time for catching rooks – as it is a tough time of the year. The weather is wild, cold and unpredictable, while the rooks and crows are all older, experienced birds. Many youngsters, plus inexperienced or sick birds, have been weeded out by disease, predators and bad weather. This is the big challenge for a young falcon, but with 37 kills to her credit, I started the spring season with confidence that Holly would score a number of kills.

After ten days of manning and weight reduction,

Holly took the field at 2 pounds in weight. After about five or six days of lure flying, I could not wait any longer and slipped her at a small flock of rooks which she chased for 10 minutes, putting in about 20 stoops! Her holiday of nearly two months seemingly had not affected her fitness or keenness to chase the black-cloaked crows. During March and April, Holly caught 3 crows and 7 rooks, giving a grand total of 47 kills for her first season. Interestingly she caught 25 crows (3 caught and lost) and 25 rooks, which really reflects the fact that many flocks are mixed and that an even number were selected.

One or two of the spring crows were nasty, aggressive birds, hell bent on fighting Holly on the ground. I am very relieved to report that she managed to mask them, with no serious injuries. Later in April, I became very selective with the slips, so as to hunt only rooks as singles or in small flocks.

Holly is now 'wedded' to rooks and crows, so that during her second season, her speed, coordination, stamina, determination and style should improve by leaps and bounds.



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CONCLUDING REMARKS

I never expected to achieve this level of success with my first peregrine, but the entire experience has been more gratifying, satisfying and enjoyable than I could have imagined. I will say this straight away – thank God for telemetry and for the way a peregrine will oftentimes come back and look for you after an unsuccessful flight. She could have been lost on two or three occasions.

The next time you see or handle or fly a bird with even the slightest hint of peregrine genes; or if you are lucky enough to fly the pure species, please reflect on how special those genes are. This bird is doing really well in Britain now – and we should all be greatly proud of the way they have adapted and are now thriving.

The peregrine is supremely beautiful; from her brown/black eyes to her long toes and scimitar talons; the superb streamlining and her blade-like sails. Always reflect upon her amazing beauty. Also, remember and reflect on her intelligence. The peregrine shares her wild environment with the raven – arguably the most intelligent of birds and

certainly more switched on than an average dog! This environment is diverse, harsh, full of hazards and very difficult to survive in. I believe that the peregrine is a true thinker and a very quick learner. They have to be to survive.

Evolution has created this very important creature, which has become a symbol of survival, and what conservation is all about. Her rarity and vulnerability are also traits that make her uniquely special. She should never be taken for granted. She deserves respect, reverence, commitment and lots of thought and planning. She will reward you very well for all your time and trouble. With growing success in the field, the level of trust and the strength of bond between man and bird, can only grow and intensify.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Sue and Steve, Brian and Tim (my landowners); Beryl and Charles for help with early training.

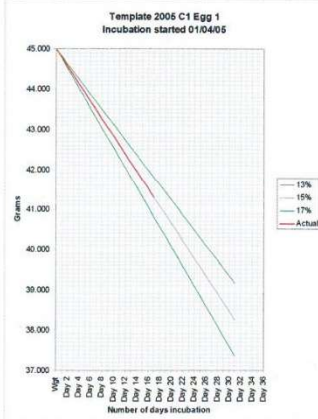
Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank Holly – just for being herself. ■

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FALCON HOSPITALS of the UAE

By Nick Kester

If you need proof that falconry is central to Arab culture, you need look no further than the falcon hospitals of the United Arab Emirates. Where else in the world would you find a fully equipped veterinary hospital with the sole purpose of treating falcons? Local vets in Europe and North America may have specialist knowledge, usually resulting from having a falconer as a practice partner. But most falconers are forced to drive many miles to affect a cure for their hawks and falcons, and as a result have become quite proficient in home treatments and avid readers of books on raptor biology. ▶

In the UAE there are three such public hospitals, each having its own very specific history. But all have one strong ethical message: to improve the welfare and understanding of the falcons that are so much a part of that region's cultural history.

The Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital is run under the aegis of the Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency (ERWDA). This far-sighted government department is central to the protection of the Gulf States flora and fauna, but also sponsors research further afield. Accompanying me to meet vet Margit Müller, who heads the hospital, was research scientist Andrew Dixon whose job it is to conduct surveys into the success or failure of the wild breeding populations of that very Arab falcon, the saker. ERWDA sponsored, Dixon travels all over the saker range from China through Mongolia to central Asia to plot population densities of falcons and prey species, and to supervise projects including artificial nest building. With advice from Margit Müller he was better able to ensure that the annual saker release programme started by the late Sheikh Zayed fits with his own research and that satellite tracking data is common to both. The fitting of satellite backpacks is expensive and any common knowledge on the falcon harness is cost efficient as well as improving the welfare of the falcons that carry the transmitters.

