

Welsh Hawking Club

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R. James.
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the
AUSTRINGER

THE AUSTRINGER

The Official Journal Of The Welsh Hawking Club



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The editor gratefully acknowledges the kindness of Mr. B. Paterson in allowing the use of the picture that he commissioned from Roger James for the front cover of 'The Austringer'.

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EDITORIAL

Dear Reader,

Once again I had hoped that 'The Austringer' would have been completed early in March - as indeed the bulk of it was, but when you have to rely on the powers of persuasion and peoples' goodwill to accumulate the articles it is impossible to set a dead-line. It seems to me that there must be a wealth of material suitable for the magazine amongst our members - the problem is getting them to contribute it! As I have said at a number of annual general meetings over the past few years the magazine is the most obvious reflection of the Welsh Hawking Club and its activities, so surely it deserves your active support. Please get your ideas, stories, views or comments on to paper and send them in!

Three people deserve my especial thanks. Lorant, our President, who as always has been keenly involved in the preparation of the magazine. Bob Haddon, who has never failed to help out when asked (and better still when not asked) and Mick, my husband, who helps in the lay-out of 'The Austringer' and puts up with my occasional grouches when it gets towards completion. By the way, although for obvious reasons Bob does not mention it himself in the piece he did about the Goshawk Conference, I understand that he himself delivered a paper there which was well received.

Congratulations to Carl Jones from his fellow members of our club on his success in hatching and rearing young Mauritius kestrels (*Falco punctatus*). Many of us saw the excellent "Nature Watch" programme which featured his work with these endangered little falcons on the island. His dedication to this task and to conservation in general came over very clearly, and we wish him continued success.

Incidentally, I hear from our President that the family of our Honorary member Miss R. Nairac, including her brother the late Captain Nairac, were all born on the Island of Mauritius.

Another interesting piece of news came from one of our members in West Germany, Sieglinde Kholer. This concerned a goshawk belonging to Dominic Kollinger which this spring has reached the age of 28. Apparently this bird has difficulty in standing on a perch now, and I understand that its eyesight is failing, but it has certainly reached a marvellous age.

Finally, I include here comments on the new legislation taken from an article by our President which arrived too late for this edition.

"I believe that anyone who knows me would not say that I am a rebellious type of person, but when I hear about all these rules and regulations which are coming into fashion every year or so, then I think that every bird of prey and falconry lover must have some measure of rebellion in their hearts as I have."

"We should be very careful with all these rules and regulations "in the interest of birds of prey and falconry" that the old Hungarian saying does not come true - among all the midwives the baby got lost".

Don't forget that your contributions are necessary for 'The Austringer' to be compiled.

Sincerely,

The Editor.

W.H.C. ANNOUNCEMENTS

BY M. SHUTTLEWORTH (Hon.Secretary).

Since the circular that recently went out to all of our members there have as yet been no further developments within the club on the new registration system under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. As was stated in the circular the Welsh Hawking Club is to be granted 'recognised club' status by the Department of the Environment, thus enabling our members to the lower registration fees, but to completely fulfil their criteria the committee have still (at the time of writing) to settle arrangements for the self-monitoring inspection procedure and also the method by which the 20% of the membership which will be obliged to be inspected annually will be selected. This is by no means an easy task, but it is hoped that these matters can be resolved as soon as possible.

The committee also continue to press the Hawk Board for a place on that body in the future for a representative of our club.

Members are again requested to enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope when writing to members of the committee if they wish for a reply. The cost of correspondence grows every year, and this year it has already been extremely heavy, both for the treasurer and the secretary, so members' co-operation on this matter would be appreciated.

The Welsh Hawking Club is now a member of the International Association of Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey. In a letter from their President to our own President it was requested that the I.A.F. code of conduct should be circulated at the first opportunity among our members. It has therefore been included in 'The Austringer'.

Definite arrangements for a Welsh Hawking Club field meeting have not yet come to hand, but if and when they are finalised members will be informed.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank those members who have responded to requests made to them for help with new or inexperienced members who wished for contacts in their various areas. It isn't always easy to arrange this, but so far no-one contacted has refused.

Members are reminded that there are still a number of the excellent signed prints of a Lanner falcon by J. Haywood available. These are well worth owning, and anyone interested should get in touch either with the secretary or the treasurer.

23rd. May 1982.

BREEDING PROJECT REPORT

A.G.M. 1982

BY J.R. HADDON.

After a tremendous start to our project by those who worked tirelessly to raise funds allowing us to purchase birds and build aviaries, I am afraid to say the project does seem to have lost momentum due to a number of reasons.

The Harris hawks which were very generously loaned to us for two seasons have been withdrawn. The female goshawk given to the project on breeding terms by the Falconry Centre has died; our thanks once again to Philip Glasier for the initial gesture and our commiserations on the loss of the hawk.

The two kestrels given by a club member despite frequent "copulation" failed to produce fertile eggs, we discovered why later. After the second clutch both birds became aggressive and the enclosure was entered, eggs removed and the "male" placed in another aviary. Two days later an egg was discovered in each aviary. To say we were amazed would indeed be the proverbial understatement of the year. Apart from being rather interesting the whole episode lost us two years. I would be interested to hear from anyone else with similar experience, either of a hawk showing most plumage characteristics of a male later proving to be a female, or of two hawks of the same sex "copulating".

The lugger falcons that were purchased are in the process of being exchanged. On the credit side, we were last year given a true breeding pair of sparrowhawks by Andy Kenyon, during 1981 they produced two clutches, both infertile, which was not surprising considering the disturbance during the move and we hope yet again to have better news next year.

Not a very pleasing report I admit, but I can assure everyone that every effort will be made to obtain more birds for the breeding project and to get it back on its feet once again.

At this point during the reading of this report to the A.G.M. an appeal was made for hawks for the project, as a result we have been given or loaned two pairs of buzzards, a male kestrel and the use of two aviaries. To the donors of these birds we give our most sincere thanks.

MEG.

BY M. DAVIE.

Sparrow hawks have always held a fascination for me, their shy and secretive habits, coupled with a sense of mystique instilled into me by a true countryman, has always led me to keep a special look-out for them whenever I am in the countryside. Therefore it was a great thrill when a young female sparrow hawk came into my hands in August 1975. Meg, as she came to be called, had a rather peculiar yet amusing appearance when I first saw her. A rather small head with yellow-green eyes and a delicate beak resting nervously on a round body partially clad in half-grown feathers, the package perching precariously on long spindly legs tapering to the enormous feet so characteristic of bird-catching raptors.

She was nervous and cautious to begin with, but soon began to accept her new surroundings. She began to appreciate my appearance as it was associated with food. I encouraged her to step up on the fist to feed, getting her to do this so early on informally was a great advantage, as it avoids the great periods of stress for a hawk when taken up after it is hardpenned and without the associated worries of weight loss and condition.

Meg made the change from her internal confinement to being jessed and put outside on a bow perch without a hint of trouble. We now enjoyed long evening walks, and it was on one such walk that Meg came into yarrack - she bated at a hedge sparrow that got up at our feet. This incident inspired me to get her going as quickly as possible and within two and a half weeks she was flying free, her weight at this period was $8\frac{1}{4}$ ozs. When I felt that I could retrieve her from any position with confidence I elected a specific evening to take her out hunting.

I was extremely lucky that in 'textbook style' on that first evening out she caught a sparrow which she grabbed as it flew out of a hedge bottom - I was ecstatic. It was a rather appropriate first kill and she consumed it with obvious relish. During this period, due no doubt to the 'joy of youth' Meg became virtually uncontrollable, as she was 'buzzing' birds all over the place. It was inevitable that sooner or later I would lose her and I did. It was entirely my fault, as I took a friend out with her when she was too high and the weather was appalling. I didn't deserve to get her back, yet Meg was picked up two days later five miles down the road after chasing a sparrow into somebody's front room - much to their surprise ! After this incident I decided to keep her on a tighter rein, her weight was adjusted (lowered fractionally) and I integrated this factor by trying to convince her that she would catch more birds with my help than on her own. In other words I had to provide flights. We did begin to work together and as we were both very much amateurs to the business we learnt together and improved our

technique i.e. working a hedgerow for small birds. The results began to reflect this co-operation, sparrows began to be caught with great regularity. We caught a few moorhens, though after one particularly nasty experience when Meg was nearly drowned in a brook by a struggling moorhen, she refused to fly them again. She caught a half-grown rabbit three times, on two attempts to bind to it she was thrown off, but on the third attempt she grabbed it round the head and after an almighty struggle subdued it. Not surprisingly her tail feathers began to suffer and she soon required a new tail, so I impud on a trimmed-up pigeons tail for want of something better - it did the job very well. We tried relentlessly to catch partridge or snipe. The slips at partridge were nearly all from too far away, Meg's initial burst of speed made a great impression on the distance between herself and the partridge, but when she managed to get on terms with it she invariably ran out of steam. Snipe on the other hand were just too quick, the only way I should imagine to catch these speedy customers in fair flight would be to throw the hawk eastern-style from the palm of the hand.

The most interesting, taxing and amusing flights arise when hawking for small birds along hedgerows. This type of flight explores the strengths and weaknesses of both austringer and hawk. Often many flights arise from the pursuit of a single bird playing the traditional cat and mouse game lasting as long as half an hour, invariably leaving an exasperated hawk and a frustrated austringer - all contributing to the fun. Most flights that end in a kill are often short and rather uninteresting but they help to keep the overall process of hawking running smoothly.

The period of flying often reflected my school holidays and the lighter evenings of early and late summer. This resulted in me hurrying to get the hawk going, which meant risks were taken. Eventually this seriously back-fired and one Christmas I lost her. She was barely coming to the fist or lure when my foolhardy desire to enter her at quarry overcame me. She disappeared over a small rise chasing a sparrow and that was the last I saw of her. I searched in vain for weeks (I still cannot explain how she disappeared into thin air) so by this time I had given up all hope of seeing her again. However, two months later a friend rang to tell me that a hawk had been sighted at Cheltenham racecourse 8 - 9 miles away from my home. Would I go over and investigate? I did, and after a day's searching I heard some bells and saw a hawk flying through some trees, my first thoughts were gos? It turned out on further investigation (running) to be a sparrow hawk. I followed the bird for two days, catching glimpses of it here and there. Finally, with the help of two local lads, we located its roosting spot quite low in a tree. When it got dark I dubiously climbed the tree and managed to grab the hawk. It was Meg, a very surprised Meg, but it was her and I was jubilant.

I kept her in mothballs (not literally) until Easter, when I carefully got her going again. I was extremely interested to see if her period in the wild where she would have

been catching birds daily would result in a dramatically improved hunting ability. During this period we accounted for many birds. I cannot say that her performance, using the number of kills as the criteria, improved greatly, but her style and method of attack had vastly improved and she was a joy to fly.

This was the last time that I flew Meg, as I entered her in to a rather ill-fated breeding programme with marginal success - she died at a falconer friend's home of aspergillosis. A tragic death for a bird that had given so much excitement and pleasure during her lifetime. I sometimes wonder as to whether I should have left her in the wild after I lost her the second time.

Meg's score over the two seasons that I had flown her was:

96 sparrows.
3 moorhens.
1 rabbit.
1 starling.
68 miscellaneous.
TOTAL = 185 head.

This score is by no means exceptional. Had I flown her with out interruptions the tally would have been considerably higher. This pays testament to what a remarkable sporting bird the sparrow hawk is, and in my opinion it exceeds all other rivals in its suitability for modern falconry based on flight quality and performance.

Michael Davie, March 1982.

HAWK EAGLES - FALCONRY FAILURES?

BY JOHN BUCKLAND.

There is something about the brooding alertness of hawk-eagles that takes my fancy and captures my imagination. Perhaps it is the extra mystery attached to what is in effect a scaled-up goshawk, but we know what a goshawk is likely to see in our northern hemisphere woods, yet the hawk-eagles look down on quite different scenes in quite different habitat.

How successful are they as hunting birds, as food gatherers for man? Literature gives many references to them, some in terms of whole-hearted admiration, some in terms of that they are time-wasters, yet it appears that the Japanese use their version of the changeable with success.

"A majority of hawks are useless for falconry, and an examination of their habits in the wild will give the reason. Hunting snails with a snail kite would probably not be of much interest, even if the kite were co-operative. A vulture can be trained to come to hand, but cannot be made to kill

anything. The species that have been used, or could be used, for falconry include the larger, bird-killing falcons, big and small eagles, and the majority of goshawks and sparrow hawks ... Even among the true falcons there have been many which are unsatisfactory for one reason or another. Again this is probably a reflection on their natural habits... Many small eagles have been tried but mostly tend to soar too much and to range too far away from their owners to be in control. Very large eagles such as the harpy, the largest and most formidable of all, seem to be more satisfactory, but they are so large and powerful as to be fatiguing to carry about, and decidedly dangerous if they happen to take a dislike to their owner or are in any way startled or annoyed...

"For a hawk or eagle to be satisfactory to its owner it generally must be very bold and rapacious itself, and its natural hunting method must be such as to command admiration and make it do what is asked of it. It must also, in general, be prepared to kill prey that is of some use!"

This short extract from Brown and Amadon is extremely relevant, but they do not profess themselves falconers, so a glance at what falconers say is appropriate.

Col. Delme Radcliffe (Falconry) is probably one of the most encouraging authors on the subject of the hawk-eagle and the little reprint by Richard Grant-Rennick affords us all a glimpse of his enthusiasm.

"The hawk eagles can hardly be said to come under the head of "Falconidae used in India in falconry"; at the present day I think I may safely state that not one exists in a trained state in India... Their disadvantages are their great weight on the fist, and almost aquiline power of fasting, with a somewhat sulky temper - though of course the latter difficulties are to be overcome by proper management - and though they do chase, and move very smartly at times, they often look long for a favourable opportunity before going for a bird. However they are all handsome birds, some of them exceedingly so, and very interesting to watch, either in a wild or tame state... All of these birds have very powerfully armed feet; their talons are enormous. They are all most destructive to game..."

