



**The
Austringer**

**THE
WELSH
HAWKING
CLUB**

**News Journal
1995**

WELSH HAWKING CLUB

CODE OF CONDUCT

1. The wellbeing of all Birds of Prey both domestic and wild together with the continuation of falconry must be the aim of all members.
2. The sport of falconry is the flying of trained hawks at suitable quarry found in the natural state. No action must bring this into disrepute.
3. Every hawk must be properly housed and equipped. Every hawk trained must be properly manned.
4. Every endeavour must be made to recover a lost hawk.
5. All hawks flown free should be equipped with field jesses, at least one bell and if possible a transmitter and the name and address of the owner. In the case of unentered hawks, aggressive hawks, eagles, hybrid, exotics, etc., special care must be taken to prevent loss.
6. Permission must be obtained before entering upon ground and it must be ascertained whether another falconer already has permission in which case his/her permission must also be sought. Due respect must be given to landowners and their property.
7. Indigenous hawks that are no longer wanted must either be returned to the wild state in suitable country or passed on to someone who will treat them in accordance with this code of conduct. Before a hawk is released the falconer must ensure that it is in good feather, in the highest possible condition, that it can kill for itself and is suitable for release. If there is any doubt that it is able to do so it should be hacked back.
2. During the year should any committee member fail to attend committee meetings regularly then he or she may be asked to give an explanation. If the reason is of insufficient justification the committee may co-opt a member to fill the position. They may also co-opt any person to the committee if considered desirable.

MEMBERSHIPS:

1. Members of the club will be elected by the committee.
2. No person will be elected without application to the Secretary.
3. The annual subscription shall be determined at the A.G.M. each year.
4. Any member whose subscription is unpaid by June of any year shall cease to be a member, but shall be eligible for election as for new members.
5. Should the committee have reason to believe that a member has acted in a manner injurious to falconry or the club or both then the member may be required to furnish a written explanation to the secretary for the consideration of the committee or to appear in person before the committee. The member may claim a personal hearing if preferred. The Secretary must give the member at least 14 days' notice of the committee's requirements. Should the member refuse to comply the committee may terminate the membership. They may also terminate the membership should they decide that the member has acted in a way harmful to falconry or the club or both.
6. No member must give talks, interviews or material relating to falconry, domestic breeding, etc., to the media, i.e., T.V., Radio, Press, etc., without advice from the committee and/or the Press and Publicity Officer. Any member giving such talks must make every effort to ensure their accuracy.
7. Any member wishing to dispose of a hawk obtained through the club must offer the hawk back into the club.
8. Only full members are eligible to vote on club affairs.
9. Proxy votes and postal votes are not allowed.
10. Associate members wishing to obtain full membership may apply in writing to the Secretary, for the consideration of the committee. Prior to applying the applicant should normally have completed at least 12 months' membership. The application must give full details of hawk-related experience and should be countersigned by a full member.

RULES OF THE WELSH HAWKING CLUB

NAME AND OBJECTS:

1. The name of the club shall be The Welsh Hawking Club.
2. The objectives of the club shall be:
 - a. The promotion of Falconry.
 - b. The provision of advice and information for members and other interested parties.
 - c. The promotion and maintenance of the club's code of conduct amongst our members.

CONSTITUTION:

The club shall consist of a President, Vice Presidents, Chairman, Vice Chairman, Hon. Secretary, Assistant Hon. Secretary, Hon. Treasurer, Editor, Press and Publicity Officer, Conservation Officer, Breeding Project Officer, Legislative Officer and Field Officer. Each of these is entitled to attend the committee meetings and to one vote, except for the Chairman who does not have a vote. However, in the event of a vote resulting in a tie the Chairman shall then have the casting vote. Proxy votes and postal votes shall not be allowed at committee meetings. The business of the club will be conducted by the officers and committee (hereafter referred to simply as the committee) which will meet at such times as it thinks fit. A quorum for a meeting shall be five members. No one with convictions for offences involving Birds of Prey shall hold office within The Welsh Hawking Club.

ELECTIONS:

1. All members of the committee will be elected or re-elected, individually, annually at the AGM. Prior to the election the attendance record at committee meetings for the last year shall be given.

MEETINGS:

1. The Annual General Meeting shall be held in February of each year.
2. Meetings shall be presided over by the President, Chairman or one of the Officers as appropriate.
3. General meetings will normally be held monthly on the second Monday of each month. Informal meetings will be held as required.

ALTERATION OF RULES:

Rules may only be altered by a vote taken at the A.G.M. or an extra-ordinary general meeting. Notices of motions for the A.G.M. or E.G.M. shall be sent to the Secretary in writing in order to arrive at least six weeks prior to those meetings. Any member wishing to call an E.G.M. shall inform the Secretary in writing stating the reasons for such meeting. The application must be countersigned by twenty full members.

The Austringer

The Official Journal of the Welsh Hawking Club

No. 27

1995



Clwb Hebogwr Cymru

Editorial

Welcome to your 1995 Austringer. You will be glad to hear I am keeping the editorial short and to the point. I need as much space as I can find for your articles. The response has been most encouraging after last year and at a time when I was looking to curtail the numbers somewhat in order to lower the printing costs. I have been caught out, but then I am not complaining because I know you will enjoy some interesting reading.

It's nice to have more good dog stories. It serves to illustrate the importance that we as falconers should attach to that other vital member of our hunting team. (Joseph Schmutz, one of this year's contributors claims that a falconer may proclaim himself a sportsman, yet without a dog he resembles a rungless ladder, useless, lame. Or the other sports person who used the analogy, referring to a falconer without a dog, as a shotgun without a cartridge.) Slowly, falconers are recognising that it is just not good enough having a semi-trained dog tagging along with them just for the ride. Care must be taken in choosing the right breed and time must be spent with their early training, just as it is necessary with hawks. Only then can the full benefit and rewards of falconry be appreciated. I have included the article from Canadian falconer, Josef Schmutz, because so many members use dogs from the HPR group.

Never forget the importance of your dogs. The threat posed by John McFall MP when he introduced his Parliamentary Bill to end hunting with dogs should not be taken lightly. You might think that this Bill only attempted to ban fox, deer and stag hounds together with coursing dogs and foot packs, etc., but in this case nothing could be further from the truth. Any dog used for hunting would be affected and that means the breeds of dogs we use. As if you need no further reminder against complacency, I learn that the League Against Cruel Sports are once again targeting falconry, in their words: "The forgotten blood sport".

With the breeding season coming to an end as I write this frontispiece, many members will be starting or contemplating taking up new hawks for training or eagerly awaiting the end of the moult to start hunting once again. Either way, have a really good year's sport and I hope we meet lots of you at our North Wales field meeting in October.

My sincere thanks to all our contributors, especially the return of Andrew Ellis for our combined front and back cover illustration. I had the choice of three artists' work to consider and although the format of Andrew's painting did not match the proportions of the cover, with a bit of trimming I have made it work. For me it is such a good painting, some of you may remember seeing it on display at the Falconers Fair. And anyway it's the turn of the longwings for our cover. As always, Burleigh Press continue to provide me with excellent, typesetting, design and printing. Thanks to everyone for this year's efforts.

**Welsh Hawking Club
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FRONT AND BACK COVER:
'Peregrine onto Grouse' by Andrew Ellis.

CONTENTS

CONSERVATION OFFICER'S REPORT <i>by Peter Scourse</i>	1
SUCCESS <i>by Alan Gates</i>	1
CLOSE CALLS <i>by Mark Williams</i>	3
A RED TAILED DUCK <i>by A. J. Phillips</i>	4
BRITTANY SPANIEL <i>by Fletcher-Smith</i>	5
CHESHIRE PARTRIDGE HAWKING SYNDICATE <i>by Mike Coupe</i>	7
BOOK "REVIEW" <i>by John Buckner</i>	8
THE BLANK PAGE <i>by Alan Gates</i>	9
THE APPRENTICE <i>by Francis Allen</i>	10
BOOK "REVIEW" <i>by Ian Blantern</i>	12
FRIEND OF THE FALCON <i>by Tony Jackson</i>	15
AN EXTRA SPECIAL FERRUGINOUS <i>by Tizi Hodson</i>	16
BIRDS OF PREY: LIVING, FLYING WEAPONS	17
GERMAN VERSATILE HUNTING DOGS <i>by Joseph K. Schmutz</i>	18
FIRST INTERNATIONAL CANADIAN FIELD MEETING <i>by Mike Clowes</i>	21
A CLOSE CROAK <i>by Alan Cannon</i>	23
TRAPPING A WILD PRAIRIE FALCON <i>by Mark Williams</i>	24
ELEVATED LURE FLYING <i>by Mick Young</i>	26
TRAPPING AND THE 1994 NAFA MEETING <i>by David Kirkby</i>	28
FALCONRY SAFARI - AFRICA <i>by Adrian Williams</i>	29

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Conservation Officer's Report

By Peter Scourse

The past year has, as always, been a busy one for those of us involved in the conservation and rescue of birds of prey. In addition to our usual problems there have been those imposed upon us by recent changes in legislation, principally the de-registration of the more common species of British raptors i.e. kestrels, sparrowhawks and buzzards. These were applied on the grounds that these species are now so common as no longer to need the slender protection afforded by registration, although the normal provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1981 as to illegal killing and possession still apply.

It does seem that the over-riding consideration for the changes was a money saving exercise by central Government. In this context it seems rather ironic that a senior R.S.P.B. representative told me only this week that concern is now being expressed about a decline in the kestrel population.

Functionaries in Whitehall Ministries, far removed from the field, often fail to realise that wild life populations are not static in a state of perpetual balance, but are dynamic, so that at one time there may be a "surplus" of a particular species often dependent upon a surge in the prey population and at others may drop dramatically when the prey population crashes.

It also seems that the technical facts of deregulation have not been spelt out to the rural population as many people that I have spoken to are under the impression that all protection has been removed from these three species. It is perhaps no coincidence that in the past two months I have taken in more shotgun casualties from these species than I have in the past four years.

Similar changes, no doubt well intentioned, concerning the

release of Barn Owls into the wild have caused severe problems to raptor rescue organisations. In the past there had been a boom market in the breeding and sale of Barn Owls to those hopefuls responding to various appeals for the re-establishment of this beautiful bird who had bought these birds in their hundreds and released them, often in unsuitable areas. To this extent the new legislation was beneficial. What our Whitehall warriors had failed to foresee was that those engaged in this traffic were now unable to release their birds or sell them on. The inevitable result was that large numbers of these unfortunate owls were dumped into the wild to starve or end upon the doorsteps of rescue organisations. I have personally received ten in the past twelve months and other rescuers have received even greater numbers.

Such are the results of playing political games with wildlife.

Since the immediate pressure was removed from falconry it would appear that there has been less motivation to forward rescue records so that the only figures available for my last report before resigning from this post are my own which are as follows:

1st January to 31st December 1994

Received: 2 kestrels, 4 sparrowhawks, 7 buzzards, 7 tawny owls, 4 barn owls and 4 little owls.

5 died, 17 released and 6 retained.

Survival rate: 83%. Release rate: 60%.

Other species: 12 ranging from Fallow Deer to chaffinches.

Owing to the high death rate of song birds (mostly cat casualties) the death rate was 83% with a 16 release rate.

NB: Cats and traffic kill far more song birds than raptors do!

Success

By Alan Gates

It was early morning as I walked along the farm road, the gos on my fist was keen she stood on her toes stretching to see over the closely cropped thorn hedge on my right. She was eagerly scanning the field of newly sprouting wheat looking for anything moving. In the distance a small covey of grey partridge scurried further away. Her intense staring and spasmodic gripping of my gloved fist brought my attention to the partridge, she was no match for them at that distance, but it indicated her keenness and that bolstered my confidence.

For this was no ordinary morning, it was October 1st and I was hoping to enter the gos on her first free flight at wild quarry. She was an adult bird, and had been in a breeding enclosure for four years. I had seen her for sale in June and although I was looking for a bird of the year, the scarcity of young goshawks in '94 brought me to consider her. My first sight of her through a peep hole in the enclosure was a deciding factor, she was a bonny German, nicely marked and with

good colouring. We caught her up, checked her over, signed the papers, paid the money and she was mine.

Her training was textbook stuff, no bad habits manifest themselves, she was as much a lady as any gos could be. I had had some misgivings on being told that she had been trained in Germany before being sold for breeding. This way of thinking is due to my being a falconer first and aviculturist second. Siouzsee my young Münsterländer bitch trotted along at heel on my right side, both dog and gos had developed a good early relationship. Siouzsee had been present at all stages of the goshawk's training and although she was still being trained herself, she had behaved impeccably. She seemed instinctively to understand that the gos was to be part of the team. The gos seemed to hold the upper hand, the occasional clip on the nose end from a bating wing primary proved to be all that was needed.

Siouzsee was edging forward as we approached the river,

her enthusiasm for work took constant controlling. I crossed the river on the farm bridge and climbed over the fence, we would work the ring bank heading for the wood. A hand signal was all the



Siouxzee (Large Münsterländer) on point.

dog needed and she was working the reeds and small hawthorn bushes on the banks. She kept close, no more than twenty to thirty yards in front, she would stop to look back, if she got no signal from me she would go on.

Suddenly she was on point, the moment of truth had arrived for both dog and hawk. As I walked closer urging the dog to hold steady, hoping the quarry whatever it was would hold still, in fact hoping it was quarry and not just the vacated smell of one. Praying the gos would not pick this precise moment to have an impatient bate and ruin everything. Siouxzee was pointing the base of a small thorn bush, she was facing towards the river, as I approached level with her a cock pheasant exploded from the bush and across the river. The gos was off the fist in a flash and in hot pursuit, I was blasting on the whistle that was clenched between my teeth, to hold the dog. She was still with me, but had done a couple of victory somersaults, for nothing excites this young dog more than a cock pheasant exploding up her nostrils.

The cock had flown across the river and made a left hand turn along and behind the bushes on the far bank with the gos close behind. This was in the direction of the wood and the way we were intending to go. For a moment I was rooted to the spot, one second I had been clutching the jesses of my gos standing on the glove the next she was in hot pursuit. Not for an instance had she hesitated, typical goshawk, but still a very welcome start to the proceedings in hand.

I was on my way with the dog galloping at my side, no let's be honest she was lolloping about in front of me, weaving from side to side, most of the time gawping at me behind her instead of where she was going, I couldn't help smiling when she was brought up short by the pig net fencing she normally sails over gracefully. "That'll teach yer to look where yer going", I growled. I ran half way into the wood and stood and listened whilst scanning the tree tops. A light tinkle of a bell indicated a direction and I moved twenty yards or so, another tinkle which seemed closer, a few more yards and there she was running about under a large patch of brambles. I bent down and showed her the fist garnished with a titbit, she was having none of it, still miffed at missing the cock she was running about intent on finding him. Siouxzee was pushing her way through the brambles from the other side. I told her to wait and at the moment the gos jumped up through a gap and into a tree. Still not interested in the fist I pulled the lure from my bag and she was on her way before it hit the ground. A few moments to vent her frustration on the lure for having missed the cock, a couple of mouthfuls reward and we were ready again to see what delights the wood had to offer.

Siouxzee worked the woodland floor in almost textbook fashion, it's moments like that which make all the hours training and banging your head on a brick wall worth it. She quartered in front checking all likely hiding places and driving through some very thick cover. If she progressed a little too fast a blast on the whistle and she would stop and stand waiting until a hand signal would send her in which ever direction I had indicated.

Unfortunately the wood held no quarry today and all her hard work had been in vain. At least now having a dog working with me I knew that there really was no quarry. One thing that never ceased to amaze me with this Münsterländer was her excellent nose – if there was anything there she would have found it – anyway it helps to have total faith in your dog.

We moved on out of the wood across a small strip of pasture and into a field of set-aside. This looked a little more promising. It had been left after harvest and was still stubble, in some places where the ground had been wet the combine harvester had left the stubble long.

Siouxzee homed in on the first patch of long cover and straight on point, she stood rock solid, but a covey of partridge exploded to her right and she turned to face them. The gos bated but I held onto the jesses, then two hen pheasants burst out, but the gos had not recovered the glove. I was cursing the gods when another two decided to make a break for it, the gos was up and I threw her after them. They both high tailed it over the far hedge and dropped out of sight. I expected the gos to lose ground, not having had time to recover from her bating and to lift up into a small tree that was twenty or so yards along in the hedge.

When she did not I was puzzled, had she grabbed the hen after all, I ran to the hedge. The dog was excitably bounding up and down the hedge and I growled at her to calm down, I found a way through, no gos! A tinkle of a bell, she was close. I walked back along the hedge bent double looking into the hedge bottom. There she was, deep into the hedge, but with a cock. As she was facing the other way I pushed back through the gap and slipped into the ditch and gently coaxed her and her prize through. I dispatched the cock and sat back whilst she plumed and broke in, Siouxzee lay down beside me and watched intently.

I was well chuffed and could only speculate that on flying over the hedge in pursuit of the hen she surprised a cock on the other side and seeing an easier meal clobbered him as he bolted for cover.

As I sat there watching her feed up and reflecting on the events, Siouxzee sat up and tensed. I looked behind me and saw a roe doe standing not fifteen feet away watching us. I whispered to Siouxzee, 'down', she slid down without taking her eyes off the doe, who having seen enough, ambled on her way and into the far wood.



Siouxzee and Little Jerry.

Close Calls

By Mark Williams

It seems that not a season can go by without one mishap or other no matter how hard you try to prevent it. I guess that if you fly your bird a lot and by that I mean you get out into the field over 80–100 days in a season pursuing game, one must expect that the odds of something going wrong are somewhat higher than for someone who is not as fortunate to get out as often.