The 2005 research programme will also include tests for avian flu, not yet present in the Gulf's captive falcon population but a distinct possibility for the future. To ascertain if wild sakers are carrying the virus will contribute extensively to our knowledge of this virulent disease. Müller tells us that there is a full bio-security plan in place ready for a local outbreak, but all hope for its non-arrival in the UAE.

The Abu Dhabi hospital which was opened in October 1999 does not

charge for its service being fully funded by EWRDA and over 3,000 visits per year by falconers proves its considerable success. "Now," says Margit Müller, "we must look to the future. We have collected a large amount of data on the health of falcons in the UAE and we must use this to develop further research into raptor health." In common with the other falcon hospitals, aspergillosis is the main reason for a visit but bacterial infections are on the increase and the source and causes need to be better understood. Research will also reveal any issues connected with the intensive breeding of hybrids. "Are we breeding in problems for the future?" asks Müller. "We need to provide feedback to the falconry community to ensure healthy falcons continue to be produced."

Up the coast in Dubai are two further hospitals. The Dubai Falcon Hospital is run by energetic Italian vet Antonio di Somma with his British assistant Tom Bailey, who also co-edits the scientific journal *Falco*. Originally established in 1983 under the sponsorship of His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashid Al Maktoum as a private facility, it subsequently opened to the general public to cater for the wider interests of the falconers of Dubai, again without charge. Stunningly well equipped and capable of some complex surgery, Antonio still acknowledges, like Margit in Abu Dhabi, that the majority of the 1,600 falcons he sees in a year suffer from respiratory disease but falcon management ailments such as bumble foot are regularly treated.

To the amazement of the western falconer, one of the treatment rooms is designated for imping and coping, something Arab falconers treat as the job of a vet. Over 60 per cent of the falcons are first year birds being checked out prior to or post purchase, with the remainder being post-moult or breeding stock. Frantically busy

from August until December, Antonio di Somma looks to further research in the future. The Dubai Falcon Hospital has helped develop and test a new drug for aspergillosis and considers such work as being central to the role of the hospital and its staff.

When I asked about wild-caught falcons at both hospitals, I was told categorically that no import permits were granted for the UAE and any that were discovered being held illegally, would be confiscated and hacked back; somewhat in contrast with Saudi Arabia where trapped sakers are still considered the best falcon to fly.

Not far away is the newest hospital at Nad Al Shiba. Famous for its thoroughbred racecourse, the area is also home to the substantial breeding project sponsored by Mohamed Hilal, which was covered some years ago by *International Falconer*. Recognising that they needed veterinary knowledge on tap, Nad Al Shiba opened its own hospital in November 2004 with Christopher Lloyd in charge. Already they see some 30 falcons a day and this is increasing. Unusually, they charge for the privilege. "It's not excessive," says Lloyd, "but it makes a serious contribution to running the hospital." He does not find resistance to charges probably because, like all of us, the thought of paying for a service confers a level of quality and equality on his clients.

So when I next get into my car for a four-hour drive to my nearest expert with a bill to match, I shall dream fondly of subsidised or sponsored falcon hospitals on my doorstep with teams of energetic vets who are not distracted by the demands of old ladies with cats or terriers in baskets and whose only purpose is the health of my falcon. Alternatively, I could move to the United Arab Emirates, where this is now a reality and the falcons are better for it. ■

Falconry: a world heritage

The annual Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition held in Abu Dhabi each September had an extra dimension in 2005 with the addition of a conference that examined falconry's roots and cultural heritage. Central to this was the concept of its protection and hope for the recognition of falconry as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Sponsored by ProFalcon and the Emirates Falconers' Club the conference heard how falconry had developed and become engrained in countries as diverse as the USA, Central Asia, Japan and China, and, of course, the Middle East. The organisers were delighted to be able to welcome UNESCO's Director of the Cultural Heritage Division, Mr Gadi who explained how a subject of Intangible Cultural Heritage could be proposed and adopted. All the

delegates recognised that in some countries falconry was higher up the critical scale than others and achieving global recognition would not be easy. However, the conference was able to place on record the immense cultural variety that makes up the sport. It also served to illustrate much that was lost (Persian falconry) and much that was threatened (the minorities of China).