Radcliffe calls the Bonelli the crestless hawk-eagle, and gives it the status of being the sole *Eutolmaetos* in India. "In the plains it hunts much in an aquiline fashion, soaring at a great height and rushing down when it sees an opportunity.. It sometimes catches hares... I think that the aquiline propensities of this eagle make it less promising for an experiment in training than those of the following group. Crested hawk-eagles (*Spizaetos*) - these are all adorned with a long occipital crest; they soar less than the last group, and inhabit wooded hill ranges". His experiments did not go very far with the changeable (*S. Caligatus*) as he suspected that his falconers did not treat them well, but he did "have some favourable opportunities of observing this handsome hawk-eagle... Few birds look handsomer, or show to greater advantage, than a fine adult *nipalensis*

(Hodgson's) seated on a blasted pine tree watching for quarry to appear in the grass below. It generally sits on a branch sticking out at right angles a little below the top. It looks very like a gigantic goshawk, and many of its actions are the same as in the goshawk. It moves its tail on alighting in the same way. When sitting, the crest is frequently erected perpendicularly, which has a very curious appearance..." There follows a comment or two on the way a bird fluctuated from tame to rather savage and then more tame and gentle than ever.

"The rufous-breasted (*S. Kieneri*) is very rare, and I have only seen its skin. It is very handsome, much smaller than the preceding birds of this type and from the accounts given of it, is probably the most active."

J.E. Harting in that best-known of bibliographies on books works on falconry called the *Traite de fauconnerie* by H. Schlegel and A. H. Verster de Wuulverhorst the finest work on falconry ever produced, and other writers of standing offered similar praise. The extract from this work therefore merits inclusion here.

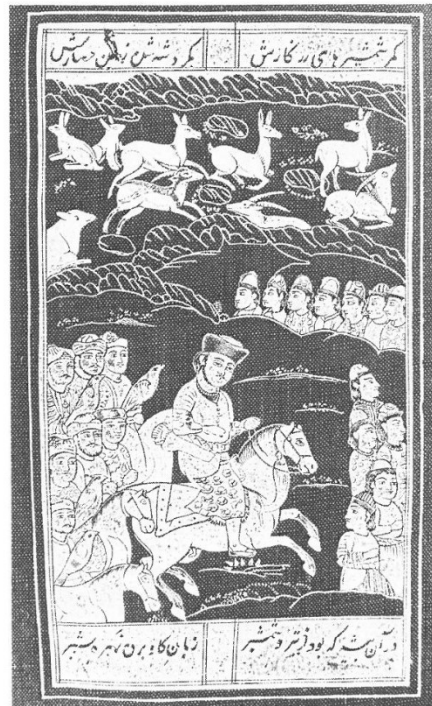
"Since the hawk-eagles are highly esteemed as hunting birds by many Asian peoples we think it proper to direct the attention of European falconers to these birds whose qualities are totally unknown to us. The hawk-eagles designated in the methodical catalogue by the names *Spizaetos* or *Morphnus* are on the one hand like hawks because of their short rounded wings and the formation of their beaks; on the other hand they resemble true eagles because their tarsi have feathers on all sides down to their toes. These birds are often as large as the goshawk or even the largest eagles. Their claws are robust and fairly well developed. They are found in the warm parts of Asia as far east as Japan and also in Africa and South America. It seems that in maturity these birds usually have a tuft of more or less long feathers on the head".

The reference to "Asian peoples" took me to the expensive, but gratifying, step of obtaining a copy of D. C. Phillott's "A Persian treatise on falconry", a translation printed in a limited edition of 500 in 1908, alternatively known as *Baz-Nama-yi Nasiri*. The reader is led to believe from its first few pages that hawk eagles will receive quite a coverage. When the birds of prey are being divided into two great divisions, the yellow-eyed and the black-eyed, and the first division starts with the crested goshawk the *Tughral*, a species frequently mentioned in old Persian manuscripts on falconry. It is probably the bird *Astur trivirgatus*, but confusion exists. This bird also seems known as the *Shah-baz*, and that is another name for the crested hawk-eagle *Limnaetus cristatellus*, and even for the rufous-bellied hawk-eagle *L. Kienerii*. But thus is only one more reference.

In the heading of black-eyed we find the *Dubarar* - "in habits the *Dubarar* resembles the eagles but not in size, the male being scarcely bigger than a female goshawk. This species always hunts in couples and is very daring and bold by nature." The foot-note contains the words - "there is in Persia a species of small eagle or hawk-eagle that always



Top left - The unfriendly gaze of a Hodgson's hawk eagle; this species is widely used in Japan, though the crest is not so pronounced in their race as it is in the ornate hawk-eagle.



Above - The cover of my elderly Persian source, in which there is mention of hawk-eagles but only enough to whet the appetite.



Bottom left - Bonelli's eagle has received both good and bad press. The extract from Harting exemplifies this.

Top right - The booted eagle sounds to be too slow to offer spectacular flying when trained.



Above - The chestnut-bellied hawk-eagle would appear to have the dash and flair to make it a good falconer's bird.

Bottom right - The black and white hawk-eagle is the sole representative of the genus *Spizastur*, its closest relatives either *Spizaetus* or *Hieraetus*.



hunts in pairs and that is known to the Persians as the two brothers Du-Baradaran." The text continues - "When in Arab-astan I once took one with a Charkh I had trained to eagles. I succeeded in training it in the space of about 40 days and flew it successfully at black partridge?, coot?, hare and common heron."

I was able to find more information and encouragement in a more recent work of 1978. On opening "Falconry and Hawking" by Phillip Glasier the first end-paper shows a hood design for the Bonelli's eagle and the changeable hawk-eagle. Immediately it is clear that both are sufficiently regarded as hunting birds to bear a little training and perseverance. Indeed Phillip has quite a sprinkling of practical advice within the text.

On hawk-eagles: "on the whole these birds are very similar in size and shape to goshawks, but are less energetic, tending to do a great deal of still hunting in the wild. Hodgson's hawk-eagle was, and still is, used in Japan, where it is flown at hares and racoon dogs which are small fox-like animals."

"I have flown the changeable hawk-eagle at rabbits and moorhens with success, and on occasions have taken pheasants. I have also seen Blyth's hawk-eagle and Wallace's hawk-eagle flown briefly at similar quarry, with reasonable results. The African hawk-eagle (*Hieratus fasciatus spilogaster*) has been flown very successfully in South Africa and Rhodesia, and also in Great Britain, at the same quarry."

"There are many other species of hawk-eagle, perhaps the most beautiful being the South American ornate hawk-eagle, which has I believe been used by some American falconers - with what results I do not know. Another South American hawk-eagle, the tyrant or black hawk-eagle, is very similar to a goshawk. As far as I know it has never been used for falconry, but it would be interesting to try it out. The very large and handsome African crowned hawk-eagle is far too large and powerful a bird for falconry."

Training: "The eagles and hawk-eagles all take a longer time to train, simply because they are larger and therefore their powers of fasting are greater. So it will take longer for them to appreciate the rewards you give them."

Bow perches: "Besides being used for all the short-winged hawks, these are also used for hawk-eagles."

Fitness: "Harris's hawks, ... and hawk-eagles can all be treated in the same way, although the big hawk-eagles will take a long time to learn and consequently to get fit. Indeed I think that the main reason why most falconers have not had a great deal of success with hawk-eagles is that they are difficult to get fit. In the wild I think these birds still-hunt more than goshawks, just waiting for something to come unsuspectingly along. Certainly my old changeable hawk-eagle takes quite a time to get fit after moulting and is very slow off the mark at the beginning of the season. Yet I have caught 44 rabbits and a rather easy pheasant with this bird, in only eight evenings' flying. The

bird visibly improved evening by evening and at the end was a really efficient, and at times spectacular, flier, taking on slips at rabbits that broke cover a long way down the hill, and pursuing them across the glen and up the other side."

"Buzzards and hawk-eagles have the advantage over most accipiters of remaining tame for quite a long time, even when they are not being handled."

What is a hawk-eagle like "about the home"? In "Owned by an eagle" Gerald Summers recounts his acquisition of a changeable which he christened Razmak. Evidently her training progressed without major trouble for her owner considered her tame enough to take to a London studio.

"Razmak was the right size (twenty-seven inches long) and weight (three-and-a-half pounds). Her pure white breast and beautifully mottled upper parts combined to give the impression of quiet efficiency. With her streamlined body, her long tail and powerful legs, her huge feet and small dainty beak she was indeed the raptor par excellence... Also she was tame to the point of being virtually unflappable. She would fly long distances to the fist with a minimum of delay ..."

Further through the book... "Razmak was the chief problem. She was active, restless and sensitive as a goshawk. For her size she was exceedingly predatory and was obviously designed by nature to prey on rabbits and small ground game... "He plans to find a new home for the bird, and then there is a taker..." within easy reach of the Yorkshire moors. Within twenty-four hours he had presented himself at my door to take her and within a week was flying her loose at natural quarry."

In the post script the author lists briefly the species he has trained -.."the lethal, rapacious, but, in my experience virtually untrainable, Bonelli's eagle..! The only other reference to hawk-eagles is to an Ayre's which was owned by a friend in Kenya which he trained efficiently, and proposed to make to the hood. The conclusion which I reach from this work is that hawk-eagles are probably not a dead loss as a falconry bird, but there is not much here about hunting with one, which to many people is the point of having a bird of prey, unless for breeding!

Distinction between eagle and hawk-eagle seems much of a matter of taste. Some people classify Bonelli's eagle as a hawk-eagle, so Harting comments: "These I found were much smaller... and belonged to the species known as Bonelli's eagle." He had obtained them through a dealer and trained one of them in the same way as a goshawk is trained...

"Soon we came to a spot where signs of rabbits were unmistakable, and choosing a likely hole a ferret was introduced, while we stood back, holding the eagle in readiness for a flight. A rabbit bolted at a good pace, and the bird was at once slipped. The rabbit, however, was a cunning one ... and he suddenly turned sharp to one side and doubled back. The

eagle, not being so quick at turning as a hawk, lost ground by this manoeuvre, missed the rabbit, and the latter got away. Whereupon the eagle after a short flight, took stand upon a neighbouring oak, and had to be brought down to the lure..."

"It would be beside my present purpose to describe the flights at rabbits with the goshawk which we subsequently enjoyed and in which the goshawk showed itself immeasurably superior to the eagle... At my express desire, we weighed the two birds, when the goshawk turned the scale at 2lb, the eagle at 4lb."

"Canon Tristram, who met with it in Palestine, considered it to be more truly a game-killing raptor than any other eagle, and less addicted to carrion feeding..."
("Management of hawks and practical falconry" by James Edmund Harting)

What constitutes a hawk-eagle is not entirely clear - probably it does not matter much in the context in which I am writing, for it is the style and size in question. Brown and Amadon seem to receive the greatest of respect for their two-volume effort, and they say outright that there are considerable difficulties in classification. Their choice is to call the species in which I am expressing interest booted eagles. They then go into detail on the taxonomic distinctions of the eight groupings they include as booted eagles. After a glimpse at flight and the comparison of bodyweight and wing area, the authors turn to hunting methods and speed ... "Goshawks are capable of extraordinary bursts of speed over short distances, and we have seen a chanting goshawk pursue and catch a quail in fair flight in the open. Some of the small eagles, such as Ayre's hawk-eagle, combine something of the falcon's stoop with the ability to weave in and out of the branches fast enough to catch small birds from them, and Bonelli's eagle has been seen to stoop at a passing jackdaw, pass under it, turn upwards and snatch it in flight."

Many of the Brown and Amadon comments are similar to those in Crossman and Hamlet, but on occasions more details are given on a species - e.g. on the Ayre's - "Although rare it is a bold, confiding, dashing and attractive little eagle, not at all shy of human beings, and inclined to attack them vigorously near the nest; *Hieraetus Kienerii* - when killing prey it plunges from the soar into the forest with the wing tips folded to the tail tip, so that the silhouette is heart-shaped. Birds are seized by this very rapid stoop which is again very like the killing method of the Ayre's."

Of the changeable hawk-eagle..."for its size and powers it is not a very rapacious bird though it can on occasion kill quite large prey. When hunting in open jungle it uses a series of perches, flying from one to another with quick wing-beats." (some of this extract is contrary to the information in Delme Radcliffe - "They are all most destructive to game and to *Spizaetos caligatus* and *S. nipalensis* must undoubtedly in a large measure be attributed the scarcity of game in many parts of the Himalaya.")

If it takes the length of an ordinary suburban garden for a golden eagle to get in about three wing flaps, it is obvious that such a bird is too unwieldy for some sorts of flying. Likewise the larger examples of hawk-eagles will prove too unaccelerative for some work, but they do have power. They fulfil many of the criteria of the falconer, superficially,; they hunt, they will hunt for man, they do excite admiration, and what they can hunt can certainly be worth having. Even if it seems to be the great American ambition to catch an African elephant with a merlin, these small eagle types in a country well populated with squirrels and rabbits should prove possible, as Phillip Glasier might phrase it, "commuters birds" - not too demanding of time, yet in good hands able to bring results, and some have bred in captivity. Are they a field which has been insufficiently researched, possibly because the few examples which have been attempted have been approached only in terms of comparison with the more normal hawks, and there has been no chance to see whether the birds tried were good or bad examples of their type?

BOOK REVIEW

VANISHING EAGLES.

Written by Philip Burton
and illustrated by Trevor Boyer -price £9.95.

I am rather biased. I tend to agree strongly with the principle that books should be written to conserve eagles and other raptors, and therefore anything written on the subject, provided it induces sympathy for the threatened species, is good and valuable.

Personal taste therefore is slightly sublimated to the longer term benefit, and in relation to this book I am delighted that; first a company with the broad scope of Eagle Star Insurance is prepared to use its influence and money to do something about eagles, and then that it is prepared to make sure that the posters of striking power that we have all seen on hoardings and billboards should have a longer life, published.