Take last year for example. My eyas peregrine Molly was only flying free and hunting game for a few weeks after becoming hard penned, when she had the misfortune to fly into a thin strand of previously unseen cattle wire just as she was about to bind to a teal. Luckily and by some miracle despite hitting the wire at some speed she did not sustain any serious or permanent injury. After a week or so of rest to allow the wound to scab up and heal she was in the air again. Molly was very wire wise thereafter. That was an experience that I would choose never to go through again in my lifetime!

Now this year yet another couple of near fatal incidents happened. It was Molly's second season and she was getting so good at catching ducks you could almost predict that she was going to catch one since her success rate was one kill in every two flights. This made taking out spectators a little more interesting and enjoyable for all. With this in mind and after having taken several friends out to witness her deadly skills I thought it was about time my own family should see her fly.

I am fortunate living in the country to have ponds and sloughs around me and if I am pushed for time before or after work or just plain lazy, all I have to do is walk 50 yards to the nearest set up. This was the case on the day I invited my sister to come and see Molly fly. I put Molly up and she took a nice pitch of around 400 ft. I told my sister where to stand to get the best view since I knew the direction the ducks would flush. Molly came over nicely into position and I ran in with my two dogs to flush the ducks and yelled so as to give Molly the signal just in case she was distracted. Down she came like a rock and levelled out behind and bound to a hen mallard. I looked back to confirm if my sister had seen the stoop and bind and then I ran through the reeds towards the direction Molly went down with her prize.

I was no more than 60 yards from her when she landed and as I ran closer, maybe 20 yds I could see her wings flapping about and thought that this mallard was giving her a hard time. I ran even faster towards her so that I could help her out. As I came up to her I could not believe my eyes. A coyote was snapping viciously at her as she held onto the duck but at the same time was trying to back off avoiding this "unfriendly strange dog" as she thought. It seems as though I was stood, jaw open, for ages but it could only have been a second before I ran forward to part them. As I got to her the coyote looked up and must have had the same thought running through his mind as I did . . . where the bloody hell did you come from? Molly let go of her duck and flew a few feet and landed in the long grass just as the coyote ran off. Still stunned I ran to where the duck was and frantically looked for it. At this moment one of my GSPs ran up having just come out of the slough after flushing the ducks. The pointer proceeded to chase the coyote but I called her back to help locate the duck in the long grassy reeds. I then collected



Molly, first year plumage.

my thoughts and ran over to where Molly had flown a few feet away. I didn't get a chance to see if she was all right since she had taken off and was up looking down to see where her duck had gone.

I tried to call her down with the lure but she was really psyched and mad, she wanted what was hers and she was not used to being robbed of her quarry. I looked frantically for the duck but it had probably made good its escape through the reeds during the commotion. Molly proceeded to climb higher and higher and circled over the nearby slough which was about 100 yds away. I desperately tried to call her down, since if she was hurt I didn't want her flying around exerting herself with a bleeding wound. In the end all I could think to do was flush the ducks off the nearby slough. This I did and down she came. Again she bound to another mallard but dropped it as she went down with it, pitching up, she stooped in after it. Oh no I thought . . . *déjà vu*.

This time she was the other side of the long slough and in the general direction of where that coyote had fled. It would take me 5 to 10 minutes to get around to her. I was in a panic. I was falling over things as I ran around the slough. My lungs were aching and I feared the worst. Luckily Molly lost the duck in the reeds and didn't recapture it on the grounds. She took off again and came overhead. I spent the next few minutes getting back my breath and trying to call her down since I had not yet ascertained if she had been injured. Down she came to the lure and I checked her over . . . not a scratch, would you believe it?

I walked towards my sister who had not seen the fiasco with the coyote. I was amazed that a coyote would be hanging around the area, let alone would be attacking my falcon when I was only a few yards away and had moments earlier just bellowed to signal to Molly that the ducks were flushing. Had I just strolled over to where she landed I would have probably come across a half eaten falcon.

The other incident occurred near the end of the season

when Molly was putting in a second stoop on a mallard. It flew straight towards a fence line with Molly right on her tail. I could see what was going to happen but was powerless to stop it. I suspect the duck was trying to use the fence to "rub off" the pursuing falcon, either that or it was committing suicide! Moments later it flew head on into the fence and exploded into a puff of feathers. Molly flicked a wing at the last second and shot over the top of the fence only to pitch up steeply and winnow down to claim her prize. I spent the next few moments trying to swallow my stomach that had previously hit my throat!

Later that month a good friend, Ted Truz's eyes tiercel peregrine, probably the highest flying first year bird I have ever seen, raked off and was found dead having possibly stooped at something and hit a power line. A week later I

heard of Rick Skibsted's eyes female peregrine going off during training and landing on a power pole and electrocuting itself. Probably the strangest incident was another Alberta falconer's peregrine tiercel which was found dead in a water barrel besides an old barn in the middle of nowhere minutes after raking off after some small birds.

I guess these incidents go to show that even as responsible falconers we try not to put our birds in any situation where they are at risk, we still can lose our birds one way or other. Sadly as some of us already know, the knowledge and wisdom we gain over the years is often as a result of a tragedy we have personally experienced. This is a high price to pay and I wouldn't wish this upon anybody but providing we learn from our mistakes or from those made by an unfortunate fellow falconer, then I believe it will make us better falconers for it!

A Red Tailed Duck

By A. J. Phillips

Colin and I had arranged to go hawking on the Saturday morning.

We would be taking my male redtail called Druid, whose flying weight is 2lb 6ozs. At this weight Druid is very aggressive and because he is an imprint, will often try to slash my hands with his talons, when removing or replacing his swivel.

As I drove along with Druid on his perch in the back, I couldn't help thinking how much falconry was taking over my life. My wife is very understanding and as long as I don't overdo it. I take Druid out most days.

I arrived at first light and Colin was waiting for me. He jumped in the car and we drove straight to the piece of land we were going to hawk. This land is on a steep hill and is very overgrown with thick bracken and ferns.

We only had two flights, the first at a pair of squirrels, which he spotted about 20 yards away in a thick patch of hawthorn, which formed a dark tunnel. He left the fist flying very fast and low towards the squirrels, which went into cover. Druid followed, we heard a squeal and as I walked to him he came flying out straight to the fist. I checked him for any injury and seeing nothing wrong with him, assumed he had just caught the squirrel lightly, which then made good its escape. He had one more flight at a rabbit, but as soon as it saw Druid it dropped straight down a hole.

We returned to the car, drove straight back to Colin's to pick up the ferret and went to another piece of land by a river. The river here is tidal, about 200 yards wide and as we arrived was in full ebb. Druid was still very keen, so we decided to ferret a warren on the flat ground adjacent to the river.

Colin put the ferret down and I walked over to cover some bolt holes. Suddenly Druid bated off the fist. I thought he had seen a rabbit coming out of the hole. He had seen a rabbit right enough, on the other side of the river and was flying across strongly to get it. I was calling him and showing him a chick, all to no avail. I was praying that he didn't catch the rabbit, as the nearest bridge was a couple of miles up river.

Fortunately the rabbit saw him and bolted down a hole. As Druid landed on the opposite bank, a mixed flock of gulls and crows mobbed him. After about 5 minutes he took off and began to fly very low across the river towards me. When he

was about three quarters of the way across a gull swooped down on him. He dropped and landed in the water, about 50 yards from our bank. My heart was in my mouth, what was I to do? Druid didn't seem at all bothered, just sitting in the water doing an impersonation of a duck.

Colin shouted: "Quick, you will have to wade in and get him". The water was flowing very fast and I hesitated, then made up my mind and ran down river. Between me and Druid was a groyne of stones, about 30 yards away and the current was bringing him towards it. I slithered down the bank in the black mud and began to wade across the water, reaching up to my waist. I was wondering how deep it was going to get, when it started to shallow up and I climbed out on the groyne Druid was directly in front of me. I showed him a chick, but he completely ignored me, so I stepped into the freezing water right up to my neck, not realising that the current had scoured the bottom away making a deep hole. The shock of the cold water made me gasp for breath and I floundered in the water and began to panic. Druid saw the chick in my hand and began to row himself with his wings towards me. Grabbing one of his jesses, I managed to turn and climb back up the stones. Resting for the moment, trying to get my breath back, I looked at Druid, who was wolfing the chick down. Reaching for the other jess Druid tried to slash at my hand with his talons. What an ungrateful bird, there was me risking my life for him and he has a go at me.

Returning back through the water I emerged on our bank dripping black smelly mud and water I must have looked like the "Beast from the Black Lagoon". I expected a little sympathy from Colin, but he was bent double with laughter. After we had returned to the car and put Druid on his perch, I tried to take my water filled wellingtons off and got severe cramp in my right leg. Instead of helping me Colin burst our laughing again. In the end I saw the funny side of it and started to laugh myself.

Back to Colin's for a hot drink and a change of clothes, it was only then that I realised what a stupid thing it was to try and get Druid. I could so easily have drowned, but I think anyone else would have done the same. Druid didn't seem any worse for the experience, in fact I think he enjoyed being a duck, a red tailed duck at that.

Brittany Spaniel

By Fletcher-Smith

The Brittany Spaniel makes a very good gundog, with much ability, and the right temperament to work well with hawks.

So let's look at what the Brittany has to offer the modern falconer. To begin with their temperament is wonderful, they are confident, extremely good natured and very affectionate. The Brittany also makes a very loyal companion. They have to be close to their master and are happiest with your utmost attention, they seek affection and love to be amongst the family. Obviously they must receive the correct form of training, patience and firm but quiet instructions being the best methods, being too harsh will only create problems in training, a raised voice should be all that is required for the dog to become submissive, therefore it becomes obvious that this breed will not suit everyone. The over-hard hand will bring out the worst in a dog with such a sensitive nature.



Brittany Spaniel.

Although I have only trained one Brittany, I was extremely impressed by her intelligence and eagerness to please, a characteristic shown so often in the Brittany spaniel.

As with all gundogs breeding is most important, dogs from working stock are obviously a first choice when considering a pup. I also believe training is made easier if the dog has natural instinct, the ability of the trainer also has a great deal to play in the outcome of the dog's potential in the field. Fortunately the Brittany has an advantage of not being overbred for the showing, therefore a good supply of potential working pups are usually available. The Brittany's nose is excellent, time and again my own dog has amazed me by picking up scents at quiet incredible distances, she then quarters in to a staunch point, is sent in, and up whirls a red legged partridge to be hopefully flown down by my old spar.

She will drop to flush and wait patiently for the outcome of the flight and will remain still until instructed otherwise, they work close, enter cover, and quarter brilliantly.

The Brittany seems really suited to working with shortwings and forms quiet a strong relationship with the hawk after a season or two. They work well in all types of terrain and are extremely steady if trained correctly. The Brittany's ability and his willingness to please his master means it becomes a real pleasure to watch him working in the field. I am, like most falconers always wary of other people's dogs. We all know an uncontrollable dog will, and often does, ruin a day's

hawking. Brittanys are very playful and this can sometimes be a drawback when working several dogs together. I have found my Brittany a very rewarding dog and cannot criticise her ability to learn in any way, she has often shown inspiration on certain occasions in the field.

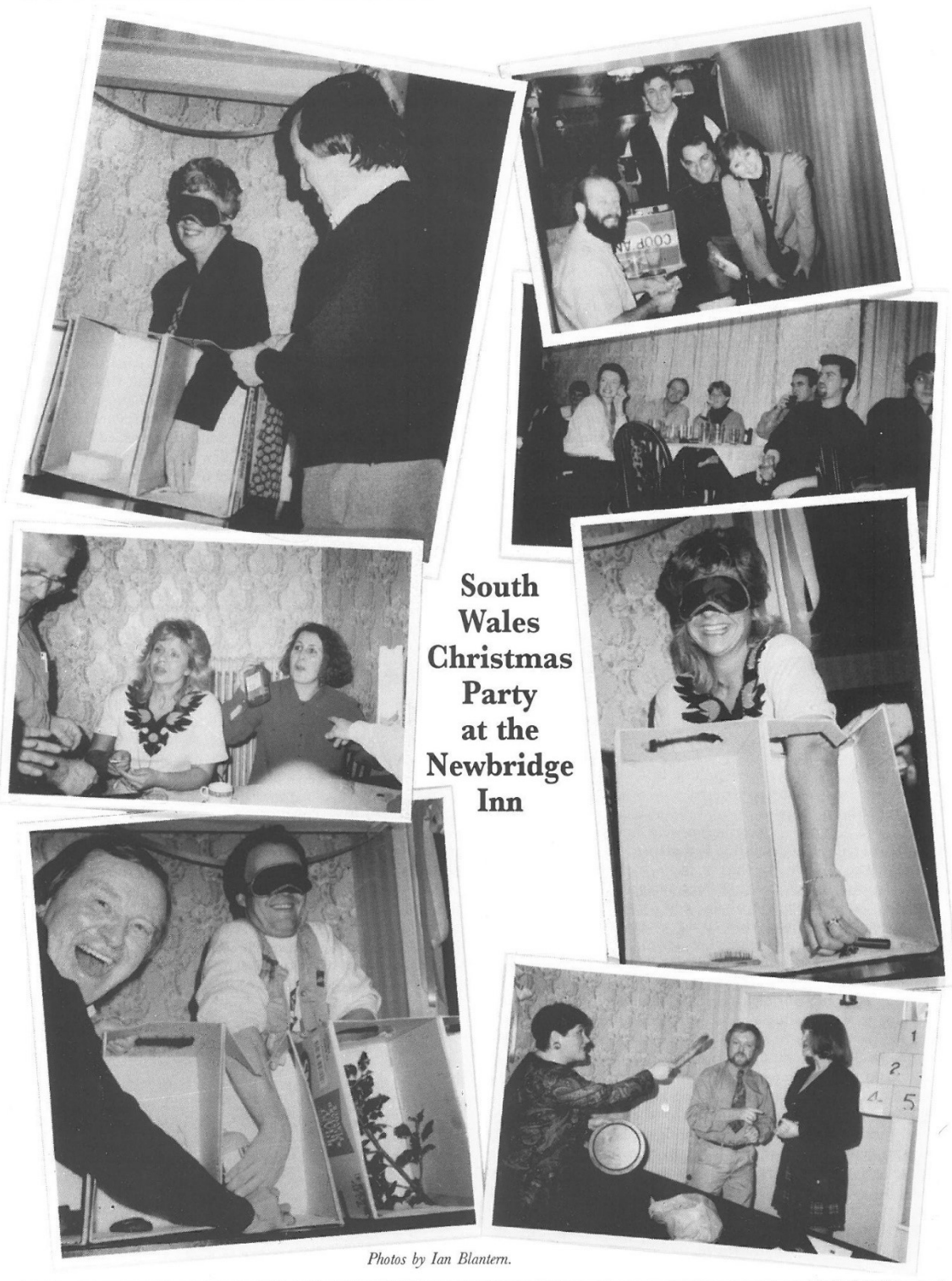
I remember well hawking partridges on stubble, these birds were particularly jumpy and kept running every time the dog came on point, she then worked out the situation and with no instruction from me, the dog crept along on her belly exactly like a sheepdog does when herding sheep. She had worked out that if she could get in front of these particular runners then they would stop. As they came to a halt I held the spar above my head the dog ran straight in amongst the covey causing them to fly right past me. The spar immediately gave chase by pumping up into the wind then turned over backwards into a great stoop and flew the partridge with great style although failing to catch one on this particular occasion.

I also remember on another occasion when out pheasant hawking, I entered a wood, then cast the dog off and left the harris to follow on in the trees above. Almost immediately the dog came on point, I could see the pheasant tucked in under a dead tree and in perfect position for a good flush. Unfortunately just as I was about to send the dog in the harris spotted another pheasant and immediately gave chase. Both harris and quarry flew out of the wood, up over a bank, and out of sight. Thinking the harris has missed the pheasant I instructed the dog to stay and went in search of the bird. Some twenty minutes later I found the harris plucking a very dead pheasant in a large bank of heather. I then returned to the dog who incredibly was still on point. I cast the harris into the tree above and sent the dog in to flush. Out shot the pheasant up through the canopy instantly pursued by the hawk who after a good chase was outflown.

Brittanys won't be pushed into anything, and being quiet submissive, I have found gentle encouragement the best policy when teaching them to hunt. When trained correctly they will return instantly to the whistle, turn on the whistle, drop to the whistle and work from hand signals at any distance. I suggest that if anyone is considering buying a dog to enhance their day's hawking and to improve their bag, go and watch a good Brittany at work. See if the dog has the character and temperament you would expect from a well bred HPR and if you decide that this is the dog for you, I'm sure like me, you will cherish the day you decided to start hawking over a Brittany.



Brittany Spaniel.



Photos by Ian Blantem.

Cheshire Partridge Hawking Syndicate

By Mike Coupe

It was 1989 when Terry Large approached me to see if I would like to join a partridge hawking syndicate at Stapelford, Cheshire. This was Harry Robinson's hawking ground at Geoff Bebington's farm which was to become the base for our activities. There are very few wild partridges in Cheshire, so it was decided that we would release native greys to supplement the wild population and provide some sport for our falcons. Harry set about the task of constructing a deluxe release pen, with bolt together sections and a nylon net roof. The pen was sited on a hill overlooking the flat flood plain of the river Gowy and Terry went to collect 60 ex-layer grey partridges.



Partridge release pen.

The first season saw us catch very few partridges; I was flying a lanneret which was too small to catch a robust partridge, Malcolm Kerry and Mike West had young tiercels and Harry was flying Mrs Bond, ring no. 007, who was used to waiting on over his springer spaniel for moorhens and ducks.

Everything was due to change in the subsequent season – Harry's falcon tragically died in the breeding aviary just as his new English pointer Mrs Moneypenny was starting to take over from the spaniel. I started to train a new tiercel bred by Martin Hargreaves and the following season Malcolm also trained a Hargreaves tiercel. Harry concentrated on training his old tiercel and Mike West's tiercel continued to improve. We now had a much more impressive line-up with four tiercel peregrines and an English pointer, and we began to improve our flying skills and success rate with partridge being taken on a regular basis.