The Archives of Falconry in America and the new initiative of an Internet-based Falconry Heritage Trust was seen as ample evidence of a continuing commitment by the West to protect the immense history of falconry. But visitors had only to visit the Abu Dhabi Hunting Exhibition to judge how deeply engrained falconry is in the Arab culture. Stand after stand is committed to the sale of falcons, so much so that the local CITES authority had a facility within

the exhibition to enable immediate issue of export papers for falcons sold. Whilst you may have been able to buy a camel, an Arab horse, a wide range of guns and hunting safaris, there was no doubt why most visitors were there. Each falcon breeder's stand had a substantial crowd surrounding it with all considering and hotly debating the merits of each falcon for sale.

As the conference closed the message that delegates placed before UNESCO was that initially the United Arab Emirates would apply for falconry in their region to be presented as an Intangible Cultural Heritage, but that this did not preclude further applications or cross border falconry being equally defined. The general feeling was that even if only one country was recognised by UNESCO, this would confer a strength and recognition for the sport that was long overdue. ■

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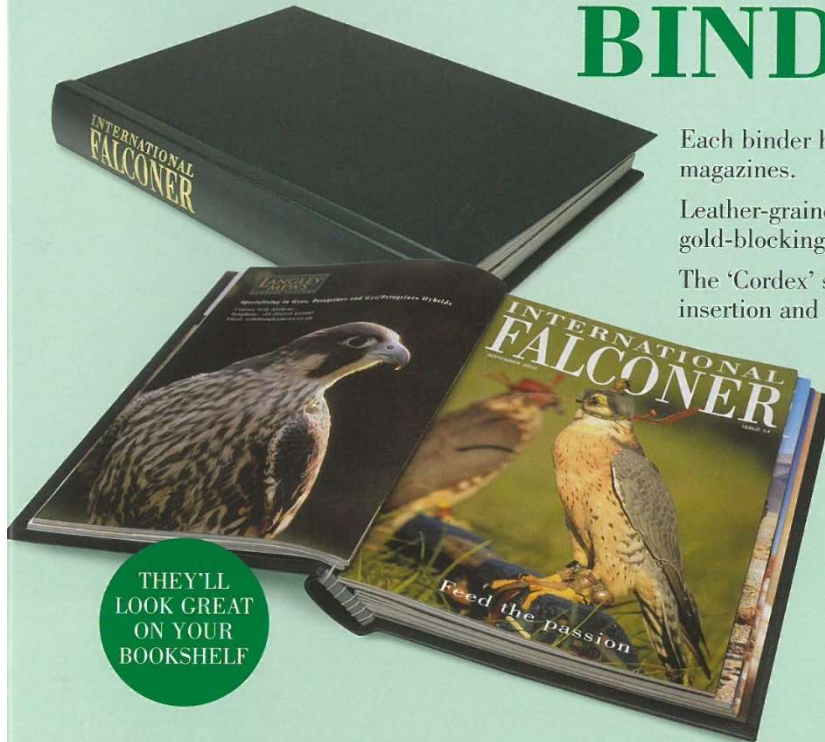
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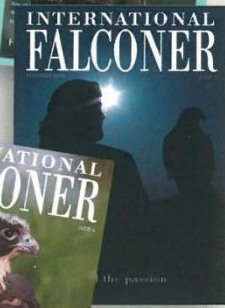
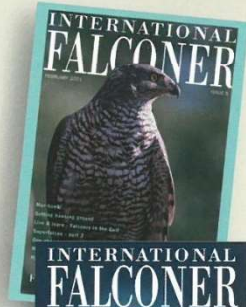
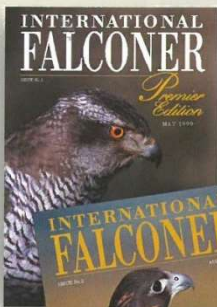
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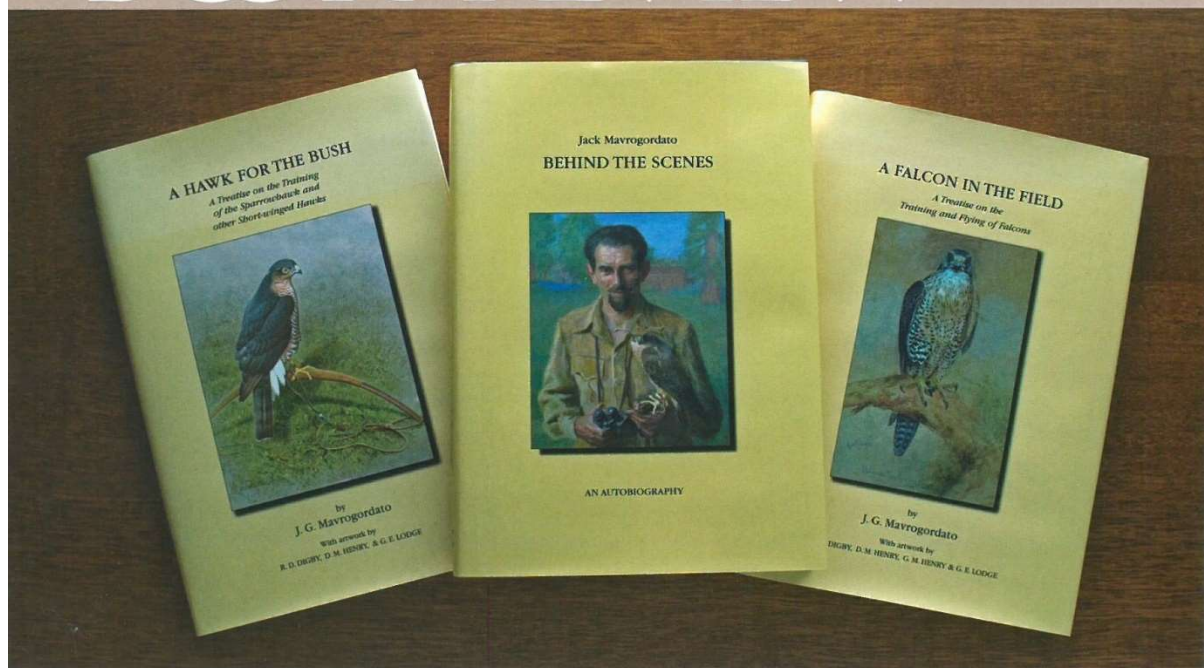
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BOOK REVIEW