There is a directness and vigour about them which is certainly extremely eye-catching, even though those who live and breathe falconry will probably find that the presentation is considerably more brash than the birds really are. If however they take the view which I choose to, that the more those whose lifestyle is not concerned with falconry can take a sympathetic role towards birds of prey, then the authority of the text, for the author, who is in charge of the anatomical collection of birds at the British Museum, and who has stated that he draws from Leslie Brown's wisdom accumulated over the years, and the supporting drawings by Michael Long make a book which will no doubt bring an awareness of the plight of the listed species, and they will be

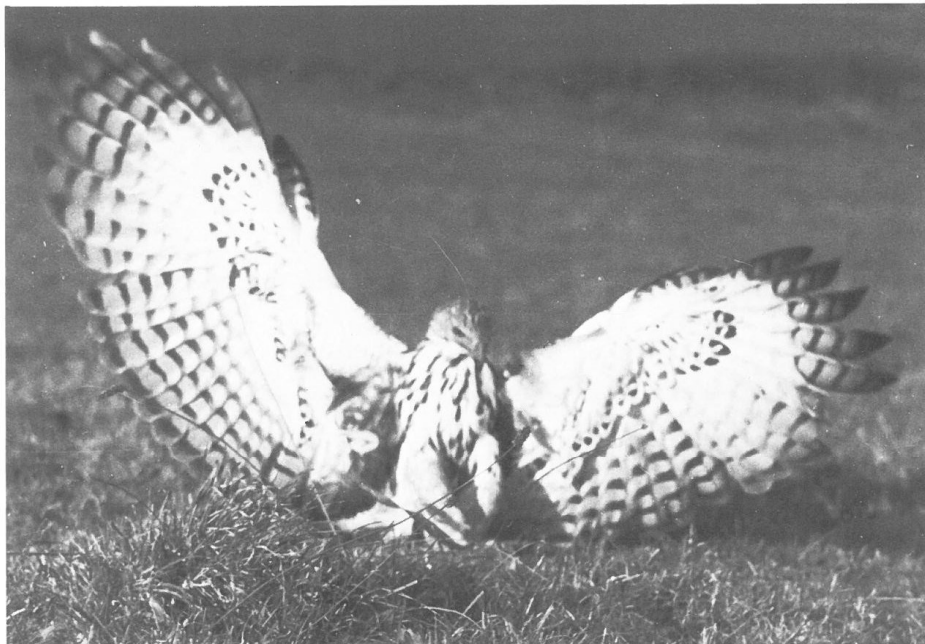
convinced of the dangers birds suffer in the face of human progress. Previously this book was only available through the RSPB: indeed the foreword is by John Parslow, Director-Conservation. I am glad that it may now reach a slightly wider market.

The author is aware of the problems of taxonomy, and he suggests that the word eagle has little scientific validity. He has chosen to consider that the word means not the falcons and not the vultures, and relates to the largest of what is left. We can find sea eagles, snake eagles, those of the golden eagle type, and the harpy types. So in the 140 pages and 155 illustrations, of which 63 are in full colour, we find 33 species, and at the end are the maps which show in a quick and simple way the areas of the world in which they are found.

(Rigby International, 6th. Floor Imperial Buildings,
56, Kingsway W.C.2).

I have been given kind permission from the publishers of Vanishing Eagles to reproduce some of the illustrations in black and white. Other illustrations are from Phillip Glasier and further sources.

John Buckland, May 1982.



Changeable hawk-eagle from S.E. Asia.
(*Spizaetus Cirrhatus*)
Copyright - The Falconry Centre, Newent, Glos.

MEETING THE RED FOOTED FALCONS

BY LORANT DE BASTYAI.

With sketches by the author.

I remember as if it had been yesterday. It is interesting how, as we get older, the brain like a good computer can recall as clear as crystal things that have happened in the past. These memories always seem pleasant ones, as even the bad things recalled look less bad when seen from a distance - thus proving the belief of the ancient Greeks that remembered thoughts are always optimistic. However, optimistic or not, I hope that this account of past events will be of interest to readers of 'The Austringer' as it is about a falcon which is not (or rarely) used in our sport.

It was late one afternoon in about the middle of the month of June when I stepped down from the train at the small sleepy station named Puszta-Taskony-Abadszalok in the county of Szolnok on the great plains of Hungary. This little country railway connected two main lines used by express trains travelling from Budapest, the capital, to the north and south-east ends of Hungary. The name Puszta-Taskony, of the doubly named station, was after the 15,000 acre estate of Count Szapary, and Abadszalok was a largish village on the other side of the line. Our family farm was on the western border of the Saparys' estate - though modestly, like a house cat beside a lion. Anyhow, those modest acres of our family farm were my haven, and I would not have taken my summer holidays anywhere else on earth at that time. This countryside was the cradle of my love for nature and wild-life - especially birds. My teachers were God and his creation of the natural world, my relatives who were the farmers, the gamekeeper from the neighbouring large estate who allowed me to go along with him on his rounds, the farming community and their children who lived there all the time. Also, naturally, there were the books and talks with the professors in the Universities and Ornithological Institutes in Budapest. In a strange way I felt a kinship to Bela Bartok, who collected his knowledge about folk music by travelling and speaking to people everywhere, from Transylvania to Western Hungary.

But let us get back to the small country station and the time when I stepped down from the train that summer holiday when I was about fourteen years old. I was greeted by the beaming smile of Mr. Bajusz the station-master. Bajusz means moustache in Hungarian, and true to his name he wore a moustache like a Royal Air Force pilot - or like Tom Jackson the union leader. Mr. Bajusz's moustache pointed upwards at both ends and I often wondered if his eyes would be safe if he did not trim the ends of his grand whiskers! However, he was the undisputed king of the station, directing the trains, the mail and luggage etc. with the help of one or two assis-

tants. These carried the postbags and sometimes the crates used to transport the birds and animals when I sent them to the zoo in Budapest. After giving me a very warm hand-shake and wishing me a good vacation, he guided me through the station building, telling me at the same time the zoological and ornithological news of the district. Another hand-shake and I was released.

When I had stepped down the two steps of the station entrance I found myself in a different world to that which I had left behind in Budapest and the stations along the way where the train had called. This was the most peaceful world in existence. The station-master's hens scratched the soil looking for something to eat, calling to each other. A big fancy cockerel guarded them, and if a pigeon flew overhead he gave the alarm. The swallows and martins were working very hard to bring food to their young in the nests high under the station roof. The honey bees swarmed around the blossoms of the acacia trees, which were hanging down like bunches of grapes. I had stepped out from the noise of town life into the real, hot, tranquil Hungarian summer.

In front of the station my familys' coachman was waiting with the carriage which is called in Hungary a 'Homokfuto', which translated into English means something like 'sand-runner'. Hitched up to the carriage were two beautiful black horses, swishing nervously at the impertinent flies with their tails. I lifted in my luggage, got in myself and shook hands with the coachman. He too was a friend, wearing a similar moustache to the station-master although on a smaller scale. I sat in the back because he said that he needed all the room in front to manage 'those fiery devils', which was how he referred to the horses. He lifted the reins and we were away. We had to travel about eight kilometres to the farm. On the way we overtook herds of cattle and flocks of sheep, they used this road on the way back from their pastures to the farms and villages. Because it had not rained for weeks the golden-coloured dust of the Hungarian plains which is so familiar on these dirt roads in dry weather even coated the leaves on the trees. We travelled first through the great estate where we met cattle, sheep and horse-drawn carts similar to our own. We also saw large carts drawn by oxen carrying harvested wheat and barley. The oxen were of the Hungarian type, greyish-white in colour with large horns and were spanned four to six in front of the wagons. The drivers either walked beside the oxen or guided them from the wagon's high seat.

We turned down left from the road, leaving behind the pine, oak and birch woods of the estate and sailed along towards a more peaceful district, trotting through half-harvested cornfields and fields of green lucerne. I noticed kestrels smaller than the common species flying over the partially harvested cornfields where they started to hover. My interest was aroused, because it was now very late in the afternoon, a time when other birds, even kestrels, were either in or near their roosting places for the night, and

also there were four, five and sometimes six kestrels hovering together. Before this I had very rarely observed kestrels hovering and hunting in company. Rather, it was the other way round. Usually when a kestrel saw another one hunting in its territory it would chase away the intruder, but in this instance all the kestrels were friendly towards one another. They were stooping down then often eating their prey whilst still hovering, their feet stretched out in front and their heads bent to eat what seemed to be about ninety-nine per cent insects and the rest of small mice. I asked the coachman if he would stop so that I could observe this (for me at that time) extra-ordinary behaviour of the kestrels. He did so, and I quickly took my binoculars out of my luggage and watched the birds. Some of the kestrels were eating their quarry, but others, also successful, were flying away towards a small wood which could be seen in the far distance. I was interested to see that although night was fast approaching other kestrels were coming from that same direction then hovering and hunting with the others. My friend the coachman said we would have to be getting on, as my aunt would have the evening meal waiting and we could not put all the blame for our lateness on the train's arrival. So we left before the last of the kestrels finished their hovering. As we travelled on my friend told me that the kestrels which we had been watching were well-known to him and that they were called 'Blue Kestrels'. He also said that I should visit their nesting area which was in a small acacia and oak wood not too far away.

Half an hour later we arrived at my uncle's bungalow which belonged to a farm named Puszta-Cyocs. It is difficult to translate this into English, Puszta could mean heath, moorland, desert or farmstead. There are a lot of Puszta's, mostly on the great plains of Hungary. The most famous Puszta is the Hortobagy, where half-wild horses gallop around with the Csikos (horse boys) and half-wild cattle wander looked after by the Gulysses (cowboys). Following 'Puszta' there is the name of the district, the name of an estate owner or perhaps something that the district is famous for. In the case of our family farm I am not sure what the word Cyocs refers to. Actually, cyocs was the name of the material used in by-gone days for making shirts and petticoats for the peasants - so maybe the name Puszta Cyocs came from it being a place where the white canvas-like material was made. I do not wish to go too deeply into the meaning of Hungarian names, but I simply wanted the reader to understand a little about the names that I mention.

When we arrived at the farm bungalow my Aunt Ethel (the mother of my two unmarried cousins Miska (Michael) and Imre (Emerich) had supper waiting. I jumped down, shook hands with the coachman, and ran up to the lighted glass veranda where the table was set and the meal ready. I greeted my relatives, quickly washed the dust off and returned to the veranda. Naturally my relatives wanted to hear how my own parents and brothers and sisters were and how my school year had been. No-one said much about the kestrels, the harvest



A group of Red-footed falcons
hunting over a stubble field.
The one in front is eating an insect in flight.

and its result, farmyard chickens and geese were the topics of conversation. Soon after the meal ended I went to bed, before getting in I opened the windows, carefully leaving the mosquito netting in place against those tiny blood-sucking monsters who sing lullabies to those unfortunates who open the window without a net and then try to sleep. In such cases take care, because while one can hear the thin voice of the mosquito it is alright, but when it suddenly stops it means that he has found a good place to have supper from your blood. However, being familiar with his habits and with the net in place I soon fell asleep to the monotonous voices of the crickets and those of the frogs and toads in the distance.

Next morning I was woken by the angry barking of our guard dogs which belonged to a Hungarian breed called Komondor and also one called Kuvasz (both are sometimes seen in British dog shows). I staggered out of bed like a drunken man who is woken suddenly. Someone knocked on the outside of my window and the dogs calmed down, it was my friend the gamekeeper. He said that he had heard from the station-master that I had arrived for my holiday, and so before beginning his round he had come to see if I wanted to go along. It was still dark but dawn was not too far away. The Golden Oriol had just started to 'blow his flute' in the orchard opposite my window, and the sleepy voice of the Turtle Dove was mixed with the twittering of the swallows from their nests in the guttering under the roof. After a quick wash I took some bread and cheese from the pantry, filled a container with water, picked up my camera and field glasses, wrote a note to my aunt and then left the bungalow.

The farmyard was already busy, with one of my cousins directing the day's start. After giving him a short greeting we set off up a narrow lane. On one side of us were green

rows of maize, fresh with the morning dew, and on the other were acres and acres of half-harvested cornfields from whose direction we could hear the call of the cock partridge. The skylarks were up, singing as if they were giving thanks to their Maker for just being alive. A magpie called from a neighbouring acacia wood, but craftily made off before my friend and I could see where his nest was hidden. A good gamekeeper does not allow magpies to breed on ground which is stocked with partridge and pheasant because the magpie has a keenly observant nature and would take the eggs or young chicks to feed his own family. However, this particular family of magpies had already grown up, so my friend Steven Varga blasted an empty nest with his shotgun. Mallards flew over our heads, moving from one pond to another, and we saw a common kestrel hovering over a stubble field not too far away. Before the gamekeeper and I had become friends he had also shot kestrels, but after I had explained to him that they do more good than harm he had left them alone. Seeing the hovering kestrel reminded me of my observations of the day before, so I asked Steven Varga if he would mind leading me to the little wood standing in corn and sugar beet fields where the nesting places of the birds that I now knew to be the Red-footed falcon were. To my delight he told me that our route would touch the wood which I had seen the day before only from a distance. We crossed the same stubble field where I had seen the falcons hovering, and once again, in the early morning, they were at work. The sun had just begun its way across the sky and gave promise of another warm day to come. As we came nearer to the wood we could see a cloud of rooks circling and swooping in great excitement, and on getting still closer we could see that there were Red-footed falcons doing exactly the same, circling and stooping down on the rooks. When we were within hearing distance we could distinguish the croaking of the rooks and the thin angry voices of the falcons.

Even in my wildest dreams I could never have imagined the sight which greeted us inside the wood. Above, fighting for the nests were the falcons, and down in the grass where they had fallen or been thrown out from the nests were young Red-footed falcons of all ages and also young rooks which had just hatched. Fortunately the long grass provided quite a soft landing for some of the youngsters. I knew from books that Red-footed falcons breed in colonies, taking over the rooks' nests when the young rooks have flown, but I never imagined that such a battle could break out between the two sets of occupants. There were still rooks sitting on very young chicks, and almost grown young rooks standing on the edges of the nests. The Red-footed falcons were stooping at these, making it clear that they thought that it was their turn to possess the nests. Some of the young rooks were hanging on with all their strength to the edges of the nests, because with the stoops of the attacking falcons it was easy for them to over-balance and fall. The young Red-footed falcons were, if anything, in a still worse plight, because the adult rooks were flying in-

to the nests and throwing them out with their very large beaks. Very often they killed the young falcons and threw them out afterwards, this happened when the adult falcons were absent - which is only rarely when their chicks are very young. I realised that something unusual had come about. Either the winter had been over-long and the spring had arrived late, or for some reason the Red-footed falcons had returned earlier from their migration and had wanted to start nesting sooner than normal. It was really terrible to see what was happening and to know that nothing could be done to help. The rooks could not be shot to save the falcons because it was impossible to do so, they were so intermingled in the flights on the nests. One could only let nature take its course and leave the rooks and falcons to settle the issue themselves. We could only try to practice some 'first aid'. Luckily my friend the gamekeeper carried a square market basket on his arm besides the rucksack on his shoulder, so I borrowed the basket from him after he had put his lunch into the rucksack. I also had a rucksack containing my camera, notebook, lunch etc., but it was only a small one and couldn't hold anything else. Our mercy mission began in the small wood. We lined the basket with soft grass and searched under the trees. There were dead and almost dead young rooks and falcons lying around, but we also found completely healthy ones which soft-landed on the grass or had glided down because their wing feathers were sufficiently well developed. We buried the dead ones and then put the survivors in the basket. There were thirteen young Red-footed falcons and eight young rooks. This was just too much for the basket to hold, so to make extra space we sat down and ate our lunch, then I transferred my equipment to the gamekeeper's rucksack and put the young rooks in my own. The basket could then be used for the young falcons. The gamekeeper had further to go on his beat, so I decided that instead of trying to take the casualties along I should let him go on alone and return to the farm to try and save the young birds.

When I got back and unpacked the young falcons five were dead, leaving eight, and three of the young rooks had also died, leaving five to raise. At the back of the bungalow I had a sort of 'pets corner', with wire netting enclosing a space of about twenty metres. Inside were a wooden shed and also one built from mud bricks with a straw roof. The enclosure was my own personal kingdom and I was free to do what I liked inside it, keeping any birds or mammals that I wished. Several times I had reared young storks there which had fallen from storm-damaged nests and had been brought to me by the farm children, so this was where I took my newly-rescued young birds. They were placed inside the cool mud building in different baskets filled with hay.

From then on I organised the farm children (big and small) so that food could be provided for the young birds. Feeding the rooks was not too difficult, although difficult enough when you think that a young rook can only be reared on meat like a young carrion crow, jackdaw or magpie, these birds

can be reared on any kind of meat, small reptiles such as lizards or even cheese, but the young rook also needs some green stuff like very tender lucerne or chickweed cut up with the meat, and sometimes boiled maize because rooks in the wild very often feed on green vegetables. This was not too bad, but rearing the young falcons was really something, a full-time occupation from morning until late evening. We went out in groups to different parts of our own farm and also to the neighbouring farms and estates. We constructed a tin box fitted with a sliding door on the top, and everything that we could catch that hopped, crawled or moved in any way in the fields went inside. Grasshoppers, crickets, small lizards, field mice, worms, caterpillars etc. One can imagine how many insects were needed until the young falcons became fledgelings. Later, when they were bigger and we had the opportunity to get into the village we bought pig's hearts from the butcher, or stole chicken giblets from the kitchen. We also trapped sparrows.

It was worth all our hard work to see how well the young birds had grown. We never let them get to know us too well, and when they could feed themselves we put the prepared food in front of them on feeding shelves. Then we opened the wire-netting hatch on the rearing shed. It was something like the kind that pigeon keepers used to have on their lofts, opening downwards from the outside, so it served for a taking-off and landing platform for the birds. The rooks were reared in a separate room in the mud building with its own hatch window. I did not mind the rooks and falcons meeting outside when they could fly because there was plenty of space for them to avoid one another if chased or attacked. After their introduction to the outside world they quickly became independent. The young rooks flew out to the stubble fields to join the flocks of their own kind looking for food, then gradually they did not come back to the enclosure at night but went to roost with the other rooks in the acacia woods nearby. The Red-footed falcons behaved in a similar way. At first they came back at night more often than the rooks, taking the prepared food which was put out for them only in the evenings. Shortly afterwards some of them did not return to the enclosure for the night but roosted in the trees of the orchard around it. They soon began to follow the habits of their species, and hovered in the fields hunting for insects. They flew farther and farther away. I went after them to see how they were getting on, but eventually I could not distinguish those from my rescue settlement from the wild ones - they mingled so well with their 'own people'.

The young Red-footed falcon's plumage is almost exactly the same as a young Hobby's. Dark chocolate brown on the back, a lighter dirty-brown colour on the breast with darker vertical bars, a whitish throat with the same colour on both sides of the head and the usual dark falcon 'moustache'. The male, after the first moult, becomes bluish-grey in front, darker on the back from the head downwards with a tail of the same colour, but the wings are a slatey greyish.



Juvenile plumage.



Adult male.



Adult female.

blue. The trousers and feathers below the tail are red, as is the bare skin, and the cere is red like the feet. No moustache can be seen. The adult females are light reddish-blue on the head, the back is a light slate-blue with tri-angular darker bluish spots. They have a yellowish-white throat, with dark falcon moustaches. The front, including the crop, is rufous red to the tail feathers which are the same bluish colour as the back of the bird but with horizontal dark grey bars. All these falcons have red feet with whitish talons.

The Hungarians call them 'KEKVERCSE' - Blue kestrel, taken from the colouring of the adult males and also the back colouring of the adult females. The English call them because of their feet the REDFOOTED FALCON. (Why 'falcon' and not 'kestrel' I have no idea, because they hover like kestrels and falcons, even the merlin, do not hover). The Germans call them very correctly the ABEND FALKE, because they do not have a separate name for the kestrel. The common kestrel is called in Germany the TURM FALKE, because they tend to nest in high buildings such as towers. Why they changed the name ABEND FALKE to ROTHFUSS FALKE I do not know. ABEND FALKE means evening falcon, similarly the latin name of the Redfooted falcon is Falco vespertinus, and vespertinus means evening in latin. In Sweden it is called the AFTON FALK, which also means evening falcon. The Dutch call it the ROODPOOTVALK - the Redfooted falcon. I had a good deal of trouble finding the origin of its French name. The French call it 'FOUCON KOBEZ'. First of all I again did not understand why it is again referred to as a 'foucon' (falcon). Why is it not called 'crecerelle' which is the French for kestrel. Yes, I admit that the kestrel also belongs to the falcon family, but if a language has a name for the kestrel why not call this bird by that name. As I mentioned previously the kestrel is the only member of the falcon family that hovers,

none of the others do. However, the French name had me very puzzled, because to my knowledge the word 'Kobez' is not in that language. My knowledge of French is not exceptionally good and unfortunately I do not have a French dictionary, so I asked Ann, our editor, who also knows a little of the language. She looked the word up in her French dictionary but could not find it. Then I phoned my publisher because his wife Lilli knows the language and has a good dictionary - no luck here either. I then remembered that living opposite to us is a lady who lectures in languages (including French) at Norwich University. She searched through three dictionaries, but yet again there was no trace of the word. However, Veronica (our neighbour) would not settle for 'no Kobez' because she too was intrigued how a bird could be given a name that could not be traced, so she went to Warwick University library and two days afterwards I received this note from her:-

Dear Lorant,

Your Kobez intrigued me too, and after I delivered Arthur home (she had brought a dictionary over to us and the name of the author was Arthur) I went to the Warwick University library and had a poke around. This was the result:

1. French has two terms 'Kober' and 'Kobez', the second being more common according Larousse.
2. The term Kobez is also Spanish.
3. According Moreau, Book on migration of birds from the Arctic to Asia (1972) the Falco vespertinus winters in the Sudan and Senegal.
4. Kobez is the name of the former capital of the Dar Fur region of Sudan. From this I draw the conclusion the French name for the bird comes from its wintering place. The hesitation on form of the word is doubtless because the final letter in Arabic would sound like the French 'R' and like the Spanish 'O' i.e. Z pronounced 'the'.

Hope that might be of help,
Love, Veronica.

Naturally this information did help, and I am more than grateful to Veronica for taking such trouble in tracing the name for me. But I really would like to find out why the French ornithologists gave a bird which is quite common in Eastern Europe like the Redfooted falcon a name that comes presumably from its wintering place, when ornithologists in other countries have given it much more suitable and easier to understand ones. Following that line of reasoning we could call the White Stork 'Stork Johannesburg' because it migrates to South Africa from Europe in the winter.

THE GOSHAWK CONFERENCE

BY J.R. HADDON.

From September 29th. to October 1st. a conference entitled "Understanding the Goshawk" was held at Wadham College, Oxford. Each of the three days was well attended by participants from many countries including Alaska, U.S.A., West Germany, Sweden, Finland, Holland, Austria, France and the U.K. In fact it was noticeable that each day the audience consisted mainly of visitors from abroad, which is an indication of the enthusiasm of those visitors rather than lack of interest by the home based raptor keepers and ornithologists. Our President was only able to attend for one day but it was good to see him, especially looking so well. There were also representatives from the B.F.C. The Hawk Trust and the R.S.P.B.

Approximately twenty five papers were read over the three days, the main headings being "Systematics and Population Dynamics", "Predation and Management", "Falconry and Domestic Breeding". Some papers were very technical (Chromosomal examination in Goshawks and Sparrowhawks), others of a simpler nature (Breeding Goshawks in Enclosures) but all were well received by the knowledgeable audience. For me the highlight of the three days was a film made and introduced by Jack Mavrogordato of his female Goshawk rearing two Sparrowhawk chicks which had been substituted for her own infertile eggs. "Nothing unusual in that", you may be thinking but the film in question was made over forty years ago, in the words of Dr. Nick Fox, chairman of that particular session. "I felt very humble watching the film, which besides being superbly filmed shows what little progress we have made over the past forty years in the field of Goshawk breeding".

All together a very enjoyable and rewarding three days, thanks are due to Dr. Robert Kenward and Ian Lindsay for all their work in arranging the conference which was organized by the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey.

A TALE OF TWO RABBITS

BY R. MOORE.

This is an account of two kills. Both, as the title suggests, were rabbits, and both were taken by a female Golden Eagle.

On Saturday, 13th. February 1982, we were invited to fly on a nearby estate high in the Pennines. The bird was in fairly high condition - 10lbs. I normally like her to be somewhere around 9 - 9½ lbs, but with the recent very cold weather I had not taken her below 10lbs all season.

We were welcomed by our host, who is renowned for his very generous hospitality to all field sports, and after a cup of coffee we set off for his very steep-sided grouse moor. When we arrived at our destination we were fairly confident that things might be in our favour, as it was a cold, bright, windy day, with the wind curling round the moor and hitting the fellside right against the steepest face, giving us the up-draught that we needed to take the eagle up high.

As I took the eagle out of the van she felt the wind in her face and her eyes seemed to light up with pleasure and excitement. Wind seems to be the most important thing to bring the eagle into hunting condition. It is as though she knows that things are now in her favour and she becomes eager to hunt. As we walked up to the bottom of the fell the eagle started to look around and spread her great wings to feel the wind blowing through her feathers. I opened my hand and let go of her jesses, and after about half a minute she lifted off into the wind and went away up the fellside, landing on a rock. As we lined out ready to beat for her I saw her rouse, preen a couple of feathers into place and then lift off over the fell and out of sight. The time was 11.15 a.m.

The next time we saw her she was about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile away heading back towards us, mounting higher and higher. When she took station over us she was at a fair old pitch. I have never been able to say just how high she goes, as I don't know how to gauge height, but that day we had the very man along to ask about her pitch. Among the spectators was the chief test pilot for British Aero-space, so I asked his opinion. He estimated that she was about 500 feet above the top of the fell, and as the fell is about 300 yards from top to bottom and we were in the valley, that would put her at about 1400 feet at her highest point.

As we started to beat for her she just moved along with us effortlessly, her jesses streaming out behind her. Through the binoculars you could see her big golden head glinting in the sunlight moving from side to side, scanning the ground below waiting for a rabbit or hare to break cover. To one side of us I noticed that a glider had flown into our valley. The eagle noticed it as well and decided to check out this intruder in her territory. She banked away

to her left and started to move towards the glider. First of all she went underneath it, then she went right up alongside it. After flying alongside it for about five minutes she moved above it, then after circling it for about ten minutes she decided it was no threat to her dominance and she pulled away, coming back over the line of beaters.

We beat the full length of the fell from one end to the other, which was about one mile in length. All we moved was one hare, which ran for about 20 yards. I looked up and called to the bird, but she was already on her way, wings together, folded up like a dart. Suddenly, she opened her wings and soared upwards again, the hare was nowhere to be seen. She took up her position over the beaters again and we continued to beat for her. At the end of the fell I had a word with our host and decided to beat the fellside back again, trying for a rabbit over the other side of the hill. Back again across the fellside we went, all the time the eagle was directly over us waiting to be served. Every 50 yards or so we kept putting grouse up, some were sitting so tight that we nearly trod on them. From this position she had completely dominated the whole moor.

Just as I was about to bring the bird down the shout of 'Hare' rang out, and on hearing this the bird somersaulted over in mid-air and plummeted to earth in hot pursuit of a rabbit. Just as it looked as though the eagle was going to smash herself into the ground she levelled out behind the rabbit. Suddenly she threw her wings back, spread her tail, dropped her feet and took the rabbit with a tremendous smack. She rolled over with it once, a quick shuffle of the feet and the rabbit was dead. I looked at my watch, the time was five minutes to one.



Ronnie's eagle on a kill,
photograph by Mike Godson.

The eagle had been up for one hour and forty minutes without touching down. In all that time she had not been given any food or shown a lure. She had one chance at quarry and luckily she had managed to take it, as far as I was concerned that was the end of the day. I always remove a kill from the eagle, give her a reward and then if I want to feed her up I cut the freshly killed rabbit up and give it back to her. In my opinion it gets her used to having kills removed from her and stops her being too possessive over them.

That was the end of the flying for that day. The bag, one rabbit, does not sound a lot does it? But the pleasure and thrill of seeing this great magnificent bird of prey working with us for so long, trusting us, and most of all showing us the skill of riding the unseen air currents without any effort, is surely something that will live with all who saw her for many years to come.

Three days later, on Tuesday 16th. February, I decided to fly the bird in the Yorkshire Dales on some land that is alive with rabbits. We never seem to get many kills there because there are holes and rocks everywhere, but we usually get plenty of flights. I rang Steve Rhodes (another member of the club) to see if he fancied coming along for the afternoon. Steve had been out with us on the previous Saturday, so he was eager to see the eagle fly again.

We arrived there about 2 p.m., saw the farmer and set off up the hill carrying the eagle hooded. I do this because with rabbits being everywhere it stops the eagle from chasing too many of them early on, when she is not particularly well placed to take them.

When we reached the edge of a large rocky outcrop I unhooded the eagle. She started looking around as I was removing the swivel and leash, and as soon as these were taken off she opened her wings and left the fist.

In complete contrast to the weather conditions on the Saturday, when everything had been in the bird's favour, this afternoon the wind was completely wrong, so it would be interesting to see if the eagle would hunt the same in adverse conditions. As well as the wind being wrong, the bird's weight had gone up $\frac{1}{2}$ lb since Saturday, making her some $10\frac{1}{2}$ lbs. so all in all I didn't expect her to go very well at all. My worst fears were confirmed when I threw the bird a titbit as we were starting to walk the hillside with her following on behind. She flew straight past us and over the titbit away up the hillside, landing on a large limestone crag. I was fairly confident that the bird would not attempt to rake away, so I decided to carry on flying.

As we started to beat for her she kept up with us and then started to range out looking for lift. The wind was blowing and swirling round the tops of the crags and soon the eagle was up in the sky moving one way and then the other, trying to gain some height. Suddenly we put a rabbit up from under our feet. I was just about to call to the eagle on the off-chance that she might make some sort of effort at it, when suddenly she closed her wings up and came hammering down

after the fleeing rabbit. The rabbit just about made its burrow as the eagle threw up, missing it by inches. This was a most interesting state of affairs, the eagle was not too bothered about titbits from me but yet she was prepared to hunt for herself. The problem now was how far would she range on her own, and how the hell was I going to bring her down if she decided to really go up. As it turned out I need not have worried. We walked around for two and a half hours, the bird kept going up whenever she could, circling us and keeping us constantly in view. Every time a rabbit broke cover down she came, and during that afternoon we were treated to some of the most spectacular flying by an eagle that I have ever seen. Vertical stoops, long steep glides, sweeping curving flights, but each time the rabbits just beat her to safety.

At one point Steve and myself sat down for a smoke, and the eagle came sweeping over and landed on a rock about 2 yards away. We sat there for about twenty minutes and all the time the eagle stayed there watching us. Every so often she would preen herself, and finally she drew her foot up and sat there a picture of contentment.

Eventually we decided to make our way back to the farm. We got up and set off walking, but we had not gone 30 yards before the bird lifted off and started to circle us again. She was spotting rabbits long before we had seen them. Over she would tumble and away she would go in pursuit of them, sometimes 300 yards or more. Each time they beat her; she must have had between twenty or thirty flights and nothing to show for them. I was beginning to feel so sorry for her, she really deserved a kill. It wasn't that she was doing anything wrong, the rabbits were no more than yards away from safety.

Just as the farm came into view in the valley below I saw the eagle sweep away to one side of us, and as we came over the top of the hill we saw a rabbit running towards us. When it saw us it turned down the hill no more than 2 yards away, and suddenly the eagle appeared from nowhere. With a tremendous thump she took the rabbit within a yard of my boot. As she took it she rolled over and crashed into a dry stone wall, I thought at first that she might lose her grip on it, but I need not have worried. She had one foot through the head and the other around its shoulders, a quick, hard squeeze and the rabbit was dead. That is the nearest I have been to a kill with the eagle, and believe me, the speed and manoeuvrability has to be seen to be believed.

When the eagle had calmed down I removed the rabbit and gave her a reward. While she was eating that I cut the freshly killed rabbit up and gave her the warm liver and the head. She was given about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a crop, as I was preparing to fly her in Scotland at Blue Hares on the following Saturday.

So that is the tale of two rabbits. Not the largest bag I have had in two day's flying, but they were two of the most enjoyable days that I have had this season. I hope that I

have been able to put on paper just a little of the pleasure and excitement that training and flying this, our biggest and most magnificent bird of prey, the Golden Eagle, has brought me. Perhaps it can be better explained in the words from a song written by the singer/songwriter John Denver;

I am the Eagle, I live in high country,
In rocky cathedrals that reach to the sky.

All those who see me, and all who believe in me,
Share in the freedom I feel when I fly.

Come dance with the West Wind
And touch on the mountain tops,

Sail o'er the canyons
And up to the stars,

And reach for the heavens and hope for the future,
And all that we can be and not what we are.

It seems a shame to intrude a prosaic note after the ending of Ronnie's article, but he rang me a few days after sending it and there is a sequel. Firstly, on the Scottish trip that he mentioned, the eagle did indeed take two Blue Hares, and secondly, Steve Rhodes went along to the aero club that the glider in the story came from and spoke to its pilot. I understand that the pilot did not see the eagle, but he estimated the height of the glider at the location described as being at around 2,500 feet. - Editor.

A LESSON LEARNED

FROM KEITH SHAW AND ALLAN MALLETT.

I'd like to tell you about one of the accidents that can happen when you are engaged in captive breeding. On January 30th. of this year (1982) we decided it was time to put in fresh material for nest sites for a pair of goshawks. Before entering the aviary we checked through the spy-hole to make sure that both birds were at the far end. I had opened the door just enough to slide through when precisely at that point the male decided to make a bolt for it. Before we could get the door shut he was out, flying straight up and going on the soar. We thought that we had lost him because he was a passage male who had never been trained. He had been in the aviary for three months, and he wasn't a 100% fit - which we hoped would be in our favour.

We started the chase with a large net, travelling for about a mile following the crows which were mobbing the goshawk until we caught sight of him in a clump of trees. It was decided that the only way that we might catch him was to keep him on the move until we tired him out, so every time he landed we threw a few stones up near him to make him move on. He then flew to a tree close to an electricity pylon. It was obvious that he was getting really tired by this time, for we could see him panting and he would not move even when we repeated our trick with the stones, so Allan started to climb the tree. As he did so the goshawk flew up, clipping his wing on one of the pylon's cables, which brought him down to where I ran like hell and netted him. We just couldn't believe our luck. We took him home, checked his wing for any damage and as all was well he was returned to the aviary. Now we are building a portable safety porch before we enter the aviary again.

ROBIN WHITING

On January 28th 1982 the falconry world lost a most valued friend in Robin Jack Peregrine Whiting who died from cancer at the age of 37.

Robin was born in Cambridge but spent some time in the Midlands where he worked for Fisons. He returned to his beloved East Anglia to work as a laboratory technician at Cambridge University.

Obviously falconry was in his blood as can be gathered from the three names that he was christened with, but he was 19 before he was "bitten by the bug" and obtained his first hawk. Over his too short life he flew many hawks, but his favourites were the sparrow hawks, some of which he bred himself. It was the breeding of birds of prey that brought Robin and myself into contact and formed the foundation of our friendship over the last four years. Besides the sparrow hawks Robin and his wife Jane also bred Harris hawks in 1981, one of which Jane flew at quarry regularly until Robin's illness demanded her time.

I have always advocated keeping records of the birds placed in breeding aviaries, but I was a none-starter compared to Robin who was meticulous in every detail. His diaries are crammed with graphs, colour charts, and lists of temperatures, humidity, pip to hatch times, food intakes and growth rates.

Those who knew Robin know that he did not suffer fools gladly and to be counted among his friends was a privilege.

The Club extends its deepest sympathy to his widow, who I am delighted to report intends to continue where Robin left off, both with the breeding and practical falconry best wishes and good hawking Jane.

Bob Haddon, March 1982.

MEMORIES OF A SPAR

BY M.J. BOURNE.

Although I have only been training and flying hawks for twelve years and my experience is confined to the short wings - sparrow hawks and goshawks, I would like to try and convey to the reader some of the more unusual incidents that I have seen while flying one of my female sparrow hawks.

Of all the spars that I've flown before and since one in particular still stands out in my mind. She was an eyass, taken under licence in 1974 at approximately $3\frac{1}{2}$ weeks of age. I didn't want an imprinted bird so she was put into the mews and left pretty much to herself. Training was a little drawn out due to the weather, with nine days in all when it was impossible to take her out - five of them consecutive.

She had completed her training and had been flying loose for a few days when I took her out on this particular day with the intention of releasing her if she bated at quarry. I made my way across the field, changed her jesses, and started down beside a tall hawthorn hedge. I had covered about 20 yards when suddenly a woodpigeon burst out with all the usual frantic flapping that they make when trying to get clear. I didn't give my hawk time to bate, she was thrown from the glove with as much force as I could muster. I had no idea what would happen, and could only hope that she would have a go. She was right behind her quarry, but seemed to be hesitating (which was understandable) but then suddenly she grabbed the pigeon about 20 feet above the ground and was tumbling earthwards still holding on to it, landing about 20 yards away - fantastic! I ran in and assisted her in despatching it, then I let her have her fill. No doubt other readers have taken woodpigeon with a spar, but remembering that this was an eyass with no previous experience at quarry I think it worthy of mention.

This first slip had been successful and afterwards she would not hesitate to fly woodpigeon even if they were a long way off, tearing down the hedge in pursuit. Although she never again caught one (probably due to long slips) it was good exercise and there was always the possibility of her checking at something else bursting out in front of her - which did happen. Some of these slips went on for quite a considerable distance, 400 yards or so, which surprised me as I expected her to give up long before that. I also had the problem of trying to keep up with the flight at times.

One day shortly afterwards, while I was trying to flush quarry out of an isolated bush that would have given her a good chance of success, she bated to my left and I instinctively let her go. I turned to see her tearing up the field making for a large brown hare which was running across it. She stooped at its head time and time again, the hare meantime swerving to avoid my $8\frac{3}{4}$ oz 'hare hawk', while I was trying to get her away from it before she was trampled to

death. Luckily she didn't make contact and had only been having a bit of fun - I think!

A few weeks later as I approached some tall trees on the edge of a wood she bated, went three-quarters of the way up one of them and landed. From underneath the branch that she had perched on a grey squirrel appeared and started to make its way across the top. She was after it in a flash, grabbing its rear-end. I was in no position to help and could only stand there whistling and shouting as loudly as I could hoping that she would take some notice and leave the damned thing alone! The squirrel turned and snapped at the hawk and she released her hold. It started to make off and I thought that was that, but my spar shot after it again grabbing its rear-end. Why couldn't she confine herself to the more normal types of quarry I remember thinking, being obviously anxious for her safety. The squirrel snapped a second time and the spar let go. This time, thankfully, she allowed it to go on its way, realising that it was too dangerous for her to play around with. She came down to my fist and I gave a big sigh of relief that she hadn't been bitten. A few years before I had lost a spar that had tackled a weasel.

Another flight which struck me as unusual (I haven't seen its like before or since) happened one day when I was walking down a corn field with stubble a few inches high. A covey of partridge took off, so I released the hawk and stood watching, expecting them to go down the field low and fast. The hawk seemed (or so I thought at the time) to cut one out of the covey, and the partridge after going away for about 20 yards turned skywards and started to climb almost vertically with the hawk about 15 yards behind in pursuit. The partridge climbed to about 60 feet, levelled out and came back over me, which meant that I had a reasonably close-up view of the flight. My spar appeared to be making progress - be it ever so slight, and I stood shouting encouragement to her. Her wings stretched and she began to soar, while the partridge continued to pull away - she had given up. My first reaction was one of disappointment, my hawk had not been fit enough, but what I have since thought is that the partridge had been an adult bird which had deliberately drawn my spar away, knowing that the younger birds in the covey were not so strong on the wing. The partridge had escaped, but nevertheless it was an exciting flight to watch with the quarry going up so high.

An accident the following year which resulted in a broken leg brought a halt to my spar's career. She was taken to a veterinary surgeon who operated and pinned the limb together with a stainless steel pin. This operation turned out to be very successful, after seven weeks she was standing and even scratching her head with the damaged leg. The only obstacle left was the relatively simple one (or so I thought of removing the pin. This second operation was performed using a different anaesthetic as it would not take as long as the setting had done, and I believe that this had some bearing on the outcome. My spar died a few days later. If not for her untimely death who knows what might have been. Although I have flown other sparrow hawks since, she was in

my opinion exceptional, being excellent to the fist regardless of distance, with a flying weight ranging from $8\frac{3}{4}$ ozs to $9\frac{1}{4}$ ozs.

You will no doubt have noticed that I do not refer to this spar by name. The reason being that I do not give names to my sparrow hawks. Similarly all my goshawks have been known to me simply as Gos - not very imaginative I know, but not of very much importance either.

(The hawking incidents in this article form part of a manuscript that Mr. Bourne eventually hopes to have published. It took a great deal of drastic editing to get them into a shortened form suitable for 'The Austringer' and I am most grateful for his time and trouble - Editor.)

HAWKING ON THE GREAT PLAINS OF HUNGARY IN 1981

BY GEORGE LELOVICH DE GALANTHA.

Translated from Hungarian by L. de Bastyai.
With sketches by the author.

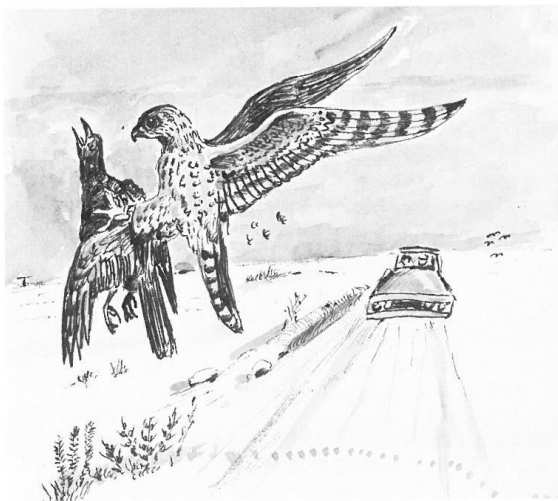
It was a frosty night at the end of November, and the darkness had closed in very early. My birds were already asleep in their mews and my wife and I were sitting in a warm room watching a crime film on the television when suddenly there was a knock on the door. It was one of my neighbours, still in his working clothes, who had jumped over my closed gate to tell me that my foreign friends were waiting outside. We were surprised at their sudden arrival because we had received a telegram the week before from Klagenfurt (Southern Austria) to say that they would be coming at the weekend. We had taken this to mean on the Saturday, and today was Friday. Teresa, my wife, set about getting the guest room nice and warm and preparing a large evening meal, we were busy in the meantime clearing the big Volvo car of its inhabitants, taking the hunting birds to the mews so that they could rest after their long journey.

The falcon looked like a jerkin - smaller than a Hungarian saker (*Falco cherrug Danubialis*). It turned out that this bird was a hybrid, the mother being a gyrfalcon (*Falco rusticolus*) and the father a prairie falcon (*Falco Mexicanus*). He had a much broader breast than our Hungarian sakers and longer wings. The colouring was different only in that on both sides of the breast the dominant colour was white with rounded markings. The other Austrian falconer had brought a very large first year female goshawk, which was used to

wearing a hood and was trained for rook hawking. Both birds, according to their masters, were not a bit interested in anything other than rooks or crows.

We waited next morning until the breeze had cleared the mist and fog which often occurs on the plains at this time of the year. Then about nine o'clock, when we could see further than the ends of our noses, we got into the car. Just before we set off the gamekeeper of the neighbouring shooting ground (a place named Csikos) came and told us that everything there was in order for a day's hawking, but my Austrian friends preferred to go to the famous plains, now a nature reserve, called the Hortobagy. Our route took us through a small town named Nagyivan (this was the road taken in 1938 by Colonel Biddulph and his Pakistani falconers to the Hortobagy for heron hawking - de Bastyai), but on the great, flat, empty-looking plains the traffic was very light - almost none at all.

First of all the goshawk was sent after a rook which got up very near to the car. The hawk chased the rook into the middle of a ditch, but did not bind to it. Somehow she didn't seem to be in the mood for hunting. (She might have been hooded for a long period. A goshawk and also a sparrow hawk need a little time to adjust their eyes to the light after being hooded, and do not like to hunt like a falcon - hood off and hunt. The author writes that the goshawk had not dropped its casting, and therefore was not interested in killing the rook, but I have known goshawks that have started to cast whilst actually holding on to a kill. A goshawk has such a great hunting instinct that it will do so even when it has not dropped a casting. The author also writes that this goshawk was also sluggish in coming back to the lure, another sign typical of a bird that has been hooded for a long time - de Bastyai).

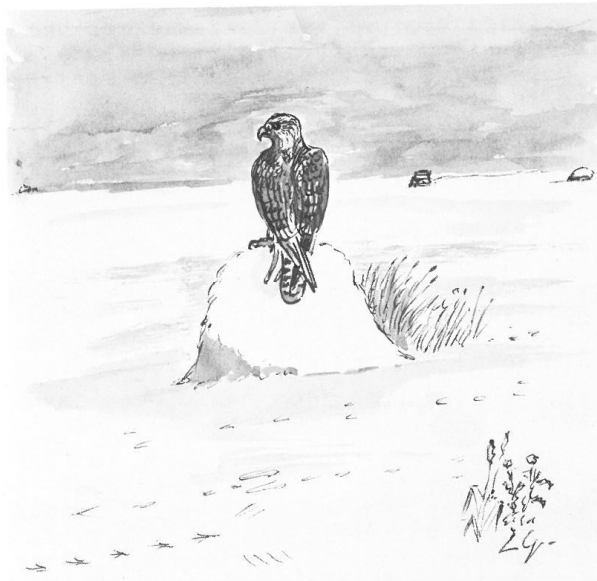


The hybrid tiercel easily caught the first rook.

Then the hybrid falcon was sent after a rook. It went after it like lightning and grabbed it 'goshawk-style' after about 20 metres, both birds going down to the frosty ground. The bird had its reward from the brain of the rook, but after a few bites it was again hooded. We drove on very slowly. Ten or fifteen minutes later the hybrid was 'thrown' from the open window of the car, because rooks could be seen feeding a little further on. The falcon had already taken one of them before they became alarmed, its speed when hunting was terribly fast. Everyone in our little party was very happy, and in our excitement we almost missed seeing a female White-tailed Sea Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) in adult plumage which was flying just a few metres above us with slow wing-beats. Everybody in the car went to grab their cameras to take pictures of the magnificent bird, but in the rush no-one managed to do so and the eagle went on her way unphotographed.

We had now come to the place where, back in 1956, I used to hunt the grey herons, thus saving the carp on the fish-breeding farm. I also had, at that time, the good fortune to kill some of the White-fronted geese with my falcons. It was good to remember those hot summer days, with the songs of the frogs and toads in the evenings and all the many-coloured wild flowers. Now white frost powdered the dry nettles, thistles and grass. In the distance where in summer the Black and White storks and different kinds of herons gathered, was standing a solitary grey heron - possibly too weak to migrate. It had drawn its neck in and pulled one leg up and was maybe dreaming of warm summer days too. Not one of its relations could be seen, just five or six harriers - Montague (*Circus pygargus*) and Hen harriers (*Circus cyaneus*) - flapped around looking for the voles and field mice which were sometimes to be seen deep in the dry and frosty grass and weeds. The large lake of the Hortobagy was frozen, but far out in the middle the ice was broken and White-fronted geese (*Anse albifrons*) were congregated there swimming in the icy water. Occasionally some of these would take off and fly away, while others came from God knows where to join the others resting in the water. Like lost souls the Black-headed gulls flew around the grey and wintery countryside. This place remained untouched by the presence of man, and this fact seemed to be known to all the geese and other waterfowl who lived there in security.

We started our drive homewards. The hybrid falcon had not been fed-up because his master thought that we would come across more rooks. We did indeed see a solitary rook feeding about 30 metres from the road. The mist had begun to come down, but the falconer seemed very sure of his bird, and threw it off from the car towards the rook. Suddenly some pheasants got up from weeds and grass, but they were ignored by the falcon who attacked the rook, flying right out of sight. The rook seemed to have had experience of attacks by harriers and falcons, and the chase went on until both birds had completely disappeared. The Austrian falconer did not seem to be unduly worried, but kept track of the falcon on his telemetry receiver. We had driven for



The lost hybrid tiercel waiting for his master.

about 2 kilometres when we saw the lost falcon standing on a frozen manure heap beside an old building used by shepherds. Luckily he had not succeeded in making a kill, and the moment that we got out of the car he came towards us. The falconer let the falcon stoop to the lure about a dozen times before letting him have it. These stoops were very fast, but were much flatter than the ones I used to have with my peregrines.

Next morning, after breakfast, the falconers inspected their birds and we waited for the arrival of the gamekeeper with his 'taxi hunting bird', a goshawk that was so named because it would fly for anyone familiar with handling a hunting bird, and so persons without a hawk of their own could have a day's sport. Two other cars arrived carrying more falconers from the town of Szolnok. They had come from Budapest the previous day, and because the hour was so late they had spent the night at a tourists hotel on the edge of the town. In one car there were three passengers, another Austrian falconer, his wife and his seven years old Austrian Golden eagle, and the other contained a Hungarian falconer with his fiancée and his five years old goshawk, and another falconer who was carrying a camera instead of a hawk. We were shortly on the road towards a large flat area of the countryside called Csikos. It had taken its name from the little ponds which were full of small eel-like fish called by the local people "csik" (pronounced cheek). Forty years or so ago I had a good deal of enjoyment here in Csikos, hawking on horseback with my friend Lorant de Bastyai. I also have some very happy memories of the place during the period in which I trapped different birds of prey. Indeed, the property belonged to me until 1945.

These days there are more pheasants in the area than rooks or crows. The hybrid falcon had been left at home, as he had a full crop for his good work the previous day, so today the birds in our party were the goshawks and the Golden eagle. When we arrived at the boundary of Csikos a hare was flushed up from the reeds, and after a chase of less than a 100 metres the eagle had caught and killed it before we could get to the spot. Pheasants shot out of the reeds one after the other like rockets. The nearest cock pheasant was the target for one of the goshawks, and it went after it like an arrow. Suddenly we saw that not one but three goshawks were in the air, as from a small wood nearby there appeared a wild female goshawk in juvenile plumage and also a young tiercel. Then a female sparrow hawk joined in the convoy following the trained goshawk. They chased the cock pheasant for about a kilometre, until it reached a reed-filled ditch and disappeared into it. The trained goshawk settled on the top of the low bank beside the ditch, and the other wild hunters flew back into the oakwoods at our approach. We flushed the pheasant up again and ran for another kilometre after the goshawk which was in pursuit. The pheasant reached the bushy undergrowth at the edge of a wood, but it was too late for it to go into hiding as the goshawk had been moving very fast and caught it just as it was about to land.



The 'convoy' chasing the cock pheasant, trained goshawk, wild female and tiercel goshawks, and the female sparrow hawk.

We picked up the goshawk and her catch and moved on, coming to a marshy, reedy place where we saw the remains of a mallard. The meat from the breast had been eaten by a wild eastern peregrine, (*Falco peregrinus Calidus* - Tundra peregrine - de Bastyai) which we saw standing about 100 metres away with a crop the size of a large molehill, but when we got nearer to him he flew off and disappeared into the far

distance. I had been observing this bird since the middle of October, it was a tiercel - but a large tiercel. We picked up the remains of the mallard and walked on. Shortly afterwards a hare was flushed just a few metres away from the eagle, but the big hunting bird only managed to get a "handful" of fur, because the hare was not "gone with the wind", but gone like the wind. The eagle landed nicely back on the fist. A 100 metres or so later another hare was flushed, but just as the eagle went to grasp it the hare jumped about 2 metres vertically into the air, and the disappointed bird was left clutching soil and dry grass.

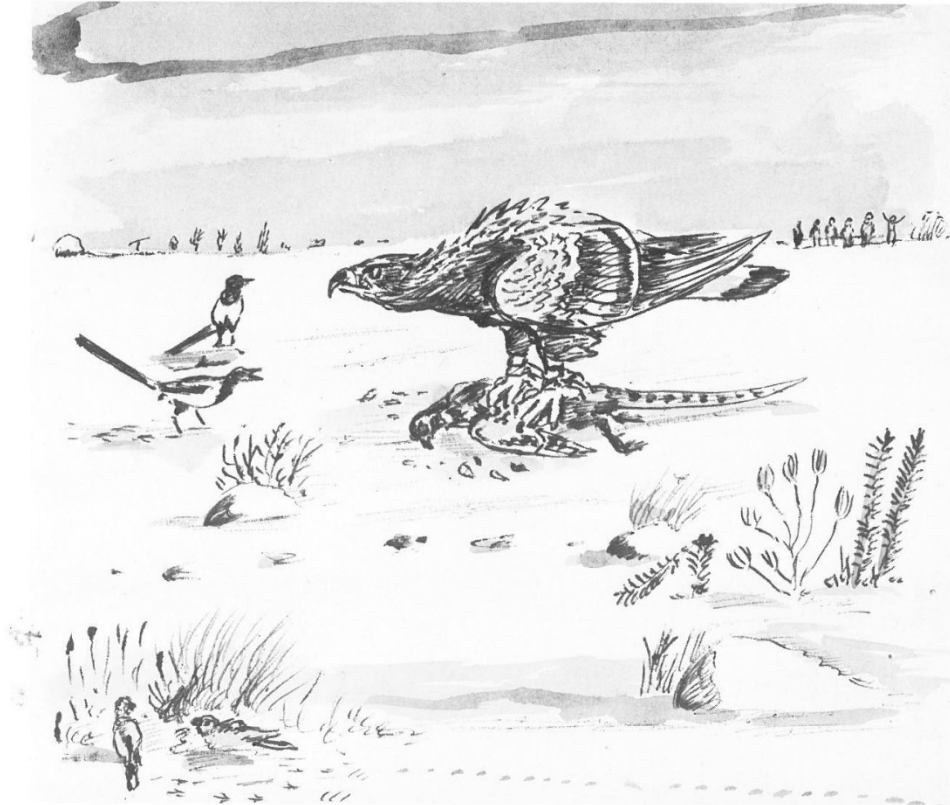


The eagle swooped like a bomb at the hare.

The eagle watched the hare running away, but suddenly it got up and after a short flight in a different direction swooped down and mantled over something. We ran the short distance to it and saw that the eagle had a cock pheasant, naturally it was already dead, killed by the terrific strength of the great feet and the sharp talons.

Leaving the Csikos, we walked through an old cemetery where three other hares were flushed, but the eagle was tired and her chase was half-hearted. This luke-warm chase by the eagle was not a true reflection of the ability of our Austrian friends or the performance of their hunting birds. The birds had travelled a long way and did not have time to rest and settle down before going out hunting, so their real

potential was not shown. I should like to mention here, as a matter of interest, that the Austrian falconers when training hawks for rook hawking do not fly them at bagged rooks, but throw dead ones that they have shot into the air and then feed the hawks from them after they have caught the dead rooks in mid-air.



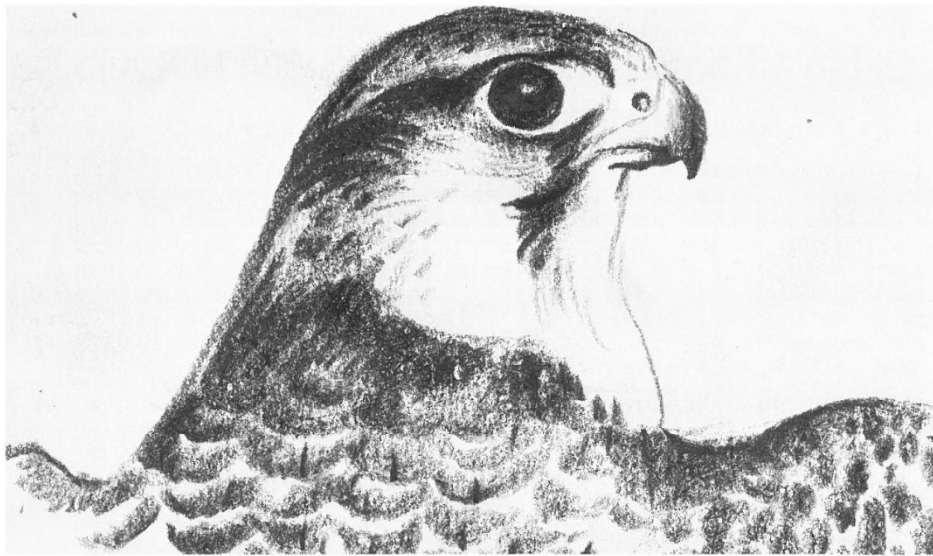
The magpies would like to join
the eagle on his kill.

We arrived home and settled down to a good evening meal, beautifully prepared by my wife Teresa, which disappeared very quickly into our hungry stomachs. Then, with a bottle of wine and glasses on the table, I told my friends that I am thankful to Symurgh the god of storms, lightning and falcons that I am still able to walk and hunt on these beautiful endless plains, which I have now done for half a century.



Symurgh was the god of falcons and storms according to the ancient belief of the Persian falconers. He was shown sitting on a cushion on the back of a giant bearded eagle, which was hovering over a volcano. His hands were stretched upwards, the left one holding a falcon and the right one a storm cloud with lightning coming from it. Symurgh is mentioned in the Book of Baz-Nama-Yi-Nasiri, written by the Prince Taymur Mirza. This book was translated by Lt. Colonel Phillott in 1908.

Drawn by George Lelovich.



A drawing of the hybrid falcon by Peter Udvarnoki who was on the hawking trip described by George Lelovich.



A goshawk with typical head-grip secures a rook.
Drawing by Ivan Marosi of Czechoslovakia.

HAWKS, FIELD MEETINGS AND DOGS

BY J.R. HADDON.

One subject guaranteed to crop up sooner or later at field meetings is the one of dogs and hawking. There can be no finer sight than a hawk working as part of a team with a well trained dog, but how many such teams do you know? I know many will say "My dog is a good worker", and like our own springer Sam they probably are, but does it run in on a hawk on a kill? Does it put quarry up 100 yards ahead? Does it course hares? Is your throat sore from shouting at it at the end of a days hawking?

On numerous occasions I have heard people say, "I can't complain about Joe Blogg's dog, as I haven't brought one myself". In my opinion this is not a valid argument, if a dog is putting up quarry out of range of a hawk, that dog is better left at home. This could mean no dog in the party at all which is not the disaster some of you may think. How many times at field meetings have you seen the dog pack, including some very good dogs, run over an apparently rabbit-free bit of ground only for one to be put up by a beater following up behind?

I must admit that Sam the springer fits into one of the aforementioned categories and after running with the pack at the B.F.C. Midland Group meeting, fitted into all the others. Which brings me to another fact, if a good dog, especially a young one, is run with a pack of less well behaved ones, the good one will come down to their level rather than they up to his.

My goshawk Belan is very nervous of strange dogs and at the recent meeting and despite much effort by me to get her used to them, she must have led some spectators to think "This bird hasn't seen a rabbit let alone caught one". In fact she has over forty to her credit this season, and a total bag in almost two seasons of nearly one hundred and thirty head.

The following weekend as a guest of Ronnie Moore and in the company of just a handful of dogs, she really showed what she can do, accounting for three rabbits and five pheasants in a day and a half.

No doubt there will be those who believe that such a nervous hawk should be left at home with the unruly dogs, but I suggest that apart from a social get together, meet old friends and fly over different ground the purpose of a field meeting is to let spectators see good hawks being flown at quarry. They do not come in their hoards to watch the dog pack.

I doubt if we will ever see the Utopia of all falconers dogs being well trained or all hawks being well manned and happy in the presence of man's best friend, so I am suggesting a compromise.

Why not as an experiment have either a completely dog-free

party or one restricted to one dog working at a time, others to be kept on their leads. I shall continue to try and get Belan used to dogs but even if I do there will still be some hawks at field meetings yet to come that will not show their true hunting potential due to the close proximity of *Canis Vulgaris*.

OSTERREICHISCHER FALKNERBUND (AUSTRIAN FALCONERS CLUB) FIELDMEETING 1981

BY GEORGE AND GUDRUN PINTER.

Photographs by courtesy of George Pinter.



Petronell Palace.

The Austrian international field meeting of 1981 took place in Petronell near the border of Czechoslovakia and Hungary. The hunting ground was flat land with sugar-beet fields and had a very good stock of game; rabbits, hares, pheasants and partridge.

The weather was a little windy but good for hunting.

The meeting was formally opened by Count Otto von Abensberg Traun in the palace yard of Petronell Palace, and besides the Austrian falconers the meeting was attended by people from West Germany and Sweden.

The birds included Peregrines, Lanners, Golden Eagles,

Imperial Eagles, Goshawks and Sparrow hawks, and after the two day's sport the total of quarry taken was:

27 hares.
22 pheasants.
4 rabbits.
1 partridge.

It was a very happy meeting and we enjoyed the two day's sport very much. In connection with the field meeting an exhibition was arranged in Petronell Palace, where photographs and old pictures from former hawking meetings were shown, along with hawking equipment and other exhibits.



"Strecken legen".

In the letter from Sweden which accompanied this article, George and Gudrun (who are known to members from the W.H.C. international field meetings) included a few paragraphs about the surroundings of their week-end cottage in which it was written, and the climate in their part of the country in the winter. I have included these, as readers of our magazine may find them of interest, as I did. - Editor.

"As a matter of curiosity the article has been written in our little cottage deep in the Swedish forest. We have five miles to go to the nearest main road, and we spend our week-ends and holidays here.

Outside it is about one yard deep in snow, and it is still snowing. We have elke, roedeer, foxes and snow hares just outside, and we can look at them through the window.

In December the days are very short in Sweden. The daylight in this part of the country is from about 9 o'clock in the morning till 2 o'clock in the afternoon. We take the opportunity to go ski-ing in the forest where we always see the tracks of the above mentioned animals. Sometimes we frighten away a black grouse or hear the cry of a jay, but the forest is very different in summer, when it is filled with bird song".

Written on December 31st. 1981.

REMINISCING OR MAD MOMENTS

BY M. CLOWES.

Every couple of months a few of the local club members living in the Chester area have a get-together in a local pub for a drink and a chat. On the way home from one of these meetings I was thinking of the way in which falconers perform sometimes quite 'dodgy' and often quite funny or spectacular feats, without thinking, when their hawk has got into some difficulty with an awkward quarry.

Everyone who is flying or has flown a hawk must have amazed themselves at sometime or other at the way in which they have found their way over, under or through an impenetrable thorn hedge when their hawk is on the other side in need of assistance. There is no time to think until afterwards, then the usual thought is "How the hell did I get through that". I started to think of specific events which I had seen in the last few years.

At one of the W.H.C. meetings a few years ago my female gos ended up in the sea quite a way offshore. Without thinking I stripped down to my bare essentials and swam out after her. It was in November and real 'brass monkey' weather. I couldn't reach her and had to turn back. Afterwards I realised what a risk I'd run, I only just managed to get back to the beach myself and the gos was drowned.

On a lighter note at another meeting, (or it might have been the same one) Tony Burnett, who a lot of members will know, was flying his very good female gos. It chased a rabbit along a hedge which was covered in thick brambles. The rabbit suddenly veered into the hedge and the gos crashed in after it. Tony, myself and another lad went to see what had happened, and I've never seen anything like it since. About two feet inside the brambles there was a wide ditch, about seven feet deep with steep sides and water in the

bottom. The brambles stretched right across the top of the ditch, and the gos was suspended by her wings which were entangled in the brambles. She was right over the middle of the ditch, and in one foot she had a good grip on the back-side of the rabbit. The rabbit's weight was pulling the brambles down and the rabbit was only three feet above the water. Realising that the gos couldn't hold on forever, and not wanting the rabbit to get away, two of us took hold of Tony's legs and we lowered him head first into the ditch so that he could grab the rabbit and take the weight off the gos. It would have been interesting to see what would have happened if Tony's wellies had come off!

Another incident came to mind when I was flying my spar one day. She was used to catching moorhens, but on this particular day she chased off after a coot. She grabbed it about 50 yards out into a ploughed field. They came down fighting and I took off at full speed (Seb. Coe watch out) across the wet plough, wellies getting heavier at every step. The spar hung on until I was about eight feet away then she was kicked off. As the coot started to run I emulated my feathered friend, launched myself through the air and landed squarely on the unfortunate coot. Needless to say the spar had a good feed of very tender coot.

You see some skilled climbing too. Another club member, Carl Moody, who is not renowned for his athletic prowess, was flying his Harris hawk when it performed a neat little twisting flight through the branches of an oak tree and grabbed a moorhen half-way up the tree towards the end of the branch. This was bad enough, but the branch was about 30 feet above an evil-smelling pit. After five minutes of Carl's usual expletives of "Oh dear me, you naughty bird", or something similar, Carl decided to climb up to retrieve the bird. Up he went to the offending branch then, while the rest of us were watching and wondering how big a splash he would make if he missed his footing, he started to inch his way along the branch with all the nonchalance of a constipated Tarzan. Being the spoil sport that he is he did not satisfy our curiosity about the splash - and he got the bird.

Another well-known member Mr. John Fairclough was flying a female gos at a North Wales meeting when it flew across a small valley and flew to ground a cock pheasant. John was off at full speed until, reaching the bottom of the valley, he came to a barbed wire fence. Feeling invigorated by the Welsh air John took the fence in his stride, executed a scissor kick that any high jumper would have been proud of and ended up stuck with one leg either side of the fence and a look of agony on his face - his wife, Jill, tells me he's never been the same since.

These are just a few of the mainly amusing reminiscences which came to mind, and I hope they raise a smile on the faces of the people mentioned and that they bring back to mind similar experiences to other readers.

HAWKING IN BELGIUM 1981

BY JOHN COX.

As some members will already know I make an annual trip to Belgium as a guest of Patrick Morel the secretary of club 'Marie de Bourgogne' in November. The meet lasts for two days and culminates in a dinner at the restaurant 'Maison Blanche' just outside Brussels. This year, however, owing to Patrick and Gilles Lafosse hawking grouse in Scotland with Christian Zarr and Roger Upton the meet was held up until December.

Patrick and Gilles have five peregrine falcons between them and rent two thousand hectares near Brussels that are overrun with partridge and pheasant. Hawking is done from Land Rovers, once a covey of partridge is spotted everyone jumps out and the selected falcon is put up on the wing. One particularly memorable flight took place at a covey of partridge that had been accidentally put up by Patrick's german pointer. The falcon was at a very good pitch of two hundred feet or more, and on the partridge being flushed it dropped like a stone on to the selected 'meal'. The peregrine hit the partridge with such force at a height of about forty feet that I was told later it had been heard by the people still standing by the Land Rover three or four hundred yards away. The partridge fell to the ground only a few feet in front of me and as I stood there a shower of feathers started to drift down about me.

At the end of the day the total bag, having flown three peregrine falcons, amounted to six partridge and four pheasant.

The next day was spent hawking with other club members, in particular with my friend Christian du Buisson and his eagle which seems to have a liking for small dogs. This small expedition took place at Waterloo. We had only been out for about an hour when Christian's eagle spotted a hare and was off, just as a party of tourists arrived at the field to take photographs of the Waterloo monument. The hare zig-zagged in and out of the people and the eagle tried to do the same. People ducked and screamed, and one American started to run back to the tourists' bus. In all the confusion one would have thought all would have been lost, but no, the hare had gone to ground under the back axle of a soft drinks kiosk. The eagle took stand on top of the kiosk and only after much effort was lured down while the hare made its escape.

During the chase nobody, least of all me, realised that we had crossed the Belgium/france border. When it was pointed out by Stan Vanoirbeck everybody laughed except me, as I had no passport on me, when carrying identification papers is mandatory. After a short discussion it was decided that the best course of action would be to 'run like hell' back to the Belgian side of the border.



John Cox with a Red-tailed hawk.

That evening over dinner all one could do was laugh and reflect on the day's happenings - particularly the look on the American's face as he ran for the bus. I am sure he thought that Christian's eagle was a cruise missile.

On the day before I was due to return I had the good fortune to be given a female goshawk by the members of the club, which is kept by my good friend Christian at his mews in Brussels. This will enable me to hunt in Belgium on future visits.

RETURN OF TRADITIONAL FACLCONRY

Good news reached me the other day from Hungary. The experiment of inviting foreign falconers to the Great Plains run by one of the state-administered estates was such a success that the management of this several thousand acres estate have decided that they will introduce once again, this time on a greater scale, falconry for foreign visitors.

There will be experienced professional falconers under the supervision of a chief falconer (in a recent letter from our President I was informed that this post of chief falconer, or 'State Falcon Master' to give it its correct title, will be held by George Lelovich, who is known to readers of 'The Austringer' for his contributions to the magazine. Indeed, one of these accompanied by more of his splendid drawings is included in the present issue - Editor) and also there will be gamekeepers ready to assist.

The visitors will be accommodated in traditional Hungarian-style houses, although these will be newly-built with all the modern amenities. Food, cooked in the traditional way will be provided by kitchens on the estate. Transport available to visitors will include horses for riding, horse-drawn carriages and jeeps. Also, for falconers who for some reason are unable to take their own hawks, there will be trained goshawks for them to borrow. Dogs too will be there. It would be advisable for those attending with their own birds to take along transmitters, as due to the flat, open countryside the chase can be very long.

Quarry available in the closed season will be rooks, rabbits, foxes (for the eagles), and because the estate breeds carp herons also. In the open season naturally there will be pheasants, partridges and hares, and from the middle of October when the White-fronted geese start to move from the tundra areas, these birds also will be available for a good strong hawk to take.

I think that if the falconers in Britain could manage to arrange quarantine for their birds on their return, it would perhaps be well worth-while on one or more occasions for them to exchange the usual grouse moors for the Great Plains of Hungary.

Lorant de Bastyai.

THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FALCONRY
AND CONSERVATION OF BIRDS OF PREY.

CODE OF CONDUCT.

I - GENERAL

1. Falconry is the sport of taking wild quarry in its natural state and habitat by means of trained hawks.
2. The keeping of hawks as pets is not falconry, and is contrary to the policy of the I.A.F.
3. Falconers must endeavour by all means to promote the welfare, the study and future survival of birds of prey in the wild state in a world where modern developments are increasingly unfavourable to their future.

II - OBSERVANCE OF THE LAW

Falconers are under both a legal and a moral obligation to observe the laws and customs of their own and foreign countries with regard to the taking, import and export of hawks, the taking of quarry species, and the right of access to land in the country concerned.

III- CONSERVATION

The breeding stock necessary for the survival of hawks species is the haggard population, and in view of the present world wide pressures on birds of prey populations, falconers shall not take or acquire haggards of any species except where they would otherwise be killed. In the case of eyasses, falconers should leave preferably one young in the nest.

IV - ETHICS OF CARE AND TRAINING OF BIRDS OF PREY

1. Persons should not keep birds of prey for which they have not the adequate experience.
2. No more birds of prey should be kept than can be properly cared for in accordance with the availability of sporting grounds and wild quarry. Birds of prey must be flown regularly to be fit.
3. Birds of prey must be properly housed, fed, equipped and trained. They should be marked to facilitate their identification and restoration to their owner if recovered after loss. (Every endeavour must be made to recover a lost hawk and to cure a sick one). Birds of prey should be flown with equipment which will not endanger their survival in the wild. It is also recommended that Radio Tracking be used.
4. Birds of prey that are no longer required must either be handed on to a falconer who will treat them in accordance with this code or be returned to the wild. In the latter case, the hawk must be in good feather, in high condition and reasonably capable of killing for itself. In case of doubt it must be hacked back. Birds of prey should not be released or hacked back in an unsuitable habitat and on no account should species not indigenous to the country be returned to the wild.
5. I.A.F. expects every falconer to inform his national club of the birds of prey he keeps and their state of welfare.

V - COMMERCIALISATION

1. The exhibition or display of birds of prey by persons whether or not for profit is contrary to the policy of the I.A.F. Falconers may however take part in official displays organised by responsible bodies, if these displays have obtained the prior approval of their club.

2. Falconers should consider carefully before they give interviews to the press, television or sound broadcasting interests, or before they provide written material for publishing or take part in films or plays or give lectures. They should remember that any of these can later be altered so as to show falconry in an unfavourable light and they should consult their national association before reaching a decision. I.A.F. does not approve of any sort of publicity with the sole purpose of making financial profit.
3. Falconers shall not traffic in birds of prey, that is to say buy, sell, lease or hire them.

VI - BREEDING

1. Captive breeding shall only be undertaken by dedicated hawk keepers with a good chance of success.
2. Birds of prey shall not be kept for long periods in breeding pens when there appears to be little chance that they will produce young.
3. Progeny will only be disposed of to persons who are likely to treat them properly and who are unlikely to bring falconry into disrepute. Hawks shall not be disposed of as pets or into the open pet trade. Hawks shall not be bred for the express purpose of creating or exploiting a market solely motivated by commercial gain. Hawks shall not be disposed of to persons (at home or abroad) who cannot fulfil prevailing registration and licensing requirements or who are otherwise debarred from hawks-keeping by a recognised authority.
4. All birds of prey bred by falconers shall be ringed or otherwise marked so that they can be identified and full proper records shall be kept.
5. Falconers shall not support the captive breeding of birds of prey for falconry in numbers beyond the reasonable requirement of falconers who will fly them in accordance with this code. Breeding for falconry should avoid non native hawks which might establish themselves as introduced species in the wild.

VII- ENFORCEMENT

The breach of any of the provisions of this code by a member of a club or association which is a member of the I.A.F. shall be deemed to be an action injurious to the interests of falconry. The club or association concerned shall be required to investigate the matter and take appropriate disciplinary action against the person concerned. They shall report their action to the I.A.F.

ROBIN HAIGH FOR THE BEST IN FALCONRY EQUIPMENT

ABBEY BRIDGE FARMHOUSE, COLONEL'S LANE, CHERTSEY,
SURREY. TELEPHONE NO: CHERTSEY 602236.

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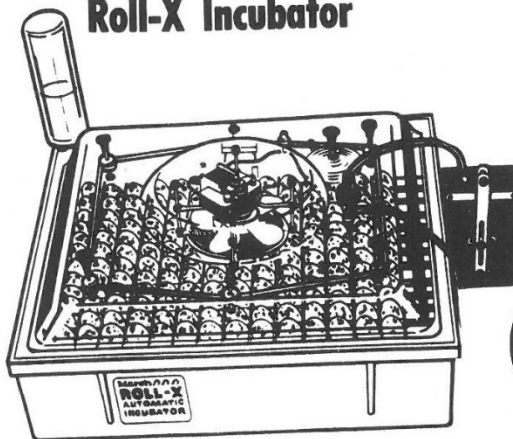
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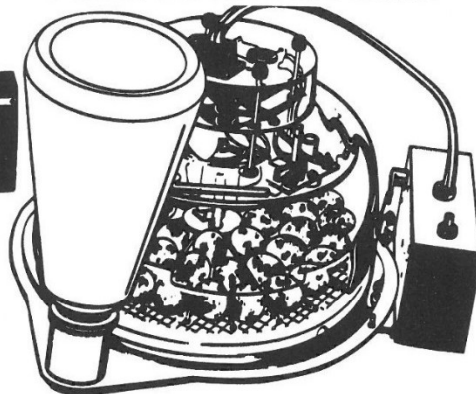
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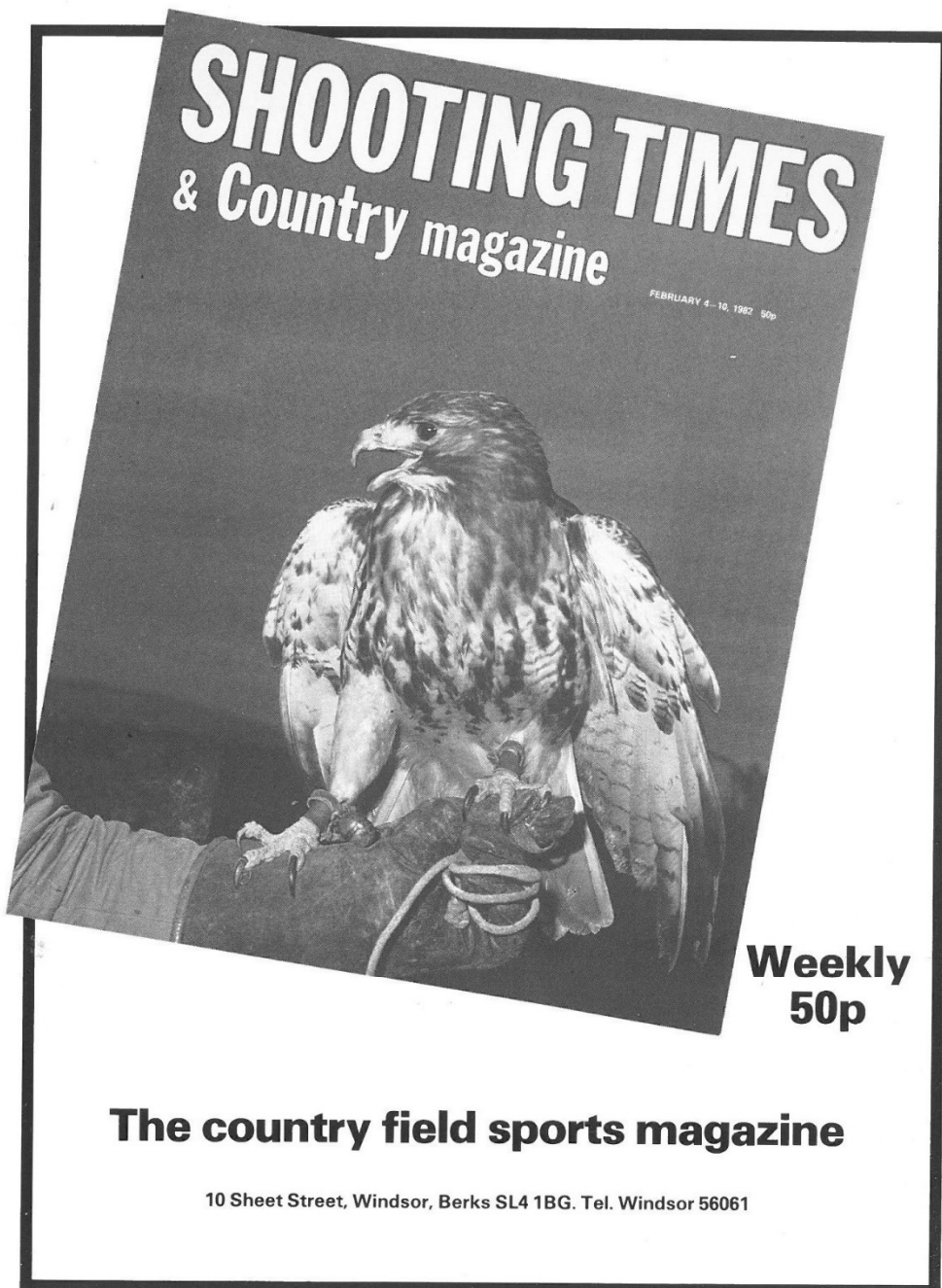
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JOHN COX
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AND SUPPLIER OF
FINE FALCONRY EQUIPMENT



THE CLOCK HOUSE,
TAL-Y-COED COURT,
NR. MONMOUTH,
GWENT.
TEL. 060085 294.

*Member of The British Falconers Club. The British Field Sports Society.
North American Falconers Association. California Hawking Club.*

I have set out below a full list of the equipment I can make and supply. All my equipment is hand tooled here at my home and I like to think that I put a little of myself into each piece of gear I tool. Any equipment that will not fit your hawks I will exchange or if you wish send you a full refund.

DUTCH HOODS. Tooled in the very finest leather, they come complete with velvet eye pieces and are blocked out on my own pattern blocks, each hood has a feather plume and the main part of the hood is embossed in very fine art work. Lanner, lugger, saker, gos, peregrine, etc. at £8.00. Kestrel, merlin, spar, etc. at £7.00.

ANGLO-INDIAN HOODS. Once again tooled in the very finest of leather and all hoods are hand embossed and come complete with a feather and wool plume. Lanner, lugger, saker, gos, peregrine, buzzard, etc. £6.00. Kestrel, merlin, spar, etc. at £5.00.

HAWKING GLOVES. Made in leather to a traditional pattern, they are stitched by hand, and come complete with a leather thong and tassel. I can supply any size from Kestrel to Gos (please send sketch of appropriate hand). Spar, merlin, kestrel at £15.00. Gos, lanner, peregrine, etc. at £25.00.

CANVAS HAWKING BAGS. Made in green canvas to a traditional pattern, they are double sided and come complete with a swivel attachment at £10.00.

LEATHER HAWKING BAGS. Made in cowhide to a traditional pattern, these are stitched all by hand, they also come complete with a swivel attachment at £25.00.

SHOULDER STRAPS. Tooled in leather and come complete with a ring to attach your bag at £7.00.

LEASHES. Cut in oiled rawhide, I can supply any size from Kestrel to Gos at £1.00.

TRADITIONAL JESSES. Lanner, lugger, saker, gos, peregrine, etc. at £2.00 per pair. Kestrel, merlin, spar, etc. at £1.50 per pair.

LURE PADS. Made in leather and come complete with a swivel attachment, I can supply any size from Kestrel to Peregrine at £6.00.

LURE LINES. Complete with a hand turned stick and approx. 2 yards of nylon line plus a swivel attachment at £2.50.

CREANCES. Complete with hand turned stick and approx. 20 yards of nylon line at £2.50.

BELLS. These are of the Lahore type and are of a very good tone. I can supply any size from Kestrel to Gos at £3.00 per pair.

SWIVELS. These are made in the U.S.A. Lanner, lugger, saker, gos, peregrine etc. at £3.00. Kestrel, merlin, spar, etc. at £2.50.

BLOCKS. Hand turned in hard wood, they come complete with a steel spike and ring, I can supply any size from Kestrel up to Peregrine at £11.00.

When ordering equipment state sex and type of hawk the equipment is for, also add 20p postage.

HOOD MAKER TO H.R.H. KING KHALED

JOHN COX
HOOD MAKER
AND SUPPLIER OF
FINE FALCONRY EQUIPMENT



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*Member of The British Falconers Club. The British Field Sports Society.
North American Falconers Association. California Hawking Club.*

This is a supplement to my list of equipment and books.

Acorn Bells. Made in the U.S.A. I can supply any size from Kestrel to Gos at £6.00 per pair.

Bow Perches. Made in steel, I can supply any size from Sparrowhawk to Goshawk at £14.00.

BOOKS

All books are new, and as new titles become available I will add them to my list. I am always interested in out of print books.

The art and practice of hawking by E.B. Michell. 291 pages and plates by G.E. Lodge £9.00

Bibliotheca accipitraria by Harting A catalogue of falconry books at £19.00

Falconry by H. ap, Evans. Many good photographs at £6.25

Falconry and hawking by Glasier. A new work at £17.50

Falcons and falconry by F. Illingworth at £3.95

Birds of prey by L. Brown by a man that spent a life time writing about them at £8.50

Eagles of the world by L. Brown at £5.95

Birds of prey of Britain and Europe at £2.00.

Birds of prey, their biology and ecology by L. Brown at £6.95

Eagles, hawks and falcons of the world (two volumes) by Brown and Amadon at £45.00

Hawks, falcons and falconry by F.L. Beebe. Falconry in the U.S.A. at £15.00

Veterinary aspects of captive birds of prey by Cooper at £10.00

A Manual of falconry by Woodford. He was at one time the Sec. of the B.F.C. at £5.50

A Hawk for the bush by J. Mavrogordate at £10.00 If you fly Hawks then you should have this book.

Practical falconry by Freeman. Paperback at £4.00

A perfect book for the keeping of Sparrowhawks and goshawks by Harting, this book is in Old English at £15.00 only a few copies left.

The art of falconry by G. Lascelles. A nice book, prints by G.E. Lodge at £4.00

Hartings hints on hawks and practical falconry. A new reprint at £10.00

Falconry in Arabia by M. Allen. A new work on why and how the arab flies his hawks. at £16.00

Birds of prey by Parry. Very nice colour plates at £10.00

All my life with hunting birds by L.De Bastyai. A new work at £10.50

Laggard by R. Stevens at £12.00

Hawks. A small book of very nice plates and poets at £2.50

The Goshawk by T.H. White (Paper back) The book of the film at £1.00

Kes. by B. Hines. (Paper back) The book of the film at £1.00

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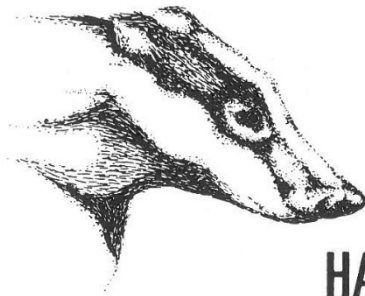
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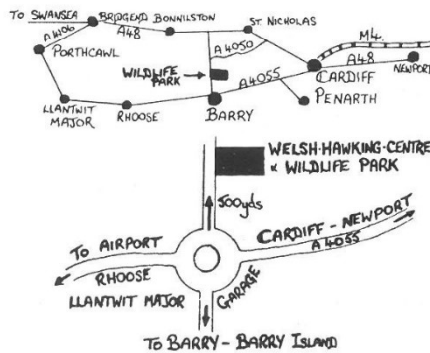
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