Flying released partridges in enclosed country is rather different from flying wild birds in large open fields where traditionally game hawking has taken place. The wild stock often "spook" at the slightest noise, whereas released birds tend to make for the nearest hedge and then often run like mad. Harry is in charge of game keeping and release; the partridges are kept in the pen for about a month before being gradually released in small numbers, always leaving call birds in the pen to attract the other back home. Food and water is provided for the released birds in thick cover close to the pen.

Our normal plan of action is for the first person flying to run in towards the pen to flush any partridges away and then the following flights are from points generally in hedges.



L to R: Mike West, Malcolm Kerry, Harry Robinson, Mike Coupe.

There are endless discussions among game hawkers as to how high a falcon needs to be to take a partridge in enclosed country. In my experience a high pitch is essential, a falcon descends very fast indeed in a vertical stoop and can strike a partridge before it reaches cover. If the falcon only waits on at a low pitch, the partridge is very reluctant to fly at all and a rat hunt ensues, which does nothing for falcons, falconers or the standard of our sport. Far better to see a falcon at a high pitch stoop and not kill than one to kill from a low pitch and rat hunt.

When flying partridges, especially in our sort of terrain, it is most important to flush the quarry exactly at the right moment. To locate quarry in cover a pointer is essential and all our hawks respond well to Harry's dog. Bird, man and dog work as a team, and although the pointer is keen to see the outcome of a flush, she will not go near a falcon on the kill. We have generally found it best to start flying the falcon at least a field distance away from the point to allow the bird time to gain sufficient height. Then flush the partridge away from the hedge, when the falcon is facing the point, and directly overhead and "bingo" you are in for a superb stoop and hopefully a partridge in the bag. There is always a lot of discussion as to how high a falcon "waits on" and this is very



Peregrine tiercel 'Tao' takes a partridge 'Penny' English Pointer looks on.

difficult to judge and we are all prone to exaggeration. However, I think a height of 300-400 feet is ideal; this doesn't sound that high but when you think that Blackpool Tower is only 518 feet it puts things into perspective. Of course we have had plenty of failures. Birds raking off at pigeons, rooks and crows. Falcons attacked by wild peregrines and disturbed by helicopters on army manoeuvres. However success breeds success and our sport has improved over the seasons. We are all keen to take a partridge but as Harry reminds us, that is just the "icing on the cake", the quality of the flight is the most important aspect of our sport.

P.S: Whilst partridge hawking in December my tiercel "Tao" stooped a mallard duck from a pitch of about 400 ft. The stoop was vertical and he bound to the duck which struggled free and was grabbed in the air again and taken. The duck weighed 2lb 11ozs and the tiercel was flying at 1lb 5⁷/₁₆ozs.



Mike Coupe with Peregrine tiercel with partridge and English Pointer 'Penny'.

Book Review

North American Falconry and Hunting Hawks

7th printing

By Frank L. Beebe and Harold M. Webster

Published by NAFHH, Box 286 Elbert, CO 80106, USA \$55 + postage

Reviewed by John Buckner

There is no doubt that when Americans do anything, it is on a grand scale and thoroughly done into the bargain. This new book contains over 460 pages with many of the paintings reproduced in full colour and weighs in at over 5lbs.

Bearing in mind that falconry rules and regulations, traditions and operational procedures of falconry are different from that of the U.K., we all have one thing in common, our love of raptors and the thrill of participating in the hunt with our birds.

In announcing the release of this, the 7th edition of *North American Falconry and Hunting Hawks*, the publishers point out that it is considered to be the bible of American falconry and is used as a single source of material for examinations given to the novice falconers in pursuit of their required US licences.

Hal Webster is no stranger to WHC members, attending our International Field Meeting in Abersoc a few years back. As long standing friends with Lorant and myself, he has been an ardent supporter of falconry for nearly sixty years. He was the founder of NAFA becoming the first ever President and editor of all their club publications. He is an Honorary member of the WHC and has generously donated and dedicated a copy of his book to the club, to be auctioned in due course for the benefit of Nancy de Bastyai.

Frank Beebe, a Canadian, is a noted wildlife artist who has been an active falconer for over fifty years. His diversified background in raptorial ecology provides basic ideas that are reflected in this publication. He was also the founder and a past Canadian Director of NAFA.

This edition is almost a complete rewrite, reflecting falconry as it is today. A great chapter by Tom Cade on the present status of the peregrine, a superb double chapter on health by Dr Patrick Redig DVM, PhD and Dr Victoria Joseph DVM, and a chapter on ferrets by our Dr Graham Wellstead. Dr Jim Enderson and Pete Widener Jr add their views and experience to captive breeding and line breeding techniques used in producing top line captive bred peregrines and telemetry. Dr Neil Smith and Gene Johnson write about Harris hawks and Canadian, Dale Guthormsen gives his expertise on dog choice and training for falconry. I was also very impressed with Dr Mike Person's valuable insight into feather imping procedures. In all, the book, almost totally rewritten, contains the most current information available in all areas from training to telemetry.

Future problems in falconry are discussed and changes in existing laws are recommended although most appertain to the USA. Hal has been very busy of late attempting to get changes in the Migratory Bird Treaty, the Endangered Species Act, dropping the CITES agreement and finally getting rid of the New Wild Bird Conservation Act. His avowed goal is to allow foreign falconers with their birds and licences, to visit the USA and be able to hawk with their friends.

This is a truly beautiful book with splendid black and white illustrations and some superb paintings by numerous artists including our own David Ron Rigby. I have no hesitation in advising all falconers to get their copy as soon as possible. Both novice and experts alike will find this highly informative and thoroughly enjoyable reading.

The Blank Page

By Alan Gates

Here I sit with a cup of coffee in one hand and a chocolate bar in the other, once again in front of me on the desk is that ominous blank piece of paper. The familiar call from our assiduous editor of The Austringer, is once again attempting to rally the membership to put pen to paper.

In his Editorial 'we' the members were seriously chastised last year for our poor attempt in not providing articles for The Austringer, and rightly so. If we want a good yearly journal, packed with interesting, exciting and informative articles we have to provide them.

I often feel sorry for our Editor, what heinous crime did he commit to have been elected and to have inherited such an apathetic membership, mind having said all that I have still not any idea what to write about.

The brain is still blank, some may say, everything is normal. No matter how I try a title or subject to write about seems beyond me.

A successful or even spectacular day is good fodder to crow about, something hilarious like falling in a gluttonous swamp or better still a colleague falling in always makes light hearted reading. The disastrous and sometimes tragic tale is all the more worth telling if the moral of 'it happened to me, and no matter how outlandish, it could happen to you', is heeded by some or even one reader and prevents the same thing happening again.

Perhaps some natty invention or a good tip to pass on would be worth putting pen to paper, but alas still no ideas come to mind.

Well instead of all that, what about if I tell you something of the things I am playing about with. Unspectacular little things that I have not quite honed to perfection as of yet. Then maybe some clever blighter might write some answers in the new super style 'Mews letter' or next year's *Austringer*.

Weathering lawn

I am an old fashioned beggar and for years my eagle 'Maria' sat on her bowperch in the daylight hours at the top corner of the weathering lawn.

She was sheltered from the north by a thorn hedge that ran the full length of the weathering, and from the west by another thorn hedge that ran along the width. These hedges are tall and as she was perched in the corner, the overhang shaded her from the mid summer day heat.

All was well until I obtained a second eagle and perched him at the opposite end of the weathering.

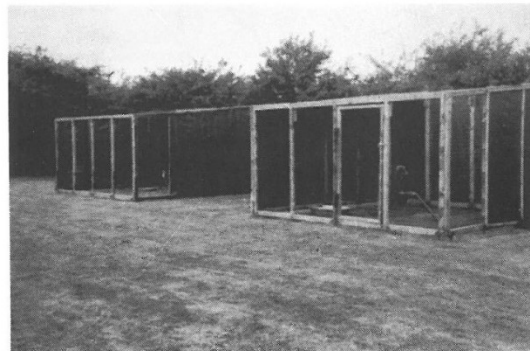
This was all well and good in the winter months and early spring, but was not going to be suitable during the summer heat (no jokes intended). I was also becoming aware that as attitudes were changing as the years progressed it was about time I made the eagles more secure. In the past I had never really worried about anything harming the eagle as she weathered, but should a wandering dog or over inquisitive intruder step within her leash length, well all's fair in love and war when an eagle is protecting her territory. Not nowadays, yours truly would get hauled before a different sort of beak.

The answer was the construction of two enclosures, with each of these the eagles were still tethered to their

bowperches, but now I could secure wind breaking material which would not only protect from the prevailing winds but also give adequate shade, the rest of the enclosure was covered with wire grid. I also left threequarters of the roof just covered with wire grid and open to the elements.

The enclosures worked well, especially in the summer months, but these winters. I don't know about the rest of you but the turf on my lawn cannot take any more water. Sadly that is the problem with large fixed enclosures, sooner or later the ground gets sour, with the excellent advantage of being able to move the perching position to fresh ground now removed. An alternative and less satisfactory floor covering has to be sought.

Sand, smooth aggregate or strip bark are sometimes used, but all seem to have some disadvantages. I recently visited a fellow falconer who had come up with a novel idea. He had covered the surrounding area of the bow perch upon which his goshawk sat with very heavy wide ex-conveyer belt rubber. A small area each side of the bow was cut out of the rubber and filled with sand to catch the mutes.



The weathering enclosures.

Maybe the answer is a combination of aggregate for drainage covered with heavy thick rubber matting, the sort used in stables. I am of course thinking of eagles, for smaller hawks lighter rubber would be suitable. I could reduce the amount of water falling in the perching area by using a solid roofing medium, but then with these ever frequent high winds, how long would the enclosure last? Any ideas?

Hawk food

This is another pet theory of mine. I like to give my hawks the best I can and like many, I too became far too reliant on the day old chick. Many years ago I fed them whole, then I started to de-yolk them. Now that's an eye opener, from a perfectly normal looking chick can come a quite nice looking yellow yolk or green slime. Nowadays I rarely use them, in fact I don't have a single chick in the freezer and haven't had for months.

Wild rabbit is the mainstay, and shooting was the main method of procurement. Hollow point subsonic rifle shot in a bid to reduce the lead content to zero. Most bullets pass through the body and those that do not can be removed, although this last year I am now moving towards rabbits, either snared or netted, still one has to be careful that the odd rabbit is not carrying old shotgun pellets just under the skin.

To supplement food stored in the deep freeze I have for many years now kept a live food production unit, this has on the main been the production of coturnix quail. These are kept, for both breeding and rearing birds on a floor pen system, as opposed to wire floor cages. I also produce a small number of chicken and or pheasant poults. These are hatched and reared from my own stock and are just to add a little variety to the diet.

This year I have built a floor pen system for the breeding

of rabbits, it is hoped that from six does to produce around one hundred plus rabbits per annum.

The advantage of home produced hawk food is that you control the diet of what in turn ends up as food for your hawk. I also like to give my birds freshly killed warm meat, and it is more than evident that it is well appreciated.

I experimented last year with keeping quail outside in movable grass runs, once they settled down they became quite happy and seemed very hardy. Egg production was a little down and dropped off rapidly as the summer season drew to an end, unlike a controlled indoor lighting system.

I am interested in continuing a more natural way of keeping quail and in their diet, so if any of you have produced quail in some quantity, I for one would be interested in reading about it.

All this prattling on has still not produced any ideas for an article, the page and the brain is still blank.

The Apprentice

By Francis Allen

High in the clear blue sky the continuing melodic song of the ascending skylark seemed to typify summer. Jack Fraser watched the lark out of one eye as he drank orange juice from a bottle, he lay down on the bank side resting for a minute from his labours of scything the long grass. Resting his head in the new cut grass he listened to the sounds around him, bees busied themselves in and out of the many wildflowers, and at his feet he heard a rustle, then the tell-tale high pitched squeak of a shrew. A cock chaffinch chwink, chwing, chwinking its metallic call seemed to be competing with the chiff chaff somewhere in the thorn hedge at the top of the bank, and all around the air was perfumed with the smell of new mown hay.

The sound of a twig cracking indicated the presence of a boy he had seen earlier, walking alongside the bottom hedge of the fourteen acre wheat field, he had now made his way up to the farm roadside.

Without looking up Jack greeted the boy's arrival, "Lovely day to be walking the fields young'un", said Jack startling the boy.

The boy had not seen Jack lying in the grass, and almost fell off the gate he was climbing over in an attempt to see where the unexpected greeting had come from.

Jack climbed to his feet and walked over to the boy, "Look lad if you must climb over wooden gates, climb over at the hinge end, you'll put less strain on the post, and me as I has to fix 'em. Anyhows where's you come from lad, I've not seen you on this farm land before?" quizzed Jack.

"Yes sir I'll remember that, I come from Orchard Fields in the village", said the boy looking up at Jack.

"Orchard Fields? Oh you mean those new houses", said Jack remembering some building work going on in the old orchard the last time he was in the village.

"New houses!" exclaimed the boy. "I moved there when I was eight and I'm fourteen now."

"Well let me welcome you boy, I'm Jack Fraser, I looks

after all the hedges and bank sides and all the game birds on these farms hereabouts", said Jack offering the boy his hand to shake.

"I'm Gary, sir, Gary Jennings", said the boy offering his small hand into the grasp of the hard weather beaten grip.

"Well Gary, we will have less of the sir, most call me Jack and some calls me Hawk", he said tucking the back of the shirt into his waist belt.

Jack walked back to where he had left off work and continued scything grass.

"Why Hawk?", inquired Gary.

"Well one reason some calls me Hawk is on account that I see's everything, just like a hawk", replied Jack with a wink.

Gary lay down in the grass whilst Jack continued rhythmically scything the bank side, the sun's rays were warming as they bathed his body. Turning over to lie on his stomach he plucked a seed head of grass and chewed the fleshy stem between his teeth. He was gazing out across the fourteen acre wheat field when suddenly a dark silhouette of a bird swooped out of the deep blue sky in a large arc, the bird levelled out at about twenty feet and heading on fixed wings approached towards them at speed.

"Look at that hawk", screamed Gary. "It's coming this way Jack", he exclaimed pointing at the bird.

Jack carried on scything, Gary had not taken his eyes off the hawk and was astounded as it kept approaching. "Jack, Jack", he kept saying as the hawk swept straight over his head, turned into the gentle breeze and landed on the gatepost.

"Back are you, 'Odin', did you find a nice cool breeze high up there old lad?" inquired Jack of the tiercel peregrine, who was now leaning forward on the gatepost as Jack approached him.

"You gave my young friend here a bit of a turn 'Odin'," Jack placed his hand against the peregrine's breast and it

stepped up onto it. Moving his arm towards Gary he brought the tiercel closer to the boy.

"Gary, this is 'Odin' say hello to him", said Jack as the tiercel looked Gary straight in the eye.

"Gosh!" gasped Gary. "He's magnificent, where did he come from, is he yours?"

"The sky", replied Jack. "'Odin' is a sky god, he lives in the sky, when he's not spending time with me", said Jack placing the peregrine back on the post. "We'll leave him to have a rest now, he's been up for hours", explained Jack returning to work.

Gary sat down in the grass and watched the tiercel intently, he was fascinated as it stretched up its neck to preen its neck and chest feathers, then fluffing all its body feathers, roused itself in a great shake. Clenching one foot, it stretched out a leg forwards, shook the leg a little, then withdrew both the leg and the clenched foot into its body feathers.

Jack kept an eye on the boy as he worked, he could see how mesmerised he was with the tiercel's presence, when he stopped working to take another drink from the squash bottle he was bombarded with questions. He found Gary's enthusiasm infectious and found himself telling stories and re-enacting flights to the lad that he probably had never mentioned to anyone before. Jack had been a solitary falconer most of his life, living and working mostly alone he had the opportunity to take a hawk or falcon with him and fly it during his work breaks. He had been hawking since he was a boy, younger than Gary, now it was just an instinctive part of his life and he really had to think hard before answering some of the questions Gary was throwing at him. Jack was a little unorthodox in his methods of hunting, especially with his longwings like 'Odin', in a way he kept them on an extended hack. He hacked all the falcons he trained, but it was a daytime hack as opposed to full time.

As he worked in the fields most days he could take an eyas with him and sit it on a hedge post whilst he worked, the eyas would soon be exploring the field, flying from post to post, and then into the trees, soon it would be flying up on the thermals. Jack would feed the eyas in the mid afternoon by calling it to a weighted lure lying on the ground, the eyas would feed whilst Jack continued to work. Then he would gather it onto his fist and return home, the eyas would retire to sit on the back of a high backed chair in his living room and sleep until morning.

The following day Jack and the eyas would repeat the performance until finally one day the eyas would return with a full crop. Jack would carry on with these free flight periods, but now using his collie dog to point partridges, the eyas learned that it was more profitable to hunt with Jack and the dog. The falcons would wait around until late morning when Jack felt it was time to look for a covey. He never had to look far as he knew where most of the coveys were, he always knew where they nested and lifted their eggs to place under broody bantams, he then released the reared youngsters and watched their progress.

It was the school summer holidays for Gary and he spent every day thereafter with Jack and 'Odin', Gary became totally hooked as 'Odin' demonstrated his immense skill on both partridge and wild pheasants. The tiercel's experience had been hard learnt, and he made hunting look easy, Jack would explain to Gary that it had taken a long time for the tiercel to learn that by hitting a wild pheasant precisely in the head he was thus able to dispatch even an old cock pheasant in the air. Many falcons don't learn this skill let alone tiercels and many a pheasant recovers from a body hit even from the

heaviest falcons.

Jack was a true countryman and his knowledge of the ways of the countryside, its flora and fauna was learnt over a lifetime's observation. It was his intimate knowledge of the particular land over which he had worked for most of his life that was a special advantage to his success at putting quarry up for his falcons or hawks.

Jack knew where virtually every bird and mammal lived and breathed on all the farms. He paid a keen interest in the comings and goings of every roe deer, fox, badger, hare, rabbit, pheasant, duck and partridge.

The pheasants, duck and partridge were his special concern and he helped their continued production where and whenever he could. Working the hedges, banks and ditches as he did he found many if not all their nests, where he would lift half it not all of the clutch of eggs to artificially incubate or place under any available broody bantam or hen. The eggs he left usually had a higher success rate of survival, and the ones he reared were all released back on the individual farms. The other species, the deer, fox, hare and rabbits had to have their numbers controlled together with the corvid population, and the farmers expected Jack to see to it. The badgers were on the whole Jack's secret, all the farmers knew there were badgers but no one knew where they all were except Jack. He would lay for hours face down on a plank of wood, secured about six feet up in a tree at dusk awaiting the emergence of the sow and her cubs from a sett. Here he would spend many an enjoyable hour or two on moonlit nights watching the young cubs gambolling about.

As late summer arrived, Gary was as ever keen and Jack had decided to take on an eyas goshawk to train. The rabbit population was exploding and Jack much preferred a natural method of control as he called hawking or falconry, he had decided that if Gary's enthusiasm continued it would be valuable experience for him to participate in the training of a young gos. This was unbeknown to Gary whose first encounter with a gos was one Saturday morning in late July, when he strolled up the garden path of Jack's farmstead to find Jack sitting on the back doorstep with a huge female gos feeding on his gloved fist. The gos stopped feeding as soon as Gary appeared and Jack indicated to Gary to sit where he



'Oulu' in her second year.

was and to keep as quiet and still as he could. Soon the gos was feeding again but every mouthful was punctuated with a cold stare at Gary.

The gos, a Finnish female had arrived the previous evening. She had just been caught up from her breeding chamber, and the breeder had delivered her, on account that Jack had no transport. He had jessed her on arrival and sat up all night with her on the fist, although this was an old outdated method of manning a short wing, he was a slow one to change. As he sat on the doorstep in the early morning sun with the gos feeding, 'Mungo', Jack's collie dog sat beside him with his head laid over his right knee. Already the gos paid little attention to the dog and Jack pointed out to Gary that this happy state of affairs was partly due to the dog being constantly present since the moment the gos emerged from the travelling box.

She was a large powerful hawk in feather perfect plumage, with a deep chest, wide head, strong beak and large sturdy legs with wide spanning feet armed with the most ferocious talons Gary had ever seen.

"Take a good long look at her now Gary, she's in brand spanking new condition, hopefully we will keep her that way", explained Jack, and went on with tales of the methods of young goshawks daredevil attitude to hunting, giving little regard to their own safety in their determined pursuit of quarry.

As they entered the living room, Gary noticed that in the opposite corner to where 'Odin' was sitting on the high

backed chair, a mobile screen perch had been erected. The floor and walls were covered with opened paper feed sacks, these were to protect the furnishings from the splicing mutes of the hawk.

Once the gos had finished feeding, Jack placed her on the perch and tied her swivel tight to the perch with a special knot in the leash. This was then tucked in between the two layers of hessian screen, in there it would be well out of the way should she bate and climb back to her perch.

Jack then presented Gary with a double thickness gos glove he had made especially to fit Gary's small hand. Excitedly Gary tried it on, a perfect fit. He was now instructed to carry 'Odin' around the farm for practise. Gary never questioned an instruction, but could not see the point. When he returned after an hour's walk his hand ached, and Jack explained that although the buckskin glove was soft, the two layers of leather needed to protect your hand from the powerful grip of a gos, was a handful when gripped in the fist for hours on end. This exercise was to get Gary's hand strengthened and to mould the glove to shape, not until Jack felt sure Gary was ready would he allow him to help manning the gos.

Such a big powerful hawk needed a powerful grip, Jack made a small hessian sack and filled it with three pounds of corn, to this he fitted two leather straps and instructed Gary to carry this about on the gloved fist for hours on end.

Gary felt a right twit and hoped no one would see him. Jack was very strict with him, and insisted that he kept his arm and fist straight at all times. "You must learn instinctively

Book Review

The Versatile Gundog Training HPRs for Gun, Rifle and Hawk

By Guy Wallace

Published by The Sportsman's Press. Price £14.95. Publication 17 July 1995.

Reviewed by Ian Blantern

A copy of Guy's book literally arrived in the post, two days after everything for *The Austringer* had gone to the printers for production. Therefore, this is a real rush review job in every sense of the word. I have read the book and typed this almost within a day. You could say the book is fresh in my mind!! I hope the following is fair in spite of my speed.

Our members in South Wales will need no introduction to Guy. He has given the club two very entertaining talks over the last few years and his articles in the *Falconers Magazine* should dictate that he is no stranger to a larger audience of falconers. Although Guy's book has not been aimed specifically towards falconers, because he is one himself, he is able to add that extra dimension relating to the HPR dog breeds and falconry. As a trainer or owner of all the dogs he describes, he is well qualified to guide the reader through the varying characteristics and suitabilities of the breeds, together with the foibles of some of their owners.

He obviously does not read his *Austringer*, for he says in one chapter that: "I know of no-one yet using Large Münsterländers for falconry, in spite of their excellent suitability." Guy, what about the 'Year of the Dog' article by Alan Gates in last year's *Austringer*?

Most of the dogs he describes I have observed while field trialling and I agree with most of his observations relating to their varying characteristics and hunting abilities. In saying of field trialling that it's like deerstalking - once the bug has bitten it can only get worse - I can identify with what Guy says . . . falconry is fast taking second place.

Each chapter of *The Versatile Gundog* takes the reader logically through every stage from the initial preliminary considerations; the choice of puppies, housing and management and then on to the different stages of basic, advanced and specialist training for these multi-talented breeds. He is fair to each separate dog in turn, describing their individual strengths and weaknesses and how to deal with them accordingly. I particularly liked his 'Odds and Sods' chapter.

The book is written in Guy's own characteristic style and humour and makes informative reading for the hunter. It's a great book on the general purpose dog for the 'general purpose huntsperson'; matter of fact, no nonsense, straight talking and well illustrated with black and white photographs and illustrations.

to keep your fist as level and as still as you can, the hawk's ride on your fist must be as comfortable as possible. Otherwise it won't want to return to a bone shaker ride on the fist from a nice gently swaying tree perch", instructed Jack.

"Think of it like this, remember when I showed you when 'Odin' fixed his gaze on something in the distance, and how if I moved my fist about his head stayed locked in space even though his body was moving with the fist! Well that is how your arm must become, as you walk over rough, undulating ground, your fist must stay locked in place. Your body becomes a suspension unit, soaking up all the bumps and jolts, even if you fall flat on your face in the mud I don't want to see the hawk even flick its wings."

Gary looked at Jack and he detected a slight glint in the eye. He carried that sack of corn about for days, every now and then when Gary was least expecting it Jack would grab the sack and give it a hell of a yank. If the straps slipped through Gary's fingers Jack would bark "hawk lost".

At first this disheartened Gary as he was caught out every time but he was determined to beat Jack at this latest game, and soon it was a rare chance if Jack snatched the sack he was able to pull the jesses from his grip.

At last the day came, Jack introduced Gary to 'Oulu' as he had named the gos. Jack explained that 'Oulu' means water in Finnish, and he hoped that by naming her so might be a good omen and she would turn out a good duck hawk. Gary asked why he had called the tiercel 'Odin'.

Jack explained that although the tiercel was now a perfect gentleman, in his younger days he would get very angry if he hit game and it got away from him, and would return to the fist in a real paddy. So he had named him 'Odin' after the mythical Norse god which means fury. 'Mungo' the collie, well it's an old Scottish word for amiable, he's such a soft old mutt, what else would I call him.

"Well lad, what are you waiting for? Pick her up on your first. I want you to walk her down the farm road as far as Lofthouse Farm and back again. Then when you get back tie her to the bowperch on the grass by the back door, I'll get her a fresh bath of water, with luck she'll bathe today", ordered Jack.

Gary was impressed by the sheer presence of the gos so close, she bated once as he left the drive and turned onto the farm road, the explosive force was more violent than he had expected and as she returned to the fist he well understood why Jack had put him through the gruelling exercises of the past week. As she stood on the fist glaring around, her beak was level with Gary's eyes, as she panted gently the pungent smell of her breath filled his nostrils.

Later that day Jack said they would try and see if 'Oulu' would jump to the fist outside, she had been coming well indoors, and Jack wanted Gary and Mungo present, so as to add to the distractions.

Jack removed her swivel and tied the creance to her jesses, he then carried her to an old post in the middle of the paddock. She jumped onto the post, the creance was about twenty yards long and the other end was tied to an old three pound retrieving canvas dummy, Jack dropped this on the ground. He explained to Gary that if 'Oulu' flew off, she would drag the dummy a little way along the ground before it slowly but gently forced her to land. Much better than if the creance was tied to a peg hammered into the ground which would pull her up sharp putting undue strain on her legs. He stepped back from the post about three yards and offering his fist garnished with a rabbit hind leg he let out a

high pitched whistle. 'Oulu' hesitated for a moment and Jack whipped his fist behind his back and out of her sight. He stood still for about thirty seconds, 'Oulu' glared at him, then quick as a flash he again held high his fist and whistled, this time 'Oulu' was on the fist instantly. Jack cooed to her as she fed and then repeated the same whistle every minute or so, he sat down on the grass with 'Mungo' and called Gary closer.

"Why did you take your fist away like that, I thought she was going to come to you", inquired Gary.

"She probably would have, but I'm not going to teach her that if she hangs about the food will always be on offer. You see, in the wild a goshawk learns that by making an instant decision on seeing prey to attack it is more often successful. The same way the instance it sees the fist it must come, or else its gone."

All the while as Jack explained he let out the same high pitched whistle as the gos fed.

"Why keep whistling now she's on the fist?" asked Gary.

"Ah well that's called food association, you see 'Oulu' will learn the only time she hears that whistle is when she is on the fist feeding, later on when we are flying her, that whistle means one thing, food and she should return to the sound even if she is out of sight of us", said Jack crossing his fingers and winking to Gary.

"I thought you would fly her further", stated Gary.

"She might well have come a bit further, but as this was her first time outside I didn't want to make it too daunting for her."

"Also you see I am letting her have the whole leg as a reward, there is no point offering a large tempting reward only to rob her of it when she gets to the fist. She would soon learn that you were only teasing her, much better to teach her that she'll get a good reward for coming, that's why we will only be flying once or at the most twice each day for her daily rations."

Soon 'Oulu' was coming so quick to the fist that Jack could not get more than ten or so yards from her, so they abandoned the post and flew her from one to the other.

Her rations were split into two portions so each could take it in turns to call her, once she was coming forty yards instantly Jack declared she should fly free. Gary was horrified.

"What if we lose her", he cried.

"Not to worry she'll not go far", replied Jack with confidence.

In fact she never showed the slightest inclination to fly off into the great blue yonder as Gary had feared. Her training went ahead in leaps and bounds, her introduction to the lure, a rabbit skin wrapped around a one pound canvas dog dummy, went without a hitch. In fact Jack remarked that he thought this hawk has read the books herself.

Finally the day came to enter her at wild quarry. Jack explained that they needed a fairly easy flight to build confidence. It was decided that the rough pasture on Jacob's Farm would be the best option. The rabbits were fairly plentiful and often sat quite a way out in the field concealed by the large tussocks of grass. "We could get a good long slip, suggested Jack.

They left the assault on the rough pasture until mid afternoon, the same time as they normally flew 'Oulu', the day before she had had a little less rations, just to give an extra edge.

Jack walked through the tussocks with 'Oulu' on the fist held high above his head, his fingers lightly gripping the jesses, this was to give her the best advantage for take off.

'Mungo' quartered ahead just like a pointer, suddenly he crouched low to the ground and crawled along towards a tussock. Jack motioned Gary to come in slightly from the right side as Jack slowly walked forward. Quick as a flash there was a blur of rabbit and 'Oulu' was away in a jangle of bells. The rabbit jinked around a group of large tussocks momentarily throwing the gos, she overshot, tipped her wings, and using her speed, lifted about another five or so feet, turning on her left wing, swooped directly at the fleeing rabbit and had it by the shoulders. The struggle was slight 'Oulu' had a deadly grip, but Jack made in and dispatched her first rabbit, he called in both Gary and 'Mungo' and they sat on the grass in front of the gos and watched her break into the rabbit and take a full crop.

The next afternoon after 'Oulu' had cast they were out again looking for rabbits, the rough pasture was no use as Jacob had driven some sheep through it and the dogs had put all the rabbits to ground. As they walked the hedge rows a rabbit bolted ahead, 'Oulu' turned.

"Hold up your fist", Jack shouted to Gary, 'Oulu' returned straight back to the fist.

"Magic", shouted Jack.

"She's a beaut", exclaimed Gary.

'Mungo' was pointing into a culvert running under the field entrance, it was too small for the dog to enter.

"The rabbit's in the drain, we'll not get him out", cried Gary.

"You just stand back a bit my lad, lift that gos high, and old Jack will show you a little trick."

Stepping down into the dry bottomed ditch Jack found the end of a length of thin wire.

"Ready now my lad", he said, gently pulling the wire hand over hand. "The other end has a loose ball of barbed wire, all the culverts are fitted out like this", he explained as the rabbit bolted. 'Oulu' was after it along the ditch bottom, and was just about to make contact when the rabbit turned and made its escape through the hedge and into the corn.

'Oulu' was left standing in the ditch bottom footing the leaves in frustration. Gary was off the mark in an instance, glove baited he called her and she returned.

"Good lad", called Jack. "Let's cross over the river and try that corner of buckthorn scrub, 'Mungo' might flush a rabbit from there", called Jack as he strode through the field gate and made his way down the side of the corn field towards the river.

Gary, 'Oulu' and 'Mungo' followed in his path, as they reached the river 'Mungo' was off, it was a warm day and he loves any excuse for a swim. As he ran down the bank he came on point in the reeds.

"Hold it", said Jack softly. "Hold her high, go on 'Mungo' see 'em up".

With that the edge of the reeds exploded as two drake Mallards lifted from the water. They were up and flying along the river when 'Oulu' hit the rear one, and straight into the river together. For a second she was under the water, as she surfaced she started paddling with her wings towards the bank. Gary slid down the bank and straight up to his waist into the mud and water, he scooped his gloved hand under 'Oulu' and lifted her and the drake onto the bank.

As he looked up there stood Jack at the top of the bank, his face beamed a smile of pure happiness. "Aye lad, you've the makings of a fine falconer."



South Wales Field Meeting at Tridunnoch

courtesy of Graham Rossiter



South Wales Field Meeting at Wotton-under-Edge

courtesy of Len Stevens

Friend of the Falcon

Tony Jackson meets a champion of 'the only true field sport'

Ask any country show organiser to pinpoint his top crowd-puller and it's a pound to a pinch he'll opt for falconry. The circling bird, the sickle-winged swoop at the twirling lure, the tasselled hoods and the trailing jesses are guaranteed to keep the crowd oohing and aahing as it cranes its collective neck. But it has nothing to do with falconry... that, at least, is the official view of the British Falconers' Club (BFC).



Picture: Simon Norfolk

Retiring: Anthony Jack with Gishmael, a goshawk.

Falconry, claims Anthony Jack, the club's president, is the only true field sport. "It simply reproduces what happens in nature," he says. "The dog and the falcon are the two essential elements and the falconer is little more than an observer."

Jack is now retiring after 23 years as the BFC's president – a period which has seen the club's membership go up from 400 to 1,000. The increase reflects the sport's growth in popularity since Jack first became involved in it 64 years ago.

In 1930, while still at school, he bought his first hawk, a kestrel, from Captain C. W. R. Knight, whose eagle, Mr Ramshaw, was famous at the time. Six years later Jack was elected honorary assistant secretary to the BFC and became first editor of its magazine, *The Falconer*.

Falconry was then in the doldrums. The club's membership was 51 and there were fewer than a dozen falconers in the country training hawks. Falconers were looked upon as faintly amusing eccentrics.

Today, it's a very different scene. There are 7,000 registered hawk-keepers, of whom 4,000 are active field falconers using their birds in pursuit of quarry. Collections of birds of prey and falconry displays have given the birds a higher profile; at the same time, the drastic decline in numbers of raptors during the 1960s and 1970s has been largely reversed. An estimated 2,000 pairs of peregrines are using traditional eyries, goshawks are re-establishing themselves and red kites are showing a steady increase.

A recent relaxation in the Department of the Environment's requirement to register all captive-bred birds of prey is a reflection of this astonishing recovery. Only certain species still have to be registered – peregrines, merlins

goshawks and gyrfalcons – and it is no longer necessary to register imported captive-bred species unless they are of international importance, such as the Arctic gyrfalcon.

The BFC is careful to distance itself from show displays and bird collections. Nicholas Kester, the club's press officer, says: "Many show demonstrations are excellent, but bad displays are little more than circus acts. The chance to educate the public and explain the role played by falconry to help conservation is so often lost in favour of entertainment."

The public, he believes, should be told that hawks are used to catch life quarry and are not simply a flying circus.

The most notable change during Jack's term of office has been the arrival of the deep-freeze, he says. "Before the freezer, falconers had to have a constant supply of meat for their birds and it was a nightmare trying to keep pace with the demand. Now you keep six months' frozen supply and just keep topping up."

In his early years, Jack took great pleasure in flying merlins on the Wiltshire Downs. On one occasion he met a woman who asked him: "Do you ever let it have a little fly around?"

"Yes," Jack replied.

"Then how do you stop it catching small birds?"

"Madam, I have been trying to get it to do just that all day."

A BLAST FROM THE PAST

Falcons thriving

Numbers of peregrine falcons have nearly doubled since before the Second World War to over 1,280 breeding pairs, according to the British Trust for Ornithology. The population has increased by two thirds since the last survey in 1981.



Members of the Welsh Hawking Club seen outside their exhibition marquee at the Welsh Game Fair at Carmarthen. Left to right: Peter Tew, Lorant de Bastyai (club president), Tony Jenkins, Mrs. Jenkins, Mrs. Ken Davies and Lawrence Workman (club secretary). Birds include Golden, Tawny and Bonelli's Hawk eagles, and two goshawks.

An extra special Ferruginous

By Tizi Hodson

My hunting partner, Buzzby, a Ferruginous hawk, started her life at a total disadvantage with four keepers before she came into my care. And here she was coming to what? A totally inexperienced keeper with the entire hawking experience of four months flying a kestrel.

But with Buzz's four previous keepers she had not been entered, and with the first year with my love and care, it seemed she may stay that way.

A whole season flying, using plenty of lure work, where the lures were always fresh dead rabbits tied onto strings and later fishing line as she got wise to the string! Either pulled from behind bushes by someone else as I was strolling past with Buzz placidly on my fist, or faster using a friend riding a bicycle with the line attached to the fresh dead rabbit.

Buzz progressed to chasing the lures brilliantly but somehow could not connect the dead lure to a live running bunny.

Ray Turner came to my rescue and suggested she would be capable of taking hares, not just rabbits, so why not switch the lures, and introduce her to fresh running hares, that will not slip down holes if they do get chased.

Ray even supplied a number of fresh dead hares, and pulled them from behind bushes while I walked past with Buzz on my fist.

Then he told me "she's ready now, for a hare . . . take her out and find one".

I lost count of the amount she chased and missed . . . she would even get up three times after the same hare when jinked off of it and try again. Ray couldn't believe her persistence and determination, despite her lack of success, and told me to persevere with her as he could already tell she had the makings of a rather exceptional hawk.

I needed this encouragement as everyone else I knew (falconer-wise) were telling me to sell her, part with her or put her into a breeding project as she was unlikely to kill hares on account of her tiny feet anyway.

Eighteen months after our partnership, Buzz caught her first hare. A day I will never forget.

I called Ray to tell him she had finally made it; the beginning of a fine hawk and all thanks to him and his help.

Ray said: "slow down, it's terrific news, but she may not catch another, but be really proud she has caught her first".

On hearing this my heart sank a little.

Ray then added: "But I think it is the first of many. That hawk has a heck of a determination about her. She just doesn't give up".

Looking back now, some four years ago it just doesn't seem possible the transformation in the same hawk.

When I go out now with Buzz I expect to come back with a hare (or pheasant).

But the difference in the way she hunts is in her own style using her own independence. I am not allowed to flush a hare for her. If I do, she won't chase it.

Simple as that.

But if she spots it in a form, or running, she will take it in fine style, often being dragged upside down, or pulled feet into the air while she still hangs on, waiting for me to help her.

Now, she knows she needs my help to secure the hares, even though she will not chase anything I flush for her, but if

I am not there when she lands on one and it escapes, it is my fault entirely and she will not let me forget it, or chase another the same day if I have lost her hare for her, by not being there quick enough!

The last occasion I took her out, was a duplicate of the time before.

I took her out of her travelling box, and she wanted to go immediately. When she wants to go there is no point holding her back, as she senses hares rather than sees them.

She was straight off across a ploughed field, which I thought was a good prospect, but no, straight on across another paddock, and onto a tree. She look round for me each time she landed to ensure I was keeping up, then into another tree. She looked for me and hunched her shoulder to fly. I could tell she had a hare in her sights although I had no idea where it was, as she had changed her expression into one that really meant business.



The last hare I caught was this big!

I was still running towards her, with a large ditch and a fence to climb before I reached her tree, so I called to her: "Hold on Buzz, and I'll be with you, but wait!"

I clambered the ditch, climbed the fence and looked up to her, telling her: "OK love, go now", even though I still couldn't see anything.

She immediately left the tree and dived onto a hare barely 50 yards away, beneath her.

I sprinted up and grabbed a couple of back legs, was kicked off one leg, but regripped. Buzz meanwhile had the head, which she moved off politely when I asked her, so as to allow me to get a better grip of it.

When the hare was dispatched, I told Buzz to tuck in to as much as she wanted.

Before starting her meal, she looked up at me with a beautiful expression, as though she was trying to say: "Thanks for your help", then she settled into dinner, quite expecting me to hold her tail for her, while she feasts, as she will otherwise sit on her tail while she eats, destroying her tail totally.

It is a total partnership with Buzz. She is neither owned nor kept by me. She "keeps" me in hares throughout the winter, and she owns my heart and soul and is fully aware of it.

But looking back to the beginning, I could never have envisaged she would turn into such a professional hunter.

Birds of Prey Living, Flying Weapons

After years of being treated as pests, falcons and other hunting birds are making a comeback with human help.

Reproduced with kind permission from The Warsaw Voice, Polish and Central European Review

A hunter wearing a green jacket with a game bag hung over his shoulder stands in a forest meadow. He doesn't have a gun, merely a long glove with several thongs hanging from it on his left hand. His weapon, a saker falcon, is soaring 200 feet above the ground. At the same time, the hunter's dog is busily searching through the undergrowth. The dog freezes: it has caught the scent of game. Spurred on by the hunter, it surges forward. A flushed pheasant takes off and quickly gains altitude.

The saker watches the whole situation from above. Within a fraction of a second it folds back its wings and dives downwards. The falcon, which can attain speeds of up to 100 meters per second, intersects the flight path of the pheasant and grabs it by the neck with its talons. Both birds tumble to the ground. The struggle does not last long. The hunter is able to find the bird thanks to the little bells tied to its feet. He covers the pheasant with his game bag and rewards the falcon with a piece of meat.

The hunter, Miroslaw Oko, is one of Poland's 50 falconers. He started hunting with birds because he was not allowed to own a gun. His father served in the Home Army (AK), the World War II-era underground resistance movement subordinate to the Polish exile government in London. For his wartime past, Oko's father was persecuted and jailed by the communist Polish authorities. Oko had no chance of ever getting a gun permit. He still wanted to become a hunter, though. He found his first raptor in a nest which had been made in a pine tree which was then cut down. It was a several-day-old buzzard chick. Oko took it home and fed it raw meat. When the bird got a little older, Oko began training. All raptors (birds of prey) are trained in a similar way: by withholding food in order to awaken the hunting instinct.

What differs, depending on species, is the hunting technique. A peregrine falcon, saker and gyrfalcon are highflight birds. They search out their victims from the air and attack, killing their target in mid-air. Their hunts range over an area of up to five kilometres. Raptors are rare in Poland. The entire peregrine falcon population numbers only a few pairs.

Low-flight birds, such as the goshawk, sparrow hawk and buzzard, attack from a tree branch or a hunter's glove. They chase their prey for 200-300 metres. These birds can't manoeuvre as quickly as a pigeon, for instance, and for that reason surprise is a key element of their success. Prey is usually killed on the ground.

Until 1972, the goshawk, marsh harrier and sparrow hawk were considered pests and their nests were destroyed by all means available. Artificial fertilizers, pesticides such as DDT and herbicides were sprayed over fields where the raptors' prey would feed. The prey animals became saturated with chemicals which were concentrated even more in the raptors, as they occupied the top of the food pyramid. The chemicals

caused the shells of their eggs to become so soft that they broke when the adults sat on them to incubate them.

Even though many of the pesticides have been banned, the raptors have not recovered their numbers. The best chance for raptor recovery in Poland are special breeding facilities, many of them established by falconers. These falconries are the main source of birds used for hunting. In Poland, 80 percent of the birds bred in captivity are released into the wild. The remaining 20 percent are sold.

All the same, Prof. Ludwik Tomialojc, chairman of the National Environmental Protection Council, is opposed to falconry, since he says falconers sometimes take wild birds out of their nests. Oko is amazed by such accusations. Together with other falconers, he has frequently taken illegally captured birds away from poachers, banded and released them. Sometimes people find wounded birds, which they to falconers to cure. After they recover, the birds are free to go.

The Act on Animal Rights Protection submitted to the Sejm includes a provision banning falconry. If the act is passed in its current form, it will mean that Grzegorz Dzik, Poland's only professional falconer, could lose his job. Together with Dexter, Zocha and Wiktor, his three raptorian wards, the falconer watches over the safety of airplanes taking off and landing at Okęcie Airport. The runway is a favourite haunt of rooks, pigeons and gulls. If even one of them were sucked into a plane engine, the results would be disastrous. For many years, the airport staff tried to chase the birds off by shooting them with guns or scaring them with a gas cannon, but this was ineffective. "The birds always came back. But it's been calm ever since we got the raptor", recounts Dzik, who makes a daily tour of the tarmac with one of his birds. "They only hunt to get enough to eat", the falconer explains.

A person doesn't become a falconer overnight. First they have to complete a hunter's internship and pass an examination covering animal biology, hunting rules, closed seasons and hunter's ethics. That is only the first step; next, all of this is repeated dealing specifically with raptors.

Polish falconry has a tradition of many centuries. Raptors were being used to hunt at the very beginning of Polish statehood (the 10th century). Annalists wrote much of Polish kings' love for this type of hunting. When Prussia was Poland's vassal state, part of its tribute consisted of falcons and other birds of prey sent to the Polish monarch. The chronicles relate that falcons outnumbered all other types of animals kept at the royal court. Out of respect for their skills, falconers were not obliged to bow to the king.

The respect once afforded to falconers has survived, at least in part, to the present. Oko frequently takes his bird on buses and trams. Other people on board always react in a very friendly manner: They talk to him, smile - and always let him take their seat.

German versatile hunting dogs

Eight breeds emerged from a "melting pot" of dogs to become tractable hunters on land and water

By Josef K. Schmutz

Josef Schmutz is a Canadian Wildlife biologist who hunts with Large Münsterländers and is also a falconer.

When a party of hunters scours the rugged canyons of the Snake River for chukar or the fall woods in Ontario for ruffed grouse, representatives of several breeds of German versatile hunting dogs may vie for the chance to retrieve a shot bird. Field tests of the North American Versatile Hunting Dog Association are regularly attended by representatives of 11 breeds, seven of which have been developed in Germany.

Why so many? How are they related?

Roman and later German writers and artists provided what scant evidence still allows us to trace the evolution of Germany's hunting dogs. Judging from these records, the dogs descended from a medium-size hound ("bracke", "bracco" in Italian or "braque" in French) that was imported from the Middle East, Africa or southern Europe. Between A.D. 200 and 800, these hounds were "bred up" to make the offspring yet more useful for hunting large German game. Herding dogs, aggressive enough to protect livestock from bear and wolf, were used for these improvement.

After A.D. 800, meat hunting was forbidden to the common man. This spelled the beginning of a desire for versatile hunting dogs used by the falconer and later the gun hunter to hunt birds and small mammals. The old Spanish Pointer was introduced into the German dogs' gene pool to improve pointing; a water Pudel was used to improve the retrieving. The dog owners/hunters who sought this change apparently were at least moderately well off and hunted for sport. Different types of dogs evolved in different regions over several centuries. Interestingly, this feat of animal breeding was accomplished long before monk Gregor Mendel's modern laws of inheritance became common knowledge.

From a rich blend of dog types the pendulum swung to rigidly organized breeds. The resumption of hunting by the commoner after the 1848 German revolution led to another surge in demand for versatile gun dogs.

The ensuing 70 years saw rapid changes in German versatile dogs. A commission of delegates was assembled around 1871 and instructed to chart the course for dog breeds in Germany. In their characteristically organized manner, German versatile dog enthusiasts established breed clubs and guarded newly set breed standards. Naturally inclined to



Versatile dogs attend a NAVHDA test in the province of Ontario. From left to right: Wirehaired Pointing Griffon, Pudelpointer, Large Münsterländer, Vizsla, Small Münsterländer, German Shorthaired Pointer.

Photo by J. K. Schmutz.

respect authority, they retained the opinions of a vocal few as dogma. The decisions made then only make sense today when considered in the context of their historical setting, moods of the time and hunting practice.

While generalizations are unfair to individuals, differences in style did emerge between nationalities. The

modern German dog excels because of its malleable, versatile natural ability channelled through disciplined training. The English hunting specialist, in contrast, is born with the spirit. German horsemen and their horses are difficult to beat in the elegant manoeuvres of dressage, yet on the cross-country obstacle course the successful German rider will be on an English mount.

North American versatile dog enthusiasts find the range of versatility expected of the dog in Germany difficult to fathom. Versatility was desired because hunting was for the pot, and because hunters felt morally and were legally obliged to conserve game, to prevent cruelty and crippling losses. The hunter's dog was also employed in the control of feral cats and natural predators. Most importantly, however, hunters leased rights in a given area and hence had relatively few of any one species, but a variety of feathered and furred game to hunt. In contrast, the North American hunter travels in search of favourite hunting opportunities.

Due to a great heterogeneity in land form and use in a country the size of Montana, most hunting areas in Germany include woodland and open country, and hence both small and big game. In many German states a trained hunting dog must be present by law on party hunts, and when hunting waterfowl. Already financially strained from steep hunting fees, the German hunter is unlikely to keep two dogs, which are difficult to maintain in crowded cities and towns.

The German versatile dog may accompany the hunter stalking big game; the dog may be expected to track a crippled roe deer and, if need be, chase it, kill it and signal its final location to the hunter. The dog may be released into a spruce plantation and move hares as Beagles do, loud on trail. When they attend the frequent party hunts, some dogs retrieve dozens of hares each season. When searching for

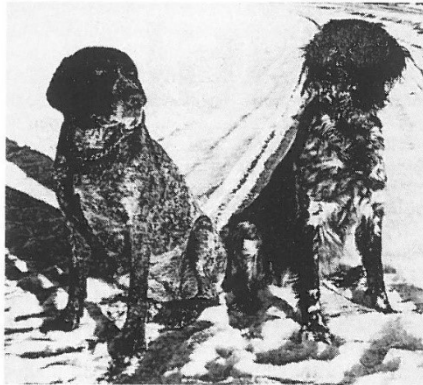
upland game birds, the dog is not to chase hares but point pheasants and grey partridge. Clearly, it is the exceptional dog that accomplishes all these tasks without flaw.

The breeding of versatile dogs is regulated by breed clubs sanctioned by the German Association for Dogs. Successful completion of a versatile dog test is a prerequisite for registration. Complicated testing and evaluation schemes are based on concepts drawn from the science of genetics and animal breeding. Versatile tests are administered by the different breed clubs with minor variations in emphasis. The basic test incorporates searching, pointing, retrieving and tracking in both water and on land. In addition, many versatile dogs are entered in speciality tests. The successful completion of "speciality" tasks is an option requirement for breeding stock in some breeds. Speciality tasks can be credited to a dog on any hunt if witnessed by an approved judge. The tracking of big game and a demonstration of the dog's ability to direct the hunter to big game at the end of a track is one speciality task. Other aspects include aggression toward natural and feral predators of small game, and loud trailing of furred game. The purist British or North American pointing dog person may barely quell disdain at the sight of a loud dog pursuing a crippled bird in water or on land; the German hunter views it as practicality deferred.

A review of German hunting dog magazines will soon reveal a picture of a versatile dog retrieving a fox. In the day-to-day hunting practice this is rare. Anti-rabies campaigns and the steady loss of natural habitat have caused red fox populations to dwindle; habitat loss now threatens the fox's food itself. However, the retrieve of a fox remains the ultimate test of a dog's willingness to comply. It is akin to developing a four-wheel-drivetrain for winter driving in Wisconsin by testing it under the rugged winter conditions of northern Labrador. As a result of this stringent requirement, it will be a rare German-bred dog to refuse retrieving a downed woodcock.

The relative emphasis on the different versatile traits has changed repeatedly during the last 150 years, one trait being refined at the expense of another. Several hundred years ago, all versatile dog varieties were heavy-boned and excellent in retrieving from land and water, and in tracking (Waldhund or "forest dog"). Due to an abundance of upland game birds and favourable political relations between Great Britain and Germany in the 19th century, the introduction of "English blood" into German versatile dogs was common.

Before this time, German dog breeding and that of other livestock was influenced by many countries, most notably France. Versatile breed norms shifted gradually from the Waldhund to the Feldhund ("field dog") after repeated introductions of English pointing specialists. Most strongly affected were the German Shorthaired and German Wirehaired Pointers. Because breed clubs were established when upland bird hunting was particularly fashionable, breed clubs added the word "pointer" to the breed name to be in vogue. In recent decades, upland game populations have declined



Bonnie, a German Shorthaired Pointer, and Amsel, a Large Münsterländer, look different on the outside but share a proud heritage.

Photo by J. K. Schmutz.

dramatically, due to widespread consolidation of small fields into larger ones, with the resulting loss of hedgerows and other undisturbed nesting cover. Game bird declines were further intensified by the growing use of agrochemicals. Spirited debates about changes in the field test schemes, with the intent to steer back to the Waldhund, dominate the business meetings of many breed clubs today.

The melting pot of versatile dogs a few centuries ago included dogs from many parts of the country and from different sources of founding stock. When breed clubs were established and breed standards narrowly defined, bottlenecks in genetic variety were artificially created. The commission of delegates, drawn up after the federation of German states in 1871, was responsible for establishing breed characteristics. This commission answered to a parent organization responsible for all dog matters in Germany. Breed decisions gradually slipped from the control of the breeder to the domain of the breed club.

The first all-round German dog show was held in 1863, at which 463 different dogs were displayed. At about this time pet breeds were developed. In 1878, the infant versatile dog clubs displayed the results of their efforts to consolidate dogs that conformed to an agreed-upon breed standards. As a result of breed club politics and different selection procedures for founding stock, the German Wirehaired Pointer emerged with the widest genetic pool and the Weimaraner, the Large Münsterländer and the Small Münsterländer with the narrowest.

Black colour is rare among modern German versatile dogs. Black is the distinguishing colour of the Large Münsterländer. Black is absent from the genetic constitution of the Small Münsterländer and the Weimaraner. In the Pudelpointer (solid black), the German Shorthair (black spots or patches) and the German Wirehair (black patches), black is tolerated at low frequency. In 1987, 13 percent of German Wirehair puppies bore black colour. In the Pudelpointer, German Shorthair and Wirehair, black colour is traceable to an English Pointer bitch that introduced black first into Shorthairs (known as Prussian Shorthairs) and through these into German Wirehairs and Pudelpointers.

Two well-known German versatile dog breeders, Oberländer and Hegewald, vocally led the crusade against black dogs in the years of breed club infancies. Three reasons for the rejection of black dogs were evident. First, because the versatile dog played an important role in the hunt of big game, often through stalking, a camouflaged dog was sought. Black and white was considered too easily visible. Second, the "gene" for black pigment is dominant to the copy for brown. Therefore, one-quarter of a litter of puppies are brown when two black parents both carry the recessive "gene" for brown. This was very disconcerting for the dog breeder at a time when genetic traits were still thought to be blended, as are two fluids of a different colour. Third, in the opinion of some, the introduction of English blood into German versatile dogs had gone too far, threatening the valued versatile characteristics. Black was seen as evidence of "English blood".

A wirehaired coat is effective because the stiff, wavy hair insulates the dog in air and water by creating air spaces between hairs and next to the dog's skin. Such a coat is not known in any other mammal in nature. According to Ojvind Winge, a wirehaired dog is only one gene away from its short-haired cousin. The wirehaired coat was not characteristic of the chasing dogs of the Celts, but was introduced into hunting dogs via shaggy sheepherding/protection dogs. In the same way that the short- and longhaired flushing dogs of several centuries ago were associated with falconry, the wirehaired dogs were portrayed alongside the gun hunting waterfowler. A hunting Pudel is prominently mentioned in the old dog literature. There was no evidence that the pointing trait was developed substantially earlier in either the longhaired, shorthaired or wirehaired varieties. Already in 1719 a pointing dog of the Pudel type was described. By 1813, a distinct German rough-haired pointing dog was recognized. This dog was the German "Stichelhaar" and existed alongside other wirehaired versatile dogs which have become the French or Dutch Griffon and the Italian Spinone.

The *German Shorthaired Pointer* was among the first German hunting dogs to include pointing in its behavioural repertoire; a shorthaired pointing dog is mentioned as early as 1582. The prevailing colours originally were black, white and brown. A club for pure breeding was first organized in 1890 under the name "Brauntigerklub" and changed to German Shorthair Club in 1891. As was true of all other breeds, ancestral individuals were large and heavy-boned, and made lighter through the introduction of pointing specialists. The club for German Shorthairs has traditionally placed the greatest emphasis on field work. Modern German dogs are brown in colour; the largely white representatives common in North America reflect renewed introductions of English Pointers.

The *Weimaraner* is derived from ancestral shorthair stock, altered through a chance mutation which gives its characteristic grey colour. The oldest surviving record of a Weimaraner was produced by Flemish painter Anthonis van Dyck (1599-1641), who portrayed a Weimaraner owned by Prince Rupprecht of Palatine. Extensive breeding of the Weimaraner took place at the court at Weimar. Separated before the extensive introduction of Pointers occurred, the Weimaraner resembles the ancestral German Shorthair more closely than the German Shorthair itself. The rare longhaired version of the Weimaraner is presumably a recent phenomenon, since longhaired Weimaraners were not recorded before the 1900s.

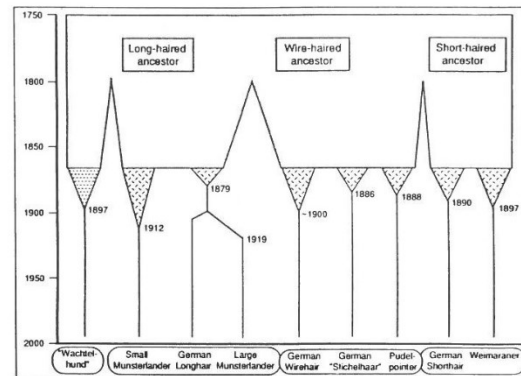
The *German Longhaired Pointer* vies with the Shorthair for the longest existence without dramatic change. The German Longhair's early origin is linked with that of a rare, modern, medium-size flushing breed, the German *Wachtelhund*. In contrast with the short- and wirehaired breeds, the German Longhair's field manners were made more stylish by introducing setters and French Brittanys instead of English Pointers. Because of the versatile qualities of setters and Brittanys, the German Longhair was largely spared the disrepute among German hunters felt towards some wirehairs and shorthairs when pointer manners became so prevalent that the dogs' versatile qualities were in danger. Given the phenomenal upland bird densities of a few decades ago and the small areas hunted, some wire- and shorthaired strains became too wide-ranging for the conditions and came to be known as "Düsenjäger" or "jet hunters".

The standard for the modern German Longhair calls for solid brown or, less frequently, brown and white dogs. A club for the pure breeding of the German Longhair was already active in the 1870s. The acceptance of black dogs in the

breed's standard was cause for considerable dissent in the early years. After 1909, black was no longer permissible.

The *Large Münsterländer* is the youngest of German versatile breeds. However, as a colour variant of the German Longhair these dogs are among the oldest. A separate club was established in 1919 when 23 black and white dogs with traceable German Longhair ancestry were recorded as the Large Münsterländer founding stock. In recent decades, the German Large Münsterländer club has again bred back to the German Longhair to increase the genetic base of Large Münsterländers.

Despite its name, the *Small Münsterländer* was distinct from both the Large Münsterländer and the German Longhair for at least 150 years. The dog's early relationship to the German *Wachtelhund* is obscure, and hence also its relatedness to the other two longhaired breeds. Many of the ancestors of the modern Small Münsterländer originated from a part of Germany that was frequently under French domination. The Small Münsterländer may be more closely related to the Brittany than the other longhaired breeds are. A club and a breed standard for the Small Münsterländer was established in 1912. Founding stock from two separate lines of dogs whose ancestry was traceable to 1850 was used to develop the breed. Some hunters accepted this handsome newcomer only reluctantly at first, fearing that the dog was too small to retrieve for any distance the sizeable and frequently hunted European hare. Owing to its attractiveness, medium size and bidable temperament, many Small Münsterländers ended up in the homes of non-hunters. After World War II, a rival breed club catered to non-hunters, but this club finally dissolved in 1961.



A "melting pot" of German longhaired, shorthaired and wirehaired hunting dogs of many colours, shapes and sizes gave rise to living representatives in eight versatile breeds. Flushing breeds and tracking specialists (not shown) survived also. The formation of more or less distinct breeds began with a commission of delegates established around 1871 and charged with dog matters.

The *German Wachtelhund*, or quail dog, so important as an ancestor to the versatile longhairs several centuries ago, was nearly lost in the process of change. Through the efforts of a breeder, Friess, this medium-size, longhaired, long-tailed brown or brown and white flushing dog was saved. A breed club was established in 1897.

Before the turn of the 20th century, a new club encouraged the pure breeding of the *German Wirehaired Pointer* by amalgamating clubs for the Korthals Griffon established in 1888 and

several other informal *German Stichelhaar* clubs. The initial attempt failed; an attempt a few years later was successful and gave rise to the Verein Deutsch Drahthaar.

Quite unlike other German breed clubs, the motto of the new German Wirehair Club was liberal, encouraging the use of any breed by the experienced breeder as long as this was stated in the pedigree. As a result of this practical approach, the German Wirehair is the most widely rooted of all the versatile dogs. Prominent in the breed's consolidation were German Stichelhaar and Griffons after the Dutchman E.K. Korthals. German Shorthairs and Pudelpointers were also crossed into German Wirehairs. As with the German Wachtelhund, the German Stichelhaar was nearly lost in the transition to the German Wirehair. The German Stichelhaar can be found in Germany today, but it is rare and to the uninitiated indistinguishable from the German Wirehaired Pointer.

Yet another wirehaired breed entered the German scene in the late 1800s. The *Pudelpointer* was the brainchild of breeders Hegewald and Oberländer. Pudelpointers were produced by combining the exquisite field manners of the English Pointer with the intelligence biddability and near fanatical retrieving instinct of a hunting Pudel.

In the summer of 1987, the respective proportions of the above breeds that were entered in field tests of basic versatility or speciality tests in Germany were as follows. More than 3,700 versatile dogs included German Wirehaired Pointer (54 per cent), Small Münsterländer (16 per cent), German Longhaired Pointer (11 per cent), Large Münsterländer (6 per cent), German Shorthaired Pointer (3 per cent), Weimaraner (3 per cent), Pudelpointer (3 per cent), German Stichelhaar (1 per cent) and Wachtelhund (less than 1 per cent). The German Shorthaired Pointer is much more common than these numbers would indicate. The clubs for this breed hold their own field tests.

If versatile dogs of the late 21st century will continue to hold chukar in the basalt outcrops bordering the Snake River, these dogs will most likely differ subtly from the dogs of today. Dog types will change in the future as they have in the past. Some varieties may be lost altogether; others may change in their physical and behavioural characteristics. Hunting dogs are a product of humans created for specific purposes. The pressing reasons that call for the conservation of the earth's natural diversity do not apply. The dogs reflect differences in hunters' practices, personal preferences and social and economic conditions of a people.

First International Canadian Field Meeting

Weyburn, Saskatchewan, October 1994

By Mike Clowes

On Sunday 2nd October, 1994, at 11.55 a.m. I hopped on a plane at Manchester Airport and flew to Toronto. From there, I caught an internal flight to Edmonton in Alberta, and thanks to the time difference, although I had been travelling for over 16 hours, I landed at 8.30 p.m. I was picked up by Mark Williams, and his lovely wife, Ruth, Welsh Hawking members of long standing, who now live in Stony Plain, Alberta, which is just outside Edmonton. They took me to their home, where I stayed the night.

The following day, Mark had to work, so I spent the day sightseeing and shopping in Edmonton. Mark returned home at 6.20 p.m. By 6.30 p.m. he had changed, loaded his peregrine falcon and pointer into his four-wheel drive, and we were driving down the lane, looking for signs of ducks on roadside pits. The first one we came to had a single mallard on it which immediately disappeared into a thick reed bed as we got out of the truck. The peregrine was cast off, and mounted to about 200 feet very quickly. It seemed to be aware that the light was going fast. We let the dog go into the reeds, and much to our surprise, out shot the mallard. The peregrine stooped, levelled out behind the mallard, came up underneath it, and bound to it, bringing it down a mere 25 yards from the edge of the pit. The time was 6.45 p.m.

The next day, Tuesday, we left at 2 p.m., to collect Geoff Person, who is a 17-year old local falconer, with his eyass peregrine tiercel, a beautiful little bird. We also picked up

another chap, Richard, who was originally from Surrey. With this full load, we set off towards the meet site at Weyburn. On the way, we left the main highway, and wandered along the side roads, looking for suitable ponds for a flight. We reached Wainwright, which is where the Alberta Falconers had held a meeting the previous week, and found a suitable pond with three mallards on it. Mark cast off the peregrine, and it started to mount, then wandered off after a flock of starlings. We waited, and after a couple of minutes, she came back over at about 200 feet. We flushed the mallards, and witnessed an identical flight to that of the day before. What a good start to the trip.

We then settled to some serious motoring. Canada is a big country, and although we were only travelling to the province next door, we did not arrive at the motel until 4 a.m. the next morning. En route, Mark was unfortunate enough to receive a "speeding ticket" for \$100, when he was caught by radar gun.

Just to be sociable upon our arrival at the motel, we woke up the other British guests, Mark Holder, Steve Williams, and Simon Bolton.

Wednesday afternoon, I went with Mark, and Bob Rafuse. Bob was flying a magnificent gyr/peregrine. We found a medium sized pond with lots of duck, and Bob cast off the hybrid. It mounted rapidly to about 200 feet. This was all the advantage that it needed. Numerous duck flushed, and down came the

falcon. It struck one duck, and knocked it into the reeds. It swerved across the pond, gaining a little height, and knocked down a teal into the water, then swung back and bound to another larger duck on the opposite side of the pond. This hawk made the ducks look as if they were standing still. A retriever swam right across the pit, and recovered the teal.



A little later, we spotted some sharp-tailed grouse. It was Mark's turn to fly, so up went the peregrine. The "sharpie" was flushed, using a pointer, and the peregrine stooped, levelled off behind it, and a tail chase ensued, for about 1/2 mile. The "sharpie" put in, and the falcon returned overhead at a higher pitch. Another grouse was flushed, and another tail chase followed, which ended the same way. Mark called down the falcon to the lure. We returned to the motel for a hot bath and a meal, before going into the evening's entertainment. Each evening, a different province supplied the entertainment, consisting of slide displays, talks, and of course the liquid refreshment.

Thursday morning we went to Lake Alma, which is only a few miles from the U.S. border. Mike Person put up his gyrfalcon over a pond with a lot of duck. They were flushed and the falcon stooped, coming behind a very strong mallard and chased it almost out of sight before catching it.

In the afternoon, Mark flew his peregrine over two small lakes which were divided by the road. There were a large number of duck and many coot. The falcon rose to 250 feet and when it was in the right position, we rushed in, and about 20 duck flushed. The falcon put in a blistering stoop, and knocked a teal down onto the water, immediately remounting to his pitch. More duck flushed, and the falcon stooped again, and bound to one of them. She did not have a good grip, and as she landed, she lost her hold on it, and it made its escape. The falcon once again regained her pitch, and when more birds flushed, she put in another fast stoop, coming behind the bird of her choice, and binding to it. She carried it across the road, and onto the opposite bank. It was only when we got to her, that we realised that it was a coot, and Mark was given the derisory title of "coot man". One of the other coot that flushed also flew across the road. It must have been looking back over its shoulder, because it flew straight into the side of the bank, and broke its neck.

Friday afternoon was the highlight of the meet. We found a secluded pond with a few mallard. Mark flew his peregrine, and she flew down wind at first, and then came back over the pit. The duck flushed prematurely, and the peregrine chased one for a short distance, and then came back over at about 400 feet. High above, we could see a red tail soaring. The

peregrine began to climb, and when she had reached about 500 feet, a wild prairie falcon appeared. They chased each other across the sky, and crabbed for about five minutes, and all the while the red tail floated directly about them, but made no attempt to stoop on them whilst they were preoccupied with each other. Finally, the prairie started to "cackle and scream" and left the mastery of the sky to the peregrine. The pond, now being empty, the falcon was called to the lure.

The most exciting flight of the meeting for me, happened on the way back to base. It was quite dark, and we were driving along a dirt road, when suddenly one of the trucks behind us flashed its headlights. It seems that we had driven past a large number of duck in some stubble, a 1/4 mile back. We drove back, and sure enough, what we had taken for a shadow about 200 yards away from the road, was in fact a very large mass of duck. Mark unhooded the peregrine and held her up. As she roused, 1/2 dozen of the duck took off, and she immediately saw them. Within a second, she was off the fist, heading in a straight line for the mass of duck. The falcon disappeared into the gloom, and a few seconds later, the whole mass erupted as about 250 duck took to the air. We were running by this time, and when we reached the point where the ducks had been, we had lost sight of the falcon. As we watched, the ducks started to go down out of sight, over the next rise. We went to the top of the rise, and saw a large lake, full of even more duck. We could not believe it. I had never seen so many duck in one place. As I was watching them, someone in the party spotted the falcon



coming over the lake at a fair height. We all ran down the hillside, waving and shouting, and all the duck flushed together, about 500 birds. The falcon came down fast, drove straight through the mass, and singled out a mallard on the edge. She hit it hard, and knocked it down into thick reeds. She regained her pitch, and came down again, through the whirling mass of feathers, and bound to another mallard, taking it down onto the damp, muddy lakeside. *What a flight!*

Saturday morning we were out with Bob Refuse, and his beautiful peregrine. We were close to where Mark caught his coot. We found a small number of mixed duck, on a very flushable pit. The flight was the very height of efficiency. The falcon mounted to about 200 feet, the ducks flushed. The falcon stooped on her selected duck, which turned out to be a gadwall, hit it hard, and carried it just over the hilltop. Without any rush or fuss, we walked over and found the falcon pluming the gadwall.

Like falcon, like falconer - cool and efficient.



In the afternoon, we found some sharp-tails, and saw one of the most unusual flights that I have ever seen with a peregrine, flown by Paddy Thompson. We had flown a couple with no luck, and one had put into a bush on the edge of a patch of rough. The bush was completely circular, with a diameter of about 20 feet, and a height of about 6 feet. The peregrine mounted to about 100 feet, and the grouse was flushed. It flew out of the bush into the field, and the peregrine stooped. The grouse was only about 50 feet from the bush when it panicked due to the falcon suddenly appearing only about 3 feet behind her short tail. The grouse then banked over onto its right wing tip, and flew in a perfect circle around us. We turned a complete 360 degrees, and then some more, as the peregrine followed every move of the grouse, and slowly gained on it. Suddenly the grouse veered sharp right and shot straight back into the bush, from where it had originally been flushed. The peregrine hovered over the bush for a few seconds, then slowly floated down and disappeared inside. The Labrador, which was a very cool customer, walked slowly into the centre of the bush, and 10 seconds later, came out with the grouse in its mouth. We could still hear the peregrine walking around inside the bush, looking for its quarry.

When we returned to the weathering ground, which was in the local park, we noticed a very strong and unpleasant smell. We discovered that one of the hounds had had a fight with a skunk, and the skunk had retaliated in its own unique way, before a savage fight had ensued, ending with the hound being called off, and the skunk shot. Whereas over here, we are used to seeing rabbits and hares as roadside casualties, in Canada it's skunks and porcupines.

As with all meetings, there was the usual meet banquet on the Friday night. This was a very enjoyable and informal meal, with about 65 people attending. There was a large raffle, some of the prizes being very valuable, e.g. a Frank



Beebe original painting, and others less valuable, but more unique! e.g. copies of the *Austringer* and Welsh Hawking Club Ties. It was interesting to note that everyone was very impressed by the *Austringer*.

Throughout the meet, the hospitality was superb. Those of us who had attended, were made very welcome by Doug Bush, Paddy Thompson, Bob Rafuse, Mike Person, John Campbell and others too numerous to mention. Those of you who know Mark (Ugly) Holder, will appreciate what the hosts had to put up with, and if I say that Steve and Simon were of a "like ilk", you will realise just how patient, tolerant and understanding they were.

We all left on Sunday morning, and drove back to Mark's for an evening meal. The following morning, I said my goodbyes, and flew back home, landing in Manchester again at 7 a.m. on Tuesday morning. What a trip! The next meeting to be held in Canada, will probably be in 3 years' time. I can't wait.

Postscript

Just one week after arriving home from Canada, I was a guest at a B.F.C. Mini-Meet, held locally at the home of Robin Jeffs, who is also a W.H.C. member.

Present were five other falconers: Michael Moore, Mike Coupe, Mike West, Martin Hargreaves, and Pete Wall. They each flew peregrines, except for Robin, who flew a peregrine/saker hybrid. The quarry was mainly partridge, but a few pheasants were flown very well by the hybrid. It was an excellent day's hunting, all birds taking quarry. It reminded me that no matter where you go in the world to see falconry, you will not find any *better* than you can get at home, only *different*.

A Close Croak

By Alan Cannon

In October 1993 I and my dear friend Mike Hoults, a fellow WHC member, spent a week's hawking holiday in the Borders. The weather was particularly kind to us during our stay and we were fortunate enough to fly our two male Harris hawks every day during our vacation.

On one such outing we scaled Glendhu Hill accompanied by our hawks, Harry and Venom and one jill ferret. Although the weather was fine no rabbits were evident so we employed the use of our trusty ferret. Whilst waiting patiently for the ferret to work a likely looking burrow, Mike's hawk launched himself from Mike's fist and crashed into some nearby bracken. Mike ran over to investigate and proudly proclaimed the first catch of the day, namely a little yellow frog! Without giving it a second thought he prised it from Harry's claws and released it. Mike took up his position again and we carried on our vigil. Two minutes later Harry was hanging upside down and motionless from Mike's fist. After several minutes Harry regained a standing position, much to our relief.

We can only assume that the frog or toad had exuded some type of poison which Harry had either absorbed through his feet or possibly digested before Mike got to him.

We searched for the likely culprit in order to make a positive identification, but were unable to locate him.

We would be interested to hear if any other member has experienced a similar incident and, if so, can they enlighten us as to the species of amphibian involved.

I am sure that you will be pleased to know Harry made a full recovery with no apparent side effects.

Trapping a Wild Prairie Falcon

By Mark Williams

I had been planning to trap a passage prairie falcon since the end of last year shortly after I moved from Regina Saskatchewan to Edmonton, Alberta. Having had a great first season with Molly my peregrine falcon and because of the relative abundance of ducks in very close proximity to where I live, I felt that I could justify another bird. I was offered a very large 60 oz passage gyr that fellow falconer John Campbell had trapped last year but I had decided against it based on my experience with somebody's hand-me-down 3/4 gyr 1/4 prairie that I had two seasons before. I yearned for another prairie like the first bird I flew when I arrived in Canada from England three years ago.

Having taken a downy eyas before, I thought that I would try a passage or recently fledged eyas. Whilst waiting for that time of year to come around I was sorely tempted to take an eyas northern goshawk from a clutch that were being reared in my fellow falconer and friend, Mike Persons, back yard! It was great to go and see them and fun trying to dodge the attacks from the defensive adult female. I thought Mike was joking when he first said you had better bring a bike helmet. I decided against the gos only for the reason that around here we have no suitable quarry since there are no rabbits, pheasants or partridge and the duck flights are usually on big sloughs or open water suitable for longwings.



Mark Williams.

It was mid July and I decided to drive the three and a half hour trip south east to Rick Skibsteds place in Rosebud on the Bow river just east of Calgary. Rick is a farmer and took up falconry recently. For the last couple of years he had been fortunate to have nesting on his land, within a three or four mile stretch of river front, a pair of golden eagles, a pair of peregrines and three pairs of prairie falcons! The drive passed by quickly and I arrived at Rick's place at around midday on July 17th. We set off to search out the three occupied eyries that Rick had previously been monitoring and found that the youngsters had fledged from each of the eyries. My timing seemed perfect considering the age I wanted to take a bird. Rick reckoned that they had been flying free for about five to ten days and they were still dependent on mum and dad for

bringing home the food. Another week and they would be starting to disperse. I was using a harnessed pigeon to trap my bird. For those of you not aware of this method it involves putting a leather harness or jacket on the pigeon which is covered in specially tied nylon nooses made from a heavy grade fishing line. It is very successful since the pigeon is able to walk about and flap its wings. The underside of the harness has an elastic "bumper" tied to it, similar to what you would use on the leash of an accipiter to stop it from damaging its tail whilst tethered to a bow perch, only this would be to soften the impact to the falcon as it tried to fly off with its quarry and is halted by the weight at the other end of the line. There are numerous other ways and the next most preferred way is to include the use of a mist net or dho-gazza trap (see Beebe/Webster *North American Falconry and Hunting Hawks*).

The first eyrie did not look good for a variety of reasons not least the fact that the eyases were not the bit interested in coming into our two harnessed pigeons when we were there. The second eyrie was looking deserted, these birds were only a half a mile from the golden eagle eyrie and Rick's sister had already witnessed one of the adult eagles take a juvenile prairie. The third eyrie was an old hack site for peregrines that the fish and wildlife dept. used to use many years ago. They used to substitute the prairie young which were more advanced than peregrines and put downy peregrine chicks in their place. This practice was stopped when they discovered the natural hybridization between prairies and peregrines in subsequent years due to the fact that the young previously reared and hacked in this way obviously imprinted themselves to their alternate species. Since Rick had not seen these birds for over a week we assumed that these had already dispersed.

The next morning we found ourselves at the top of the cliff above the first eyrie before dawn, hoping that the young would be hungry and ready to tackle a pigeon. I used a shed mule deer antler that we found whilst walking to the site to weigh down and tether one of the pigeons. We placed that one at the very bottom of the cliff in the open. The other I placed half way up the slope to my left side which was almost eye level with me. Rick sat behind some bushes level to me but on my right side about a hundred yards away. I lay patiently waiting in the grass on the top of the cliff looking down the gentle slope at the two pigeons. Not ten minutes later I saw a coyote sneaking in on my pigeon at the base of the cliff. I felt that this was a goner for sure, since I could not get down there quickly or quietly enough to scare it off. As the coyote ran in, the pigeon flushed and dragged with it the antler that weighed it down. The noise and commotion was too much for the coyote and it took off. Easing back I looked through my bino's to re-assess the situation. No harm done and the pigeon was still in view of the falcons. Next thing I see is a mule deer walking towards the same pigeon. The pigeon moves and the deer stops and looks at it. The pigeon thinks it's the damned coyote again and panics. The deer bolted a few yards and then decides to walk back to the pigeon to investigate further. It walked around the pigeon at a safe distance trying to make out what it was. After a few

minutes the staring match ended and the deer carried on its merry way.

After about forty minutes dawn had broken and the birds were beginning to leave the ledges where they had roosted for the night. I suddenly had the sensation that I was being watched and I heard a snorting noise. As I turned around very slowly the snorting sounded again and I was face to face with a large doe mule deer who had sneaked up close behind but up wind of me to investigate. She stomped the ground and trotted off not too alarmed since I did not reveal myself fully but she was not going to hang around and find out what I was. By this time the young eyases were quite active and one came and landed on the cliff ledge not thirty yards from me and I managed to get a picture with my camera. The next half hour was uneventful so we climbed down the gentlest part of the cliff and repositioned the pigeons. This proved to be a good move and we did get one of the falcons to make a couple of passes and it hit the pigeon on at least one pass. I think that it was an adult bird which I did not want to trap.



Mark Williams.

After another hour of inactivity we decided to move to another eyrie. The one by the eagle eyrie was definitely deserted so we continued to the third eyrie but not before glassing the young eyas eagle that was almost fully fledged and sitting in the nest ledge on the face of a sheer cliff. It was great to be able to get so close to it. If only we didn't have more pressing matters I would have liked to sit and wait for mum or dad to come back possibly with some dinner.

As we drove across the field to the edge of the cliff above where the third prairie eyrie was situated, three youngsters flew off the ledge and I quickly retreated to the far end of the field a few hundred yards away. I parked the truck and we sat and glassed the skies with our bino's and saw three birds in the air and two on fence posts. I harnessed two fresh pigeons and we drove back to the edge of the cliff. We didn't stop but slowed to a crawl and we each threw a pigeon out of the window a few hundred yards apart. I had no sooner driven and stopped at the other end of the field, when before I had turned off the ignition, an adult redtail stooped out of nowhere and bound to one of the pigeons. We sat stunned as it easily picked up and carried the pigeon off antlers and all, over the edge of the cliff! We raced across the field in the truck and saw the redtail drop the pigeon. It cleared off, and to our relief a disaster had been averted. The last thing I needed was a redtail to be caught up in a noosed pigeon and fly off with it!

The pigeon survived the ordeal and was quickly put back on active duty. Again no sooner had we driven back to the vantage point and parked the truck, when this time is was a race between the redtail and an adult swainson's hawk as to who was going to get the pigeon first. While all this is going on, the five eyases (two females, three tiercels), were doing a fine job stooping at the two trespassing hawks. What an exciting air show! This time we had stuck the antlers firmly into the ground so there was no chance of a repetition of before. Since we only had two more spare pigeons we decided to drive over to help the falcons scare off the hawks and reset the trap.

Unfortunately the one pigeon did not survive the last attack so we called it a day for now and decided to return later that afternoon when hopefully the hawks were elsewhere and the weather was cooler than the 32°C degrees we were cooking in! Even the young eyases were reluctant to fly in the baking heat.

At about 4.30 p.m. we returned to the spot and put out our last two pigeons. We sat back in the truck a few hundred yards away and watched through the bino's, the youngsters flying and stooping at the pigeons. They would not pile in and bind like the adults tend to but instead were strafing the pigeons as they passed. It seemed like they were playing and not really serious about it or were afraid of such big quarry at their young and inexperienced age. About half an hour later after things had died down and they were all sat on fence posts I saw one of the females take off and head straight up into the sky at quite a steep climb. All of a sudden I saw the adult tiercel stooping into view. The young sharp eyed eyas had obviously seen him coming in long before we or her brothers and sister did. As the adult male came into view the others saw him and were also noisily climbing high into the sky calling in anticipation of being fed. What we saw next was a superb food pass to the first eyas, which was a female. The adult tiercel did a couple of passes as the other eyases chased the one with the food. When the adult male felt that the others were sure he had no more food he came into land on a fence post. It would obviously be like getting caught up in a rugby scrum for this poor little devil if those five hungry youngsters caught up to him. The scene took on a calm tone for a while as the afternoon heat began to subside. Every now and then a bird would get up and bash a pigeon but not one would bind.

I was getting fed up and was deciding on coming up next week this time armed with a dho-gazza. That would have this little exercise over in minutes. We decided to call it a day after not seeing the remaining eyas female (who had not been fed),



Mark Williams.

flying about for a while. As we approached the first pigeon I dropped off Rick to collect it and as I looked towards the second pigeon I realised that something was not quite right. Then I saw the prairie struggling to get free. I raced towards it in the truck, jumped out and threw my sweat shirt over the spread eagle and terrified falcon. She had probably caught the pigeon twenty minutes earlier by the amount that was eaten and we didn't even know she was caught. As luck would have it I had caught the remaining eyas female out of four other male prairies, including the father. Rick and I couldn't believe our luck. We released the remaining pigeon and set off home. We never did see the adult female that day.

Well it's now mid-December and the season is long since over for me. I ended hacking back the prairie early in the season but flew my peregrine right up until the last duck flew south at the end of October. We had a great first season with Molly but the second season was just incredible. The season concluded with 39 ducks (23 mallard, 10 gadwall, 1 scaup, 1 widgeon, 1 blue wing teal, 1 shoveller and 2 coot!), all taken in 71 flights. That represented an outstanding 55% success rate! The first Canadian Field meeting was also a great success and no doubt Mark Holder, Steve Williams, Simon Bolton or Mike Clowes who came over from Britain to stay during this historic event, will probably write about it in this year's *Austringer*.

It seems that every time I get settled and my hunting established, new house, new job, etc., I get up and move. Well, the pattern has not changed since we arrived in Canada and once again the Williams family is on the move. Another job promotion takes us to Kelowna, British Columbia. This time I plan to stay for a lot longer. The weather is considerably better than either Regina, Saskatchewan or Edmonton, Alberta, no more -20°C, -40°C weather. At least we get to see more of this beautiful country courtesy of my company. Kelowna is situated along the Okanagan Lake in the middle of the Okanagan Valley surrounded by mountains and lakes. Falconry will be different that's for sure. The seasons will be much longer but longwing country (terrain) is about an hour's drive south. However, in and around Kelowna there are large



Molly and me at the 1st Canadian National Field meeting (Molly caught seven head of game at the meet).

populations of quail, partridge, pheasant and various species of grouse that are really only hawkable with shortwings such as a gos or coopers. We will see. I move at the end of this month after Christmas and the family will follow once we sell the acreage.

Canada is rich in natural resources and not least its wildlife. I consider myself fortunate to be able to enjoy my sport with almost no bureaucratic interference and to be legally allowed to take virtually every species of raptor suitable for falconry by simply putting in a request to the fish and wildlife dept, and a cheque for £25! Yes folks, life doesn't get much better than this!

Elevated Lure Flying

By Mick Young

I was told some time ago about a balloon trick to teach longwings to mount high in the sky.

The balloon used is a weather balloon. Filled with helium with a high set-up cost and serious transport problems.

So I tried it with a kite. After some teething problems it now is reliable, cheap, easy and very small to transport about.

You do need wind. But a small breeze will lift modern kites with very little fuss and no running around the field pulling a string is required.

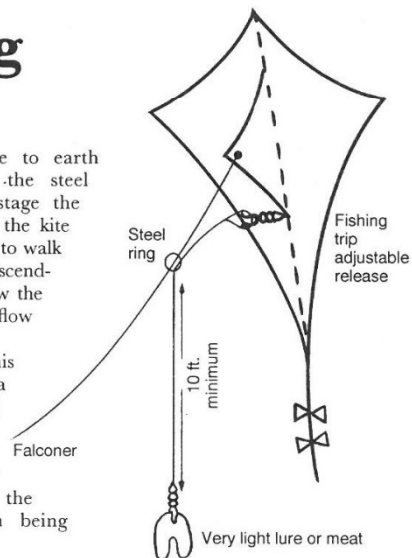
The set-up is easy (see diagram). The kite should be purchased from a specialised kite shop, the cost of which around £15. Ask for a single string kite that is easy to fly and very stable in the air. The swivels and trip are from a fishing tackle shop, and the steel ring is from a rabbit purse net.

The bird is first introduced to the kite and lure at low level and the height is increased until you will eventually need permission from Air Traffic Control.

The bird catches the lure, the trip releases and the bird

and lure come to earth controlled by the steel ring. At this stage the person holding the kite string will need to walk towards the descending bird to allow the kite string to flow free.

I've tried this method on a peregrine and a male lugger - both birds had no bother adapting and the kite was soon being raised.



The CLA Game Fair

Cornbury Park, Charlbury



Photos by Jean Dimond.

Trapping and the 1994 NAFA Meeting Dodge City, Kansas

By David Kirkby

Having attended the 1993 NAFA meeting held in Kearney, Nebraska with fellow WHC members, I decided that a return visit was a must.

Following numerous phone calls and letters to the USA my trip was prepared with help from my good friends in Minnesota, Curt and Bobbi Ruthenbeck.

On departing Gatwick and with a long flight ahead of me, I took it upon myself to take advantage of the complimentary drinks trolley which helped the time to pass quickly (if you know what I mean!).

On my arrival to the twin cities of Minneapolis/St. Paul, once clear of customs I was met by Bobbi and the unseasonably good weather of Minnesota. Having had a good night's sleep and feeling refreshed, Curt, Bobbi and myself prepared for the long drive south to Kansas.

Curt would be taking two longwings with him to the meeting. His 8 year old peregrine/prairie hybrid and a tiercel anatum/peales peregrine. Before leaving, Curt and I spent two days over on some local stubble fields exercising the falcons.

At one point his tiercel took great interest in a passing bald eagle and started to buzz and annoy it. Curt and I swung lures, three pigeons out, everything, in an attempt to recall the peregrine, frantic with worry that the bald eagle, showing interest, itself in the peregrine was about to make a meal of it.

Thankfully, to the relief of us both it returned. With that little incident over, the following day we made the trip south to Dodge City arriving a few days early for the NAFA meeting.

Being the first to arrive at the motel in Kansas allowed us a fair amount of time to explore the surrounding area to try and find suitable quarry for the falcons.

Curt wanted to find duck flights, this presented quite a problem, Kansas had seen very little rain for quite a while and most of the flight ponds, including several rivers were devoid of water, most of the duck population had moved on.

After a great deal of searching we managed to find a small creek with just three ducks on the water, they were teal. It was decided to give Curt's tiercel its maiden flight away from its training ground back home in Minnesota.

Striking the hood the tiercel roused, took flight and climbed away from us into the wind, turned sharply then appeared over-



Myself releasing an immature female redbtail.



Mark and Mike, the bulldozer brothers.

head at about 200 ft. We ran at the thin stretch of water flushing the teal, the tiercel stooped striking a drake knocking it into the water. The drake emerged 10 yds. away and made good its escape minus a few feathers.

After an exciting flight Curt decided to call it a day and after giving his peregrine a crop of pigeon we returned to the Dodge Inn for a few beers.

The next morning, falconers from all over the USA and overseas started to arrive in Dodge. Two of the first people I bumped into were the infamous bulldozer brothers, Mike Franklin and Mark Runnell who were in Kansas to spend their time trapping.

I was very pleased to be offered and readily accepted their invitation to accompany them for four days of what I can only describe as sheer bliss.

The main intention for Mark and Mike was to try and trap a tiercel prairie falcon, also a female ferruginous buzzard.

Mark had already sought permission from a local rancher to set up a hide, lure pole, and bow net and after a verbal agreement with the local wildlife and fisheries officer the hide was set up 10 miles west of Dodge City.

Once everything was officially sorted we made out way to the trapping station. Equipment in place we attached a harnessed pigeon to the line, and climbed into the hide. The weather was clear and sunny. Good conditions for trapping. Hopefully there would be plenty of thermals and we would see plenty of action with hawks on the soar.

Within 10-15 minutes of starting, the first hawk came in and attacked the harnessed pigeon. It was a haggard northern harrier, something Mark and Mike had never caught before.

Once we removed her from the bow net, on having a close look at her, she was very keen with little far on her, explaining to us why the harrier had attacked such a large bird as a pigeon. We released her and set up a fresh pigeon in the harness, climbed back into the hide and started again.

The next hawk to come in was an immature female redbtail. She was on the pigeon for only a few seconds, when a male harlands redbtail knocked her off.

Rather than trip the bow net Mark decided to keep moving the redbtail on the pigeon with the lines in the hope of attracting a female ferruginous to come in and try to rob the redbtail of its kill.

We kept the redbtail on the pigeon for a long time, moving it back and forth, then decided to catch it. I tripped the net catching the hawk. Then to our amazement once the net was sprung, a female ferruginous tried to rob the pigeon from the redbtail that was caught in the net.

It's easy to say after, but if only we had waited a few moments longer, we'd have had an opportunity of catching the ferruginous.

Mike on the other hand was more fortunate. After catching a couple of redbtails, out of nowhere a passage tiercel prairie falcon appeared on the pigeon.

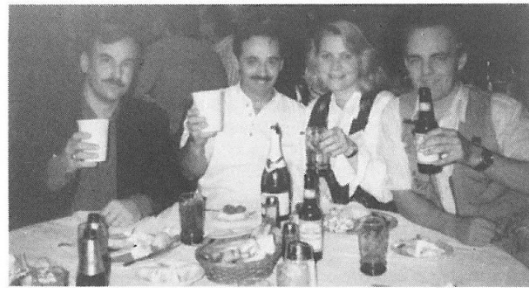
We sprung the net, and I was out of the hide within seconds to grab the prairie, before it had any chance of getting away.

This lovely little tiercel has since been flown successfully at Bob White quail.

Over the four days that I went trapping with Mark and Mike we trapped nine redtails, one prairie falcon, one northern harrier, also a sharp shinned hawk did make an appearance on the pigeon.

For me it was a superb experience, a real adrenalin rush. I must give my thanks to NAFA including Curt and Bobbi Ruthenbeck, Burt Lozburg, Don Bandanski, Lou Woyce, and Mark Runnell and Mike Franklin (the bulldozer brothers). Also everybody else too many to mention.

Burt, Curt, Bobbi and myself at the banquet.



Falconry Safari – Africa

By Adrian Williams

Last year I was fortunate to be invited to experience a Falconry Safari in Zimbabwe which was intended exclusively for falconers and raptorphiles. Also invited were Lyn Wilson, who was unable to accept due to family commitments, Andy Brown and Geoff Dalton. The falconers organising the safari hoped that it would form the basis of a commercial falconry safari. I should explain that the deal was for us to critically consider the safari, report on the pitfalls and make suggested improvements to the organisers in order that they could possibly rearrange matters if necessary into a more viable package.

Outside the airport at Harare we met Geoff Boddington and Ade Langley our hosts and Stephen who was one of Adrian's staff. We took a three hour drive south to Felixsburg during which we saw troupes of vervet monkeys, some deer, several bateleurs which we stopped to observe with binoculars and lots of other birds.

Our destination was Eastdale Ranch in the high veldt (pronounced felt) country, where Devure Camp site had been recently hacked out of the bush. This was to be camp for several days. The 100,000 acre ranch was a cattle station (approx 10,000 cattle are ranched – any more would be over grazing!). On arrival we were met by more of our hosts John Groebbler, Pierre and Barbs Heymens along with several more of the catering staff. The camp consisted of several twin bedded typical safari kayas, a combined bar and lounge with a separate kitchen, toilets and an open roofed shower/wash room. The hawks were housed in a



Guests, hosts, birds & dogs at the lounge, Devure Camp, Eastdale Ranch.

meshed mews for safety and the pointers were kept inside for safety too. Leopards like dogs, they taste good. We unloaded, had some tea and cake, changed and within half an hour of arrival we were in the field. Using several pointers we soon found a covey of francolin and Ade put his peregrine Nirvana up. The small African peregrine is the usual choice of falconers, they are about half the size of 'our' UK peregrine. Pierre had a passage lanner which had been taken in a dho ghazza although he was almost exclusively a shortwing man. Surprisingly the falconers told us that the lanner was actually a better falcon in many respects than the peregrine. We explained that lanners are almost exclusively used for lure flying in the UK. African falconers are of the opinion that the lanner is a damn fine hunter. Nirvana rose to around 200 ft before stooping at the francolin but it was not a successful flight. Within a few minutes we found another covey but John's falcon Avalon was not quite ready. We decided to drive on for a few k's (kilometers) and try again. Pierre soon suggested another spot and sure enough within two minutes we had a point. This time Geoff put his tiercel Thor up. he was very swiftly up and as soon as his wings were set Geoff was in the long grass and whooping. Off they went and down he came with a thwack – it was magic. This was what we wanted to see, African sky hunters.

Whilst Geoff picked up Thor and the francolin we went to the truck and enjoyed some chilled beers. A secretary bird was spotted landing some half a mile away and Pierre told us that they were a common sight, and that we would see them every day at Eastdale. Then we returned to camp for a very welcome shower which felt wonderful. Dinner followed then a discussion on how we wanted to spend our safari – on falconry and raptor viewing with wildlife or maybe taking in a little general sightseeing. Falconry and wildlife almost exclusively was the joint decision. We were then told that we should normally leave camp at 6 am to fly the falcons at game as we would have to finish by 8.30 am or so as it would become too hot and also the danger of eagles attacking the hawks became greater then. Of course we could have skipped a trip anytime we wanted to lie in.

As planned we left camp at 6 am next morning after tea and rusks – hard fruit biscuits. It was very cold. Whilst daytime temperatures were similar to summer in the UK, the night times were cold. Frost had to be scraped off the vehicles each morning at all of the locations we stayed at. Just before our arrival temperatures of -15°F had been recorded. Soon we were flying at Swainson's francolin and the falcon Isis took one. John's tiercel Bobbit took another. Francolin was the most common game bird flown at and there were several species available, Swainson's, Coquii, Shelley's and Natal although the natal were only in a few areas. They range from the size of a grey partridge to a good sized hen pheasant. When we had the opportunity we also flew at guinea fowl which gave a flight very much like a pheasant (but they tasted better). After the morning we made for the trucks for

a soft drink before returning to camp for brunch. This might begin with suda porridge (made from maize which is known as mealy meal) followed by full cooked breakfast, bacon eggs, etc., with huge boervas spicy sausage – very tasty. We sampled several types of porridge and most were very nice, but a word of warning – if you are ever offered sorgum porridge – take the corn-flakes.

Later we took off for a drive around to look for raptor nests and whatever wildlife was about. By late morning it was quite warm and it was very enjoyable to climb up onto the 'howdah' on top of the Toyota Land Cruiser both for the breeze and the view. Four wheel drive vehicles were standard. During a two hour drive we saw groups of impala, kudu, jackal, lizard buzzard which is about the size of a kestrel, an ovambo sparrowhawk and also a black sparrowhawk on the soar. There were always plenty of birds around but it's difficult to remember everything we saw. Pierre wanted to show us an old bateleur nest but it was hard to locate – 100,000 acres is a lot of ground! However during our stay we saw many nests several of which were occupied including African hawk eagles, martial eagles, gymnogenes, in fact we saw about 40 of the 61 raptors on the Zimbabwe list which astounded us. One afternoon on finding an occupied African hawk eagle nest the female flushed and we all had a view of her. As it was time to pick up the hawks for the afternoon flight we decided to move on but left Geoff there to try for another view. We came back for him after taking a typical four francolin. He had seen the female several times and was very pleased with himself. He had also watched elephant shrews and several lizards running around the rocks. Back to camp for dinner and relaxation, plenty of convivial conversation over several beers – the Zambezi beer was good. We all were keen to eat the game taken but also to try new things.

We were very well catered for by our hosts and their staff. Some of the things we ate were ostrich (no not hawk caught), francolin, guinea fowl, crocodile, various venison, and lots of biltong – strips of dried spiced beef or game which can be eaten as a snack or as a starter.

We hoped to see some large eagles naturally, but were constantly amazed at the amount and variety that appeared. As I mentioned we saw a bateleur the first day. By the third day we had seen so many we all but ignored them. We were excited when John came into camp one morning to announce that he had just spotted a martial. We took off and found it in a tree. It was unmistakable as we approached. It took off to another tree and we followed slowly across the savannah, very slowly as the terrain is riddled with aardvark burrows which cannot be seen as the grass is so high. We had several good views of martials, the biggest eagle in Africa. We made our way back to camp and stopped at an acacia bush from which we had seen secretary birds leaving. Pierre explained that they used the same sites for nesting and roosting all year. Also we stopped at a tawny eagle nest which was high in a gum tree. Male and female were present. Back at camp Pierre made arrangements to collect ladders from the manager's house. We took these to the secretary



Four times interweaved African Crowned Eagle 'Lundi'.



African Crowned Eagle nest, Ditchwe.

bird nest to have look in to see if any eggs were present but it was just a roost at present. Some raptors might be on eggs at any time of the year in Zimbabwe in contrast to the situation here in the UK.

Over a guinea fowl casserole that evening we discussed plans for the following day. We had wondered if it might be possible to see a black eagle during our stay and Ade suggested that we take a trip first thing in the morning to a group of kopjes (rock outcrops) where we might be lucky and see one. We hawked on the way taking three hen Swainson's francolin with the falcons Avalon and Nirvana and funya which is the native name for a grey lourie. On arrival at the base of the kopje we set up a camp fire whilst taking turns at scanning the sky for the eagle. It turned up right on cue and we watched it drifting back and forth for an hour or so whilst we feasted on the fry up which included the freshly taken francolin. We saved the funya for hawk food. We saw plenty of the eagles favourite quarry rock hyraxes or dassies running over the kopje. A lanner came over too and we saw an exhilarating flight at a dove lasting about five minutes before being lost behind some trees. On the way back we saw several skinks and had a good view of a boomslang which was on the road. We had been told that we were unlikely to see snakes as they were mostly hibernating (this was winter). Similarly insects were no problem. We saw some hoopoes, a dark chanting goshawk, a disused Wahlberg's eagle nest, a white backed vulture, secretary bird, a kori bustard and a black breasted snake eagle. A pretty ordinary day really. The roads on the ranch were all dirt and indeed many many miles of main road across the country are dirt. When you drive there are clouds of dust everywhere as you no doubt will have seen on TV. Excited by our luck at seeing the 'black' we were told by Pierre that he knew of a possible martial nest at Masvingo – about 70km away by road then a long walk through the bush. It was a two hour walk and very warm, thank God it was winter! On the way we happened to pass an occupied African hawk eagle nest which we stopped at for just a moment, well they were becoming quite common to us by now, and then a climb up onto a kopje to survey the area. After a few minutes the intrepid Pierre announced, 'There, straight across look, the nest'. Then the female came off and with bino's we could just make out – a martial chick!

At this kopje and on the way back we saw a pair of martials in the air, five lanners, a family of slender mongooses, a gymnogen nest, and heard a troupe of baboons going through the forest. In the evenings we often took a drive with a lamp and spotted bush babies, hyena, a caracal, aardwolf, scrub hares, springhaas, dika, impala, reedbok, boschbok. The evening drives would be very cold in contrast to the heat of the day.

Our stay at Devure has been impressive, the amount of quarry available was surprising and the variation of wildlife especially



Taita Falcon plucking my beard.

raptors was incredible. From here we travelled up to the very fertile arable area in the north known as the lowveldt. Our tented camp was at Lion's Den, Norton district. For all intents and purposes we were alone in the bush. Here we met more of the team. Andy Barnes who flies a black spar and Andre and Laura Groenewald with even more of the catering staff. Andre flies peregrines and also an African crowned eagle. Crowned eagles are not normally available to falconers but Andre is privileged to hold 'Lundi' by special permit on behalf of the Parks Department. She was found by a farmer and imprinted so is not suitable for release. He hunts her at scrub hares, springhaas and when possible at her natural quarry vervets. We were looking forward to seeing her at the vervets but our first chance to see her in action was at night off the back of the truck at scrub hares. My first impression was that she is an 8 lb goshawk. Very impressive, very fast. She took three hares out of five in less than an hour. We flew her at vervets several times but they are quite difficult to approach and we didn't take one. The technique is similar to modern magpie hawking with shortwings. Drive around until you spot vervets feeding on maize or whatever then slip before they get to the nearest trees. When they get to the trees they become invisible. One day we were on foot looking for vervets when Andre spotted a mamba. We only saw three snakes during our visit. Most avoid people and anyway are usually in hibernation in winter which was the season we were in. Andy flew his black spar several times for us and as I am keener on shortwings than longwings it was good to see the way she took several guinea fowls although he did fly at the francolin too. If there was abundant quarry at Eastdale then there was a vast surplus at Lion's Den. The amount was phenomenal. Walk into a field and several hundred guinea fowl might explode. A point on one of the varieties of francolin could be had every couple of minutes. On a drive we saw a covey around every 150 yards for miles. Here the falconry was spectacular because the amount of game meant it had to be. All the falcons went up well. We estimated that Geoff's Isis might have gone up to 800 ft from where she took a cock Swainson's, but who knows? She was high and so were we, intoxicated with the pleasure of what we were witnessing. Andy took several guinea fowl with Raker his spar. Once, he and I tracked her for a couple of hundred yards only to have the signal flood in tall grass. After five minutes we discovered her well down in an antbear burrow pluming her guinea fowl. This is a potentially dangerous situation as entering head first could mean you disturb a semi torpid snake, jackal or wart hog. If you need to dig your hawk out the warm dry conditions would mean you digging into earth that is like concrete. After several days here we drove on further north to the much warmer, phew, Kariba area. Here we took a boat across Lake Kariba to spend a

couple of days at the luxury Sanyati Lodge. The dam at Kariba was completed thirty years ago but the petrified forest of Dandawa still pokes through the waters in a somewhat eerie fashion creating nest sites and resting places for the many fish eagles and hundreds of cormorants. From Sanyati Lodge high above the lake there are fine views over the lake and along the shore of the Matusadona mountain range. Here was an opportunity to concentrate on game viewing and on the boat trips we saw elephant, hippo, crocs, many deer and antelope, sandgrouse, black eagle, auger buzzard, night herons, and another host of birds species. Vervet monkeys and baboons were common and would steal your breakfast, tea and rusks if you weren't out of bed the instant they arrived.

Three boat trips a day can be taken here if you want to enjoy the lake and visit the various creeks yet it is fairly quiet despite its popularity with tourists. We had a couple of hours of fishing for the famous tiger fish. Our guide thought it was too cold for fishing - we were sweltering. After three days we returned to Lion's Den and we were soon taking game again with the fine high mounting falcons, quick footed hawks and the ever impressive crowned eagle in fantastic surroundings. Almost at the end of our stay we again took Lundi on the howdah but this time across the savannah searching for vervets. Two oribi - small deer - appeared running across our path. Lundi had one in a matter of yards. We were quickly on the scene as Andre was afraid that Lundi might be cut if the deer kicked but she was straight over it and had it trussed. What a flight! It was not a huge beast but this was the first time an oribi has been taken by a trained bird of prey. Roast oribi is delicious. Late that evening we sat around the camp fire and one of the subjects briefly discussed was snakes as a grass snake had been seen in the camp. Geoff was first to turn in that night and we all bade him good night. Moments later we heard an almighty scream, whereupon Geoff hurtled out of the tent shouting, 'Snake! Snake!' The light had failed in his tent, so he had felt his way along the bed before getting in only to find his hand on a large snake. On rushing to the tent with lamps a soundly sleeping pointer was found on the bed. Geoff had grabbed its tail. Next day was our last day in Africa. We went to see a crowned eagle nest which was 60 ft. up in a red mahogany tree surrounded by a lemon forest. It was thought to have been a lemon grove planted and possibly abandoned by the Dutch in the 1600's. Boy, were those lemons sharp. A little later that day we were privileged to see the rarest falcon in Africa, the tiny taita. The ZFC is very involved with conservation work and in conjunction with TPF is hoping to be in a position to introduce domestically produced taita's at some point.

I would like to thank the falconers who were our hosts for a marvellous experience and the chance to see some really superb falconry and hawking. Very many thanks.

If anyone is keen to take a similar safari, government authority has been obtained for the commercial venture and I can supply further details including costs.



Typical African savannah - the highveldt.