THREE REPRINTS OF JACK MAVROGORDATO TITLES

A Hawk for the Bush

ISBN 1-888357-19-3

A Falcon in the Field

ISBN 1-888357-20-7

Behind the Scenes

ISBN 1-888357-21-5

Published by Western Sporting
Ranchester, Wyoming, USA

www.westernsporting.com

Some falconry books should never be allowed to go 'out of print': classic works that are required reading for any falconer today and tomorrow. And certainly, two of the three works by 'Mavro', as he is popularly known, must be included. Yet, sadly, they did, and have now become one of the most sought after and valuable works on 20th-century falconry – a few years ago I heard of a signed copy of a first edition of *Hawk for the Bush* fetching over £1000!

A great loss to those not able to read his great contribution to falconry's library... Until that is, these excellent reprints from falconer David Frank's imprint Western Sporting.

This review is not going to comment on Mavro's words, for as you should expect they remain unchanged and as valid today as they ever were – especially *A Hawk for the Bush*. But these reprints have been augmented and enhanced, sometimes for the good, sometimes with doubtful benefit. The most perfect is the autobiography, *Behind the Scenes*, mainly because the images are black and white, relevant and of the period. The preface by Tony Huston includes some excellent letters between them and places the period perfectly in context.

The other two works – *A Falcon in the Field* and *A Hawk for the Bush* – contain a wealth of colour plates by both of the Henrys and, of course, George Lodge. It is particularly pleasing to see Lodge's sketch of the goshawk Shadow of Death and Tony Huston's photograph of the same hawk

in close proximity. Of lesser benefit is the plethora of Ron Digby's art which seems at odds with, and overpowers the other works, which are more 'of the period'. I would not have bothered to colour the charts even though it is the done thing nowadays. But my real beef is with the cover 'blurb'. Why must it refer to 'Jack'? I have only heard the author so described by those who knew him well, and they are sadly reducing in numbers. The back cover of the two falconry books includes plaudits by four falconers – three of which are Americans. For heaven's sake the man was British, doesn't he deserve more than one 'Brit's' eulogy? His appeal to falconers made at the Hungary conference in 1969 is a more fitting epitaph and only appears on the autobiography. But all that being said, it is the man's words that matter and they stand high in the canon of falconry literature.

Reviewed by Nick Kester



Passage female Prairie Falcon wearing an RT+ tailmount used with a TrackPack at the 2005 Utah Sky Trials. Photo: Rob Palmer. ©2005 Marshall Radio Telemetry 001-801-936-9000 www.marshallradio.com



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