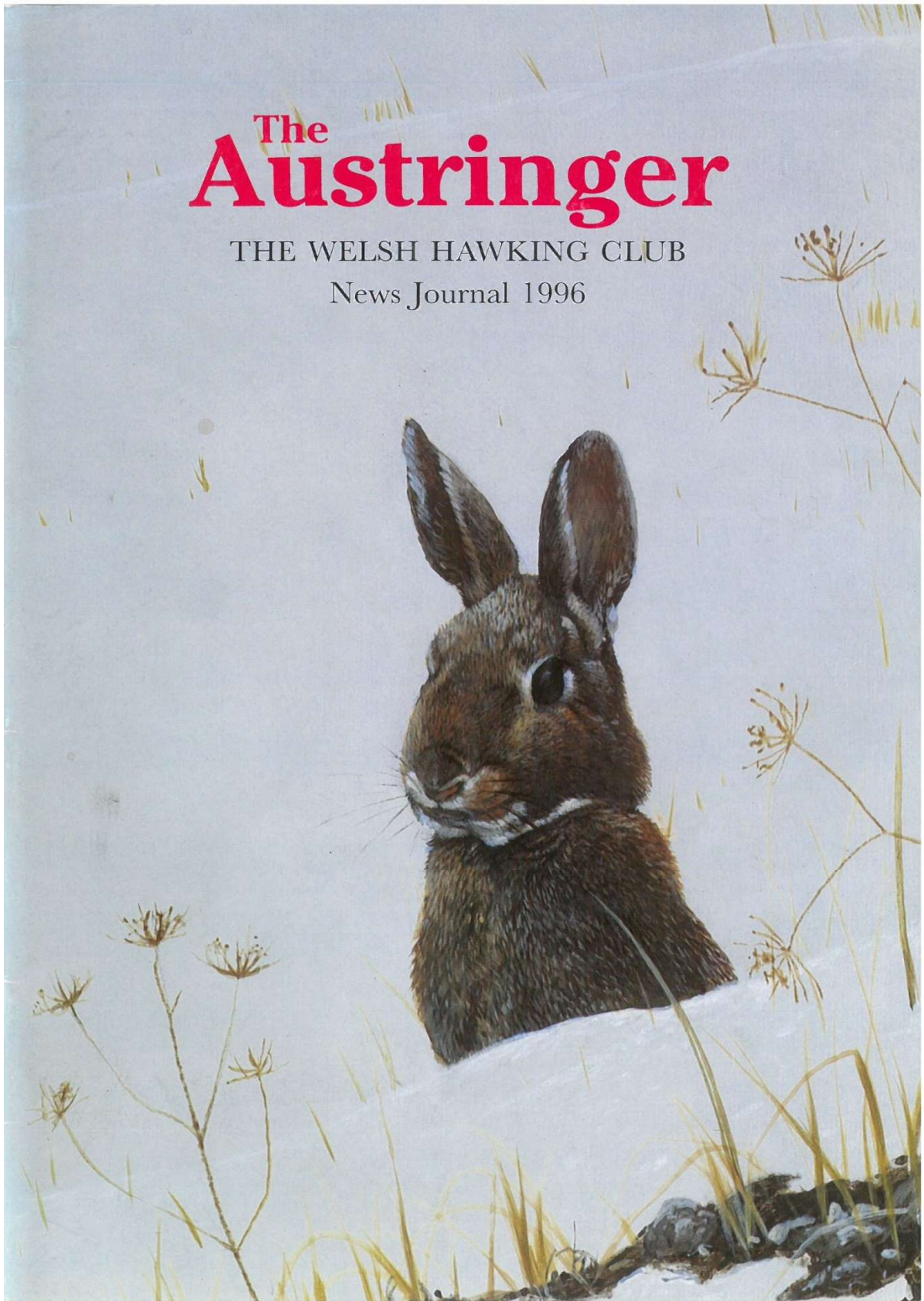


The **Austringer**

THE WELSH HAWKING CLUB

News Journal 1996



The Austringer

The Official Journal of the Welsh Hawking Club

No. 28

1996



Clwb Hebogwr Cymru

Editorial

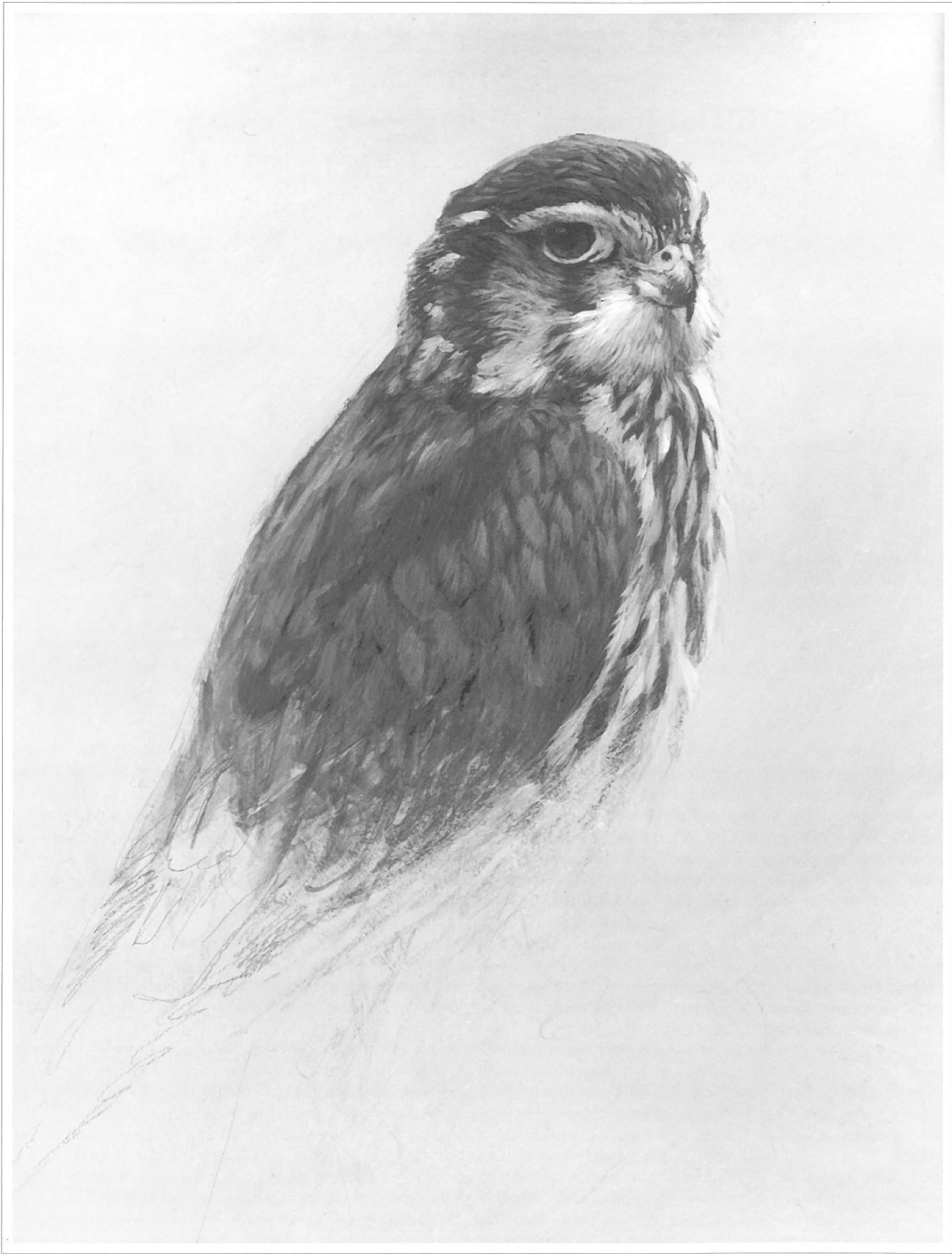
I am pleased to be sending you this year's *Austringer* which is a little later than usual. There have been a few reasons for this, namely I hadn't enough material to make up the usual varied contents that I would have liked and secondly, the reason for the traditional press release date at the end of July has disappeared. The club aimed to have *The Austringer* printed by the end of July in time for the CLA Game Fair which up until last year we always attended. It was always a good opportunity to meet old and new members and to pass on their edition of *The Austringer* which saved considerably on postage. This date no longer applies and therefore I have not had a rigid date to aim for. Maybe it would be a good idea to use the Falconry Fair for next year's press date? Therefore, after a few SOS phone calls for last minute articles (*thanks again Alan Gates*), I feel confident that there is now an interesting enough and varied contents list to cater for most tastes.

During the year, I was delighted that the committee decided to take the financial risk in reproducing as a print, last year's front cover picture of Andrew Ellis's painting, "Nowhere To Go". It has turned out to be a great success, well received by everyone and I am sure admired by those who now have it adorning their walls. There are a number still left if you missed your opportunity. Remember that we purposely limited the signed edition to 350 prints to give it a collector and rarity value.

With the growing number of foreign field meetings and the ease of travelling abroad, more and more members are taking advantage of the numerous club invitations received. Germany, Czech Republic, Spain, Hungary, France, Belgium and the NAFA meeting in USA have all seen members in attendance enjoying foreign hospitality and sport. It will not be so very long before members will be able to take their birds freely with them and without the trouble they had experienced before. I think it is fair and correct to say that our secretary was the first to legally surmount these obstacles and take a bird with him to Belgium and back for falconry purposes and overcome the present CITES restrictions. Well done Adrian, you have beaten the system and achieved a first. Thanks also to member Ronnie Broos for putting on this first Belgium meeting and for entertaining and accommodating our members so well.

I hope you are not too alarmed at the change from our traditional "bird" front cover. My purpose is to welcome back artist, Karl Taylor who specially did the painting for this cover and for a change, to recognise the two quarry species that supply us with most of our hunting. With the season almost underway, it is a time to reflect, admire and honour our feathered and furred quarry species, without whom we should have no sport.

So here you have it for 1996, falconry tales and experiences from our members, reports on field meets and different bird species, more history on the HPR dog breed (continued from last year) and grouse counting in Wales - I hope you enjoy this edition. □



"Jack Merlin" by Karl Taylor.

**Welsh Hawking Club
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Jemima Parry-Jones,
Stephen Frank

FRONT AND BACK COVER:
'Sweet Game' by Karl Taylor.

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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.

An American Experience

By Alan Gates

The Department of the Environment's Bird registration Section, released the figure, a few years ago, of around 8,000 or so raptor keepers in the United Kingdom. Sadly the bulk of this number are aviculturists, pet keepers, circus-arena lure swingers and posers, with I guess a mere 500 or so, who are truly dedicated towards striving for excellence in the art of falconry.

You may or may not, have some argument with my breakdown of the numbers, but I doubt that, if you are one of the dedicated, you will have never felt outnumbered by the pseudo-types.

I put this point of view forward, as a possible illustration to help explain my long time passion for communicating with, and occasionally meeting, some of the truly great practising falconers of our time.

I think it stems from my first steps into the art, at that time I already had a young hawk in my possession, when our town library divulged to me the fascinating world of falconry. I had to work hard to find any practitioners, and even harder still to convince them of my sincerity and dedication to warrant their valuable time. Most of this early communication was through letter writing, and as the years pass my letters continue to fly around the world. The desire to make contact and to learn from other falconers has never diminished. Maybe it's a sign of the advancing years but these days I am more perceptive to the fact that if an idea gels and is worth doing, then there is no time like the present.

For the past few years I have been enjoying an extended correspondence with Morlan Nelson, one of America's great ambassadors for the right of birds of prey to fly in the skies, without every rancher and landowner reaching for a gun.

It was Morlan's work with eagles that first inspired my initial correspondence, but it soon grew both in frequency and depth of content. So much so that I felt the need for us both to sit around the table for a number of days and just talk eagles.

As I mentioned before about "if an idea gels", I booked a flight to the US for early September with the prime objective of spending time with Morlan Nelson.

His home is situated in the foothills of Boise the capital of Idaho, this high desert region east of the Cascade Mountains is a magnet for serious US falconers, who wish to pursue the ultimate of game birds, the sage grouse, with their high flying, hard hitting hybrid falcons. With this in mind and to give Morlan a break from days of relentless questions, I also arranged to meet a few other falconers I knew of in the area.

What started as casual planning soon gathered momentum, and before I knew it I was standing in the foyer of Boise airport. It was early evening but I was feeling the effect of losing seven hours, and my body demanded a bed after twenty-three hours travelling. The following morning my room resembled an untidy office as I rang around fixing dates on what had been a loosely planned schedule before I landed. My main priority was to contact Charles and Patty Browning who I had last spoken to by phone on Thanksgiving Day. Then the exact dates had been a bit hazy, but the invitation was offered to join them and a few friends at camp on the Camas Prairie to hawk ducks and grouse.



Morlan Nelson with some of the mock-up powerpoles and proto-type nest platforms.

Now Patty's voice on the answer phone indicated they would be camped near Soldier Creek just north of Fairfield, and gave a mobile number if the caller required more details. Well I bloody did, but I could not get an answer from the mobile for the best part of the morning. Finally Patty's voice interrupted the phone's ring, she had moved out of the foothills that had been blocking the signal and was now out on the prairie hawking. I took her advice and cadged a lift from Boisian falconer Jon Neviasser who was driving down the following morning.

We grabbed a drive-in breakfast and proceeded along Interstate 84 slightly later than planned. Driving with large cups of scalding hot coffee in one hand and egg baps in the other, whilst talking falconry and swerving to identify the hawks sat on the cross bars of the power poles as Redtail, Swainsons, Ferruginous or Golden Eagles made the trip memorable.

We had enormous difficulty translating Patty's simple instructions on how to find the camp into reality, even the local Sheriff could not help. We had just returned to start at the Fairfield General Stores, when we both noticed that a Landcruiser that was being filled up at the gas pump and was carrying two fine hooded white Gyr Tiercel's. We were getting warmer. It turned out to be Dan Thee, who gave us the welcome news that all the falconers were meeting at the Stores prior to heading out on the prairie hawking. Within minutes we were surrounded by four-wheel drives, dogs, falcons and too many introductions for my brain to take in, and we were back on the road in convoy.

It was ten a.m. on a normal September day in Idaho, the temperature was heading for its daily peak of the low nineties and the sky, with not a cloud to be found which stretched for miles, was a deep blue. The convoy stopped along a dusty road, we were just south of the Soldier mountains on the Camas Prairie.

Rob Holen was kitted up ready to fly his falcon, and

proceeded out into the sage bush and cheat grass, the organisation was loose, not everyone was ready, some stayed with the vehicles. I headed out to catch up with the two or three falconers with Rob, who by now had removed the hood and held aloft his fine Gyr x Peregrine 'Vapour'. It leant into the slight breeze and pushed off the fist, a quick rouse and she was soon pumping into the sky. In no time I was having difficulty in keeping her in my 8 x 30s, having reached her pitch she turned and headed over Rob who was now moving towards a pond. With no undulation in the ground I had not seen this pond, these guys had been here before. A labrador and pointer set off for the water, and a group of small ducks flushed from the edge of the reed grass, I looked skywards, the falcon had teardropped and was stooping, I looked back to find the ducks, and

just located them when the air was torn apart as the falcon levelled out and tapped the lead duck in the head. It dropped stone dead. She rolled over and landed with her prize.

Next to put a falcon to the sky was Darryl Barnes with a lovely tri-bred Prairie x Lanner x Gyr which was climbing almost from the fist and was soon just a speck in the heavens. The pattern followed as before from the same pond, it had a good area of cover with the surrounding reed bed, which held pockets of ducks who quite obligingly stayed put until flushed and enabled repeated flights all morning.

The dogs flushed a small group of ducks and the tri-bred was soon ripping through them, a very experienced falcon she knew that a head hit meant certain death in the air, her victim was a Shoveler duck and was soon in the bag.

Charles Browning soon had 'Zorro' his strikingly marked Tiercel Gyr x Peregrine high over the pond, 'Zorro' like all the falcons flown was super fit by any standards let alone this early in the season. At one point I watched as Charles joined the dogs wading in the water to successfully flush ducks for his waiting Tiercel.

'Zorro' too took a Shoveler duck, these falcons made it look easy, and in doing so concealed the skill and experience of each of these falconer/falcon teams.

We left the pond to settle down and returned to the vehicles to quench our thirst and partake of a little food.

The heat of the day was reaching its peak, or at least I'd hoped it was. The discussion between the falconers reached a consensus that Charles would take his Golden Eagle 'Messiah' up into the foothills where he would hopefully find some lift, thus leaving the remaining falcons in the shade awaiting the cooler evening air in which to continue flying on the flat prairie.

Watching these superb falcons being flown was an unexpected treat for me, but to experience the techniques of one of the few American eagle falconers, was the number one reason I had travelled to the mid-west.

Charles carrying a hooded 'Messiah' climbed the hill, as I followed my footsteps disturbed the dry dusty soil. The gravelled lava rock in places was like marbles under your feet, together with the long woody stems of sage bush lurking close



Darryl Barnes, with his tri-bred Prairie x Lanner X Gyr.

to the ground just waiting to trip the unexpected footstep, made me aware that I lacked the aid of my trusty thumb stick.

I was feeling the effects of a lazy summer, Charles on the other hand was finely tuned. I watched as he strode up the hill a little ahead of me, the muscles of his bare legs pushing like pistons as they brushed aside the sage. This was not the start of the season for Charles and 'Messiah', as they had kept flying throughout the moult and successfully taken many blacktails. We stopped at about three hundred feet up the hill, the view out across the prairie was dramatic and I was surprised to see about fifteen ponds scattered about in front of us. The one we had been working the falcons over that morning was by far the largest. As our breathing pattern returned to normal, Charles removed the eagle's hood. The

slight breeze that was blowing gave the eagle little advantage, as it came across and down the hill from behind us.

As Charles extended his arm the eagle spread his wings, dropping altitude down the hill he then circled a little way out only to return and land. I know the feeling well, on your own and with the elements, the eagle and luck on your side it can be the recipe for a red letter day. With the expecting assembled crowd down below and the wind as flat as a f*#t. Things did not look as though the eagle was about to burn any primaries.

Once or twice the eagle did a circuit as though looking for a lift, then as we were slowly moving down the hill 'Messiah' found a very gentle thermal of warm air. In seconds the efficiency of those large broad wings soon had the eagle above us, within a couple of minutes he was high above the hills.

Charles and I hurried down the hill to the flat prairie below, all the time stopping to locate 'Messiah's' position in the sky, who was now over the second hill ridge.

By the time we were both on the flat the eagle was just a speck, I stayed put whilst Charles moved out into the prairie, then he would locate 'Messiah' and I could then join him. The eagle was now so high he was lost to the naked eye, we had to hand over his position to one another before you could take down your binoculars and walk out into the prairie. We continued our progress in the relay fashion moving towards the larger pond, Charles was hoping for a stoop at ducks.

The eagle was a good mile away and hundreds of feet above a second ridge of hills, he was riding the air drafts back and forth for about three quarters of a mile along the ridge of hills. At one point a wild eagle joined him, and I became confused as which was our bird, Charles knew and was proved right when the eagle I was watching disappeared into the blue and 'Messiah' finally started to fly towards the prairie still keeping the height gained.

With my aching arms, a sunburnt face and an hour later 'Messiah' was high above us and we were ready to flush the pond, by now everyone had joined us and a mass flush was on hand. Dogs, children and falconers pushed forward, a shout, someone called out "'Messiah' was stooping", from what must have been well over a thousand feet came a stooping

eagle in a style that any falcon would have been proud to match. A small flock of ducks had left the water and looked to be making for the next pond, one of them must have spotted the eagle and they all hit the water like a shower of stones. At about three hundred feet he terminated his stoop and levelled out, cutting across the sky with the accelerated velocity he had gained. Over flying the pond he turned then rolled over and stooped to the ground. as we made our way round the pond edge towards where 'Messiah' had landed, a wild eagle came low in from behind us and shot straight into where 'Messiah' was. Panic broke out as everyone rushed forward, mud splashed everywhere as most of us took the direct route.

As we approached to where the two eagles were it was 'Messiah' who took off first, we were almost on top of the wild eagle (a first year bird) before it left. 'Messiah' had taken a coot running across the mud flat, and to the young eagle 'Messiah' possibly reminded it of its parent, came in for a feed.

With no harm done, Charles called 'Messiah' down to a well earned reward.

The late afternoon was spent with Rob Holen and Jeff King's gyrs hawking sage grouse. As dusk crept in and Rob picked up his young gyr on a grouse kill, the sound of coyotes howling to one another across the hills brought a superb finale to a magnificent day's hawking the Camas in America's northwest.

Jon and I returned to Boise and to his home in the northern foothills, where he had so kindly invited me to spend a few days with him and his lovely wife, Wanda, and their young son, Nathan.

The lucky so and so had procured a job with The Raptor Research Center of Boise States University. Jon's work involved a study into what raptors see, this was supported by KENETECH Windpower, Inc. as they were concerned by the occasional raptor collision with wind turbine blades.

He was maintaining, training and flying a number of Redtailed Hawks and American Kestrels. These were housed in a facility at Zoo Boise and were flown out of town at a wind turbine field, the study hoped to find some marking or patterning effect that would make the moving turbine blades more visible to flying raptors.

It had been an extraordinary coincidence meeting Jon Neviasser in Boise, when his name had been suggested to me by Patty Browning I had that *déjà vu* feeling. The name rang bells, and as it turned out it was the right man in the wrong

place. Well that was due to the incorrect data stored in my brain. Jon had been logged in the brain cells, as a falconer to write to, because he was the only falconer that I had ever heard of to be flying ornate hawk eagles. Where things did not compute, I had Jon logged as living in Virginia. Whilst behind my back he had moved family and chattels and relocated in this falconers' paradise.

Stranger still, who should live next door, none other than Kent Carnie, falconer and Curator of the Archives of American Falconry. I had corresponded with Kent before leaving England and made arrangements to visit the Archives.

If like me you have a fascination for falconry art and literature, here is the largest and most accessible collection in the world. I spent two days combing through manuscripts, books, journals and personal papers and letters of some of the greatest American and British falconers.

This collection is a jewel in the crown of American falconry, it was created by the Peregrine Fund and is housed at its headquarters at the World Center for Birds of Prey. It is supported solely by donations much of which comes from the individual American falconer. Meticulously kept and collated by Lieutenant Colonel S. Kent Carnie, US Army (ret'd), who has been personally acquainted with many of the key historical figures of American falconry. Clearly Kent loves his work, "Every day is like Christmas, when I open the mail each morning" he told me. As I searched the old falconry journals, shouts of delight came from Kent as old black and white photographs slipped from newly opened envelopes. As I looked over his shoulder he named the faces, some mentors, some just acquaintances, many friends and many memories. I glanced out of the large window in front of Kent's desk as he talked, the large expanse of dried cheat grass rolled down the hill, golden honey brown in the morning sunlight. Just then an immature golden eagle flew past not one hundred yards from Kent's desk, "God damn it, if ever you need an assistant Kent, I'm just one phone call away".

Later, on the second day at the Archives, Cal Sandfort of the World Center offered to take me on a personal tour of the falcon factory. Although the breeding season was over, one got an excellent impression and no doubt a more detailed insight into the work of the Peregrine Fund. Cal is a dedicated, highly experienced falcon breeder, and as part of the "P" Fund's team he can justifiably be proud of their success.

The Peregrine Fund was established in 1970 by Professor Tom Cade at Cornell. After the widespread use of DDT and other chlorinated hydrocarbon pesticides, Peregrine numbers in the United States plummeted during the 1950s and 60s. By the end of the 60s the peregrine was extinct in the Eastern United States and reduced by 90% in the West.

Alarmed by this situation Cade and other eminent falconers developed a method of breeding peregrines in captivity, together with pioneering successful methods for the release of the captive bred falcons to the wild, made this the most successful breeding and progeny release conservation programme of the 20th century.

To date the Fund has released over 4,000 captive bred falcons in 28 states, the peregrine is well and truly saved in the United States and has been down listed from Endangered.

Strangely enough, I think the one thing that brought home to me the enormity of the project was the visit to the falcon food breeding center.

120,000 quail are needed to feed the falcons and standing in front of a hopper that must hold some 10,000 frozen quail, one gets to understand the logistics and enormous amount of work involved to succeed at such a scale.



Charles and 'Messiah' above the Camas Prairie.



Snake River birds of prey natural area.

It made me proud to know that falconers have achieved the largest and most successful captive breeding and release project of an endangered species, anywhere on the globe.

With the completion of the Peregrine restoration programme the Center is concentrating its efforts on other species such as the Aplomado Falcon, California Condor and the Harpy Eagle. All are breeding at the Center with the intention, as is happening with the Aplomado Falcon of releasing progeny into its natural habitat.

When I had first arrived in Boise I telephoned Morlan Nelson to arrange my schedule, he suggested that I look in at the World Center first, to see the showcase that is dedicated to some of his life. This I duly did as part of the official tour of its "Interpretive Center". On display was Morlan's first conservation tool, his holstered hand gun. Returning from the War, Morlan continued to fly falcons and make 8mm films of them, but so many people stopped to shoot at his falcon if it landed on a power pole that he started to carry a Colt frontier model six gun to fire in their direction if they attempted to shoot at his falcon.

This wild west action saved many of his falcons' lives but it nearly started a war in the State of Utah where he lived. So many individuals believed that all chicken hawks, bullet hawks and duck hawks should be shot on sight, and this caused many a heated argument which nearly ended in a shoot out. It became clear to Morlan that the way forward was through education not the bullet.

Walt Disney, having seen Morlan's early 8mm movies of his falcons brought him to Hollywood as a consultant on early wildlife adventures such as *The Living Desert* and *The Vanishing Prairie*. Morlan flew Redtailed Hawks and Prairie Falcons, which gave many Americans their first intimate sight of wild birds of prey. The effects of the Disney films and the six series of TV's *Wild Kingdom* which Morlan worked on had such a dramatic effect on the American public perception of wild birds of prey, now you hardly ever hear the words, "chicken hawk" used.

Also on show were Morlan's war medals, he had given them to the Center as he felt that their possession by him was morally wrong and they should have been awarded to his fallen comrades. As an officer in the legendary Tenth Mountain Division, the all-volunteer ski troops, Morlan saw action from the Aleutians to the battle of Brenner Pass. Decorated with the Silver Star and Purple Heart and wounded in the final week of hostility, but languishing in a

hospital bed with his leg in a cast was not to stop Morlan from a successful attempt to obtain a young kestrel he had been watching on a nearby cliff. It involved rappelling down a cliff, but he returned to the hospital with the kestrel, a broken cast and some unexplained rope burns on his pyjamas.

I was beginning to understand the enormity of the task ahead of me in trying to document much of Morlan Nelson's life. His long life right from a boy growing up on a North Dakota ranch has been dedicated to the education of the American people towards the conservation of its birds of prey.

My real interest in Morlan Nelson was his work with eagles, and predominately the Golden Eagle. Although Morlan has worked with Bald, Bateleur and Harpy eagles, it is his work with golden eagles which is so extensive and of such great interest to me. We talked for days, and Morlan demonstrated many of his techniques often using his female golden eagle to model a particular hood or to show me how he applied the snap fit jesses he developed for his film work.

Not all of our discussions were of the armchair variety, Morlan enthusiastically guided me on trips to the Boise River Canyon and the famous Snake River Canyon.

The night before our planned trip to the Snake River Canyon, Morlan announced that he would take a rope along, so *we* could go over the edge and I could have a better view point for photographing the canyon.

We could go over the edge of the canyon, never one to make much of a point as to how much of a wimp this Englishman might be, I kept my mouth shut. This coupled with the loose talk of sun basking Diamond Backed Rattlesnakes, had the effect of concentrating the mind. In fact I was conscious of where I was placing my feet in this hot arid desert landscape, I had no intention of disturbing the slumbers of any ten foot diamond back. No siree!

As we walked, Morlan pointed out many new and disused eyries of golden eagles and prairie falcons, in this remote and desolate canyon which at first glance is like many desert, river and cliff complexes in the North Western United States. It was not until Morlan Nelson moved to live in Boise, Idaho that he discovered that the Swan Falls area of the Snake River to be a very unique habitat, probably in the United States if not in the world.

It was through Morlan's work as a soil scientist and hydrologist employed by the US Department of Agriculture's Soil Conservation Service, that he discovered the condition of the top soil surrounding the top of the canyon. This deep, medium textured soil was perfect for the burrows of the Townsend ground squirrel who multiplied in the area in large numbers.

Morlan also discovered that up to 10% of the nesting prairie falcons in the United States live in this unique 33-mile stretch of the Snake River Canyon, and that the Townsend ground squirrel made up to 70% cent of the falcons' diet.

Forty-nine pairs of prairie falcons nested in the Swan Falls area, which means there was a falcon's nest every 300-400 yards in the canyon. Morlan also found that this area of South Western Idaho contained about 100 golden eagle eyrie's, probably the largest concentration in North America and possible the world.

He brought this unique location into the living rooms of millions of Americans through two nationally televised films that he worked on, Disney's *Ida the Off-Beat Eagle* and the Wild Kingdom series, *The Valley of the Eagles*.

Through an enormous amount of lobbying, Morlan brought the uniqueness of this priceless heritage to the attention of the Department of the Interior, and upon the recom-

mendment of the Bureau of Land management, a protective withdrawal of 26,255 acres of land along the Swan Falls reach of the river was designated a "Nature Area" a unique and exceptional sanctuary for rare birds of prey, now known as the Snake River Birds of Prey Natural Area.

In April of 1972, a new effort to increase consideration for eagles was spearheaded by the Idaho Power Company. It had found a problem with eagle electrocutions, the eagles often use power poles as landing sites from which to scan the surrounding terrain for game. A wingspan from six to eight feet makes it easy for a landing eagle to simultaneously touch the two phase conductors (or one phase conductor and a ground wire) on either end of the crossarm.

More and more eagles were being found under the company's power lines, victims not only of the electricity but of gunshots, poison and starvation. Although the power company was unable to do anything about the last three things, it felt it might be able to prevent the electrocutions, but it wasn't sure how.

Morlan Nelson now recognised as one of the world's foremost authorities on eagles, hawks and other birds of prey was enlisted to help with Idaho Power engineers and biologists to study the problem of eagles and power lines.

Idaho Power line crews built mock-ups of various types of poles in Nelson's backyard in the foothills near Boise so he could study the eagles' behaviour around the poles. Using his skills as a cinematographer, Morlan Nelson spent hundreds of hours filming his trained eagles in 16mm slow motion on the mock-ups. The big birds were tested in a variety of wind conditions and the films provided dramatic proof of an eagle's ability to touch both conductors with its wing tips.

A study of Idaho power pole landing sites determined that 95% of the electrocutions could be prevented by correcting 2% to 15% of the poles. This is due to the eagle's extreme selectivity in choosing a landing site. Prevailing winds, prey density and surrounding topography have to be exactly right.

The corrections made by the Idaho Power Company varied from covering conductors and raising one wire to building perches on top of the poles.

The sometimes fatal attraction of some species of birds of prey to nesting on power structures carrying 69,000 volts resulted in the Idaho Power Company's cooperation in designing nesting platforms for the larger birds, especially eagles.

The idea for this platform came when Nelson observed a pair of golden eagles nesting on the observation tower from which the Idaho Air National Guard marks bomb hits from fighter planes in training pilots.

The tower was an ideal nest, providing shade, elevation and protection from the wind. The nesting platform is mounted on a power structure, the open or unshaded end must be away from the tower. This gives the adults maximum freedom to land under all wind conditions.

The Company stipulated that these nesting platforms should be constructed of materials impervious to weathering and have a projected lifespan equal to that of the power pole - approximately 100 years. Sturdy, permanent structures would not only minimise maintenance and replacement costs but would be of greater advantage to the birds. The success of these corrective modifications was documented in slow-motion photography. After correction, the poles became positive ecological factors rather than inviting, but lethal killers.

It has been estimated that the work done to the Idaho Power Company's poles following Morlan Nelson's advice, which has been copied by other power companies within the

western US, has saved the lives of around 300 eagles each year. The work on the power line problem lasted over a decade and Morlan's own film company Tundra Films, filmed and produced the award-winning film *Silver Wires*, *Golden Wings* which won top honours in four national film festivals.

Nelson's work on the thousands of modified power poles and nest platforms have actually benefited the eagles and other raptors. While there's a solid prey base for raptors in the treeless high deserts of the western US, high places which can be used for nest building and hunting perches are scarce. The building of power lines across the nation has undoubtedly helped raptors to increase their geographic distribution.

With a lifetime dedicated to the promotion of the protection and better understanding of birds of prey, Morlan Nelson is "The Man who saved the Eagles".

When the time came for our goodbyes, it was a tough parting, I just wanted to stay a few more days. As Morlan put it, "We are looking at things from the same track", all I can say is that it is a pleasure and an honour to know you Morlan Nelson.

Back in downtown Boise with a couple of days before my return flight, I had made arrangements to meet just one more of the dedicated.

Some time back I had purchased a back issue of a *NAFA Journal* and the eloquent writing of Bruce Haak in his article entitled "Kudos For Kudo" had stuck in my mind. Later I purchased his masterful tome: *The Hunting Falcon*. Fired up by such knowledgeable and enthusiastic writing I felt I had to try and meet Bruce. It took numerous messages on our respective answering services before we managed to arrange a breakfast meeting. The problem I had in catching Bruce on the phone in person was all down to our "best loved English falcon artist", Andrew Ellis.

Bruce had driven Andrew to Fairfield, to spend time with Charles and Patty Browning. For most of my stay in Idaho, I seemed to be one step ahead or one step behind Andrew, "I think next time we plan to visit the US Andrew, let's check our diaries and fly there together".

Bruce and his lovely wife, Evelyn, and I, had an excellent time. Bruce is another of those fantastically fortunate characters, whose job seems to entail numerous helicopter rides into remote and wonderful country, looking for peregrine and prairie eyries. Working for the Idaho Department of Fish and Game as a Non-game Biologist seems to be a vocation in life to aim for.

Since my return to England, Bruce and I have kept up an



'Angel' female Ornate Hawk Eagle.

enthusiastic correspondence, only the other day I found him in my electronic mail box. This is a dangerous escalation, cutting down from, what at best was a two-week turn around by snail mail (Internet techno talk), to overnight communication. Where will it all end? □

Monkey Business

By Adrian Williams

This hastily written piece is a response to the news from our Editor, Ian that The Austringer is likely to be delayed this year due to a shortage of articles. As I have just returned (July '96) from a hawking trip in Zimbabwe any relevant article would be considered (and would I miss an opportunity to advertise the most exciting falconry experience possible?).

My first few days in Zimbabwe were spent at Bryn Farm, Norton which entails a drive from Harare airport west for about an hour. This is the family home of Andre and Laura Groenewald. Andre ranches cattle, rears pigs and grows tobacco and maize on several thousand acres. He keeps a pair of Peregrines, F p. minor, in a circular pen which is built on a man-made hillock. Whilst this gives them a panoramic



Crowned Eagle, 'Lundi' on kill.

view of the area the nest areas have a shielded backing which gives the occupants quite a natural atmosphere. He also has a pair for flying and the Crowned Eagle, *Stephanoaetos coronatus*. Following afternoon tea on my first day at Norton, Ade Langley and myself made ready to leave for the hawking field. 'Nirvana', Ade's peregrine was a little high but was expected to fly, and 'Slick', Andre's tiercel was spot on weight wise. We took the pick-up and drove for just five minutes along the farm roads until Andre decided on a suitable "land" to work. The pointers were out and away over the land – the maize had been cut – as soon as we had the hawks on the fist. 'Georgie' came on point at the first patch of scrub, backed by 'Krupp'. 'Slick' was put on the wing but as he was making his pitch the francolin bumped. 'Slick' tail chased them out of sight then came back over but not at any great height. Andre brought him down and we walked on and again we had a point in minutes. This time 'Nirvana' was put up but in fact she gave us a run around, landing in a tree and then refusing to come down for a few minutes. As soon as she did 'Slick' was put up and took a good pitch.

The various species of francolin commonly flown are broadly similar to partridge in size, flight and characteristics. 'Slick' performed a nice stoop knocking the quarry down but initially lost it in the long grass at the edge of the land. After the throw up he circled momentarily then took the francolin on the ground. Falconers in Zimbabwe generally examine their quarry thoroughly, weighing and measuring so that the data can be compiled by ZFC and then passed on for recording. This hen had a crop full of harvester ant heads, various seeds and some rhizome fibre.

Afternoon flying usually lasts about an hour and a half. Starting before four o'clock is not practical as it's too hot, but as soon as the sun drops then the change in temperature is very rapid. By 4.30 pm you are looking for your sweater! Then by 5.30 the light has gone. So about that time we retire to the truck, for a couple of sundowners and maybe chew some biltong before heading back.

On the next afternoon 'Lundi' the crowned eagle was back to her correct flying weight following her last gorge. Correct flying weight for her is just under 8lbs. We took the opportunity to see her flown before Andre took her off to Nyanga in the Eastern Highlands for a few days where the BBC natural history team from Bristol were filming several trained African eagles for the David Attenborough programme *Eagles of the World* which is to be shown next year. Neil Lucas who was member of the WHC for many years was there as one of the BBC team.

Our plan was to load 'Lundi' into her travelling box, then Andre would drive a few k's (kilometres) to the Kent Estate where a troupe of monkeys would, we hoped be relatively easy to find. Monkeys and baboons are considered vermin as they do a great deal of damage to crops often destroying more than they ever eat. Actually gamebirds are also considered vermin by some farmers! After about five miles we turned off the tar road onto the dirt estate road and as soon as we approached the large brick Kent Estate sign at the bottom of a "gomo" or hill we saw seven or eight vervet monkeys climbing over it. We drove straight past and on for half a mile before pulling in. There Andre prepared 'Lundi' for flying, climbed onto the back of the pick-up with her on the fist whilst I took the wheel and ambled back towards the monkeys. As soon as she spotted them 'Lundi' shot over the top of the cab at them – this was from one hundred and fifty yards but the sentry monkey sounded the alert and most of the troupe were away before she arrived. She is extremely fast, the crowned being a woodland eagle has short rounded wings and long tail – an 8lb Gos almost. She took stand in a tree while we leapt from the vehicle. Two adult monkeys screamed abuse and threatened her while she just calmly looked around and summed up the situation. The adults were not bothered at us being ten yards away but were intent on watching their mortal enemy – a money-eating eagle. 'Lundi' then flew about thirty yards to another vantage point, most of the trees being bush and thick with cover. We ran up the gomo toward her and the two adult monkeys took their chance to catch up with the troupe. From her higher position

'Lundi' had now located a solitary monkey high in a bush to her right where presumably it had stayed put when the troupe had made a run for it. Possibly it had not seen the eagle arriving. This monkey was agitated but unsure what to do. It fidgeted a little but 'Lundi' coerced it into action by launching herself at it. Although she could not foot it she flew over the top of it tearing the top of the leaf canopy as she passed and causing the monkey to attempt to make another tree from where it would try to follow the line taken by the troupe. 'Lundi' now landed in a large tree on the roadside about one hundred yards from the monkey. This was to be its only chance of escape but it did not take sufficient advantage of the situation. If the monkey ran and kept running through the covert it would have been difficult for the eagle to take it there. 'Lundi' came back over the bush and tore more of the canopy with the monkey again trying to change trees. After many repeats of this tactic the eagle had moved the vervet into about a dozen different trees without the monkey gaining any distance, it was still within thirty yards of the tree it started from. She tried about six times to foot the monkey whilst it was either just below the canopy or when it stuck its head above the canopy. Each time more and more branches and leaves were torn off but the vervet evaded those formidable feet. Although the crowned is not the largest nor heaviest

eagle in Africa, it is the most powerful. Its toes are very short and thick, as thick as a man's fingers. They have been recorded taking a huge variety of quarry the dasses, (hyraxes) being the most common with antelope next, to monkey, young baboon, mongoose, genet, leguaan, snake, ostrich chick, guinea fowl, korhaan and francolin. I have seen a dead monkey in a crowned nest and seen scrub hare, spring hare, monkey and oribi taken. Back to the monkey business in hand! Slowly but surely this intelligence of the eagle outmanoeuvred the intelligence of the monkey and she finally plucked it and another sweep of branches and leaves from the tree top. She dropped to the bush floor and as Andre made in to take her off the already dead monkey the now fully raised crown was magnificent. She looked beautiful and the crown actually made her look very cuddly – well I thought so, beauty is in the eyes of the beholder. Andre took his time and allowed 'Lundi' to pluck a little before picking her up to a spring hare leg. I put the monkey in the bag then 'Lundi' was fed whilst we made back to the truck for the very welcome Zimbabwe beer sundowners. Monkey hawking is one hell of an exciting aspect of falconry in Zimbabwe. If you would like to sit in the bush and drink cold beer after hawking in Zimbabwe then let me arrange it for you, 'phone me on 01443 206333. □

Many an odd day

By A. Dave Jones

Dave and Criss decided not to have a drink in the garden but to have an hour ferreting to stock up on rabbit for their hawks whilst moulting. Dave tells me that Criss always hangs out in wooded areas with his jack boots and mini shorts on, looking like a member of the Third Reich, that's why the rabbits give themselves up. Dave said Criss is a great asset.

This peculiar partnership of the Welsh in the woods with the English, started out with the sale of a cockerel that Dave sold to Criss for a £1 which is still outstanding) and since then they both have travelled hundreds of miles together, hawking and telemetry tracking from Weston-super-Mare to Gloucester and eventually finding the falcon

one mile from where Dave lost it (message – keep reading the books).

Dave said every time we go out Murphy's Law follows. Lesson number 1: How to part two hob ferrets when fighting without landing up with a tin of elastoplast on both hands. Lesson number 2: How to separate a Redtail and Harris Hawk when locked together up a 40ft tree with two screaming falconers below. Lesson number 3: Where to fly a kestrel without collecting Jack Kestrels, and so on.

All of these events landed up in laughter and no major injuries to hawks or animals, only falconers.

We will follow the progress of this young Goshawk using Mike McDermot's recipe for imprinting. □

Dave Jones (left) and Criss Lock (right) in their normal ferreting clothes with 'Eric and 'Fred' the ferrets.



Bechins

By Roger James

Always having been a bit of a day-dreamer, during my daily exercising of the many dogs June and I have in kennels, I often find myself thinking about the most obtuse subject.

Little seems to have changed during my thirty-odd years in falconry, but I detect many small and subtle differences in our approach nowadays to the training of our hawks, and with this in mind I thought I might throw a few spanners in the traditional works, and see if anyone would respond.

The Harris Hawk. Although I occasionally fly this species myself, I must admit to certain misgivings about its role in the world of falconry. It is often with dismay that I hear austringers of only a few years' standing boast about the number of say, rabbits their Harris has caught in one season, and how well it follows-on through the trees, and sometimes hunts for itself. But hang on a minute. I thought this was a spectator sport! It is certain that many of these kills happen out of sight of the handler, with very little of the flight being observed . . . I can't see much point in that! And that brings us to another aspect . . . the quality of the flight. Most Harris flights that originate from a high tree seem to possess as much style as a falling house-brick, with sometimes the pheasant or rabbit just squatting and being dropped on.

Would we not do our Harris's more justice if we flew them off the fist as one would a Goshawk? Certainly the flights would be more controlled and stylish, and as the Harris got fitter, an increase in score would be a more creditable one. And what about fitness? The fact that most Harris's are flown mainly on weekends, would seem to indicate that most of them are, as a result pretty unfit, and so we have to resort to the hawk taking stand in order to make up for its lack of speed and stamina, and so we're back to the start, which could make you think (if you were old traditionalist like me), is the Harris Hawk really a good thing for falconry? Does it enable short-cuts to be taken, in dedication, learning and fieldcraft? This brings me neatly on to the next conundrum . . .

Goshawks . . . are they "over-manned"? Sometimes having got Harris's out of their system, some austringers will want to try the Gos, many fall by the wayside because they ignore the basics of falconry, or are not methodical and disciplined enough, and return to the easier Harris, never to become the "Bride".

In the early days of manning, many people I'm sure over do it, before the Gos is ready for such intense handling. Longwing flyers, think nothing of leaving their falcons hooded for a week or more, with the bird only seeing the falconer when there is food involved. And this I think is the key . . . when the hawk shows any sign of stress, I believe it is best to

place it in the dark immediately, whether by hooding it, or by placing it in a dark mcws. Gradually the "exposure-time" may be lengthened, with the hawk never associating the handler with fear. This technique seemed to work with the few Haggard Gosses I've trained in the past, and I see no reason why it shouldn't work with a captive-bred Gos.

Longwings . . . to stoop or not to stoop, that is the question? Reading through one of Hal Webster's books a few months back, I was interested to see that the late Peter Asborno was a great advocate of stooping a game-hawk to the lure, and I remember a good friend of mine saying a few years ago, that he thought his display falcons were very much fitter than my game-hawks, because of the amount of flying they do every day.

I used to share in the traditional belief that in order to create a high-flying falcon one should on no account, stoop it to a lure, now I'm not so sure. My beliefs started to disperse a few years ago when I worked at the Welsh Hawking Centre, where I saw and trained a great variety of longwings. I noticed with several of them, that as they became fitter and put in a goodly number of stoops, when they were first cast off, the period of "leisure-flying" they displayed before coming in for the first pass became longer in duration. Not only this, but the falcons started to mount very high, not by lazily circling around on thermals or updraughts, but by pumping into the wind regardless of its direction. They were flying for fun! They felt good, and they certainly looked good.

The 1994 season started badly with the loss of a two-year-old Peregrine, after only three weeks flying, what was I going to do? I couldn't afford to buy another falcon (honestly! . . . so I thought I might try one of my display falcons, as a hunting bird. The female Saker in question was three years old, had never been entered, but was still fit, and flying pretty high in any wind conditions. On the moor for the first time I put her up over a solid point from my trusty old GWP. A brace of grouse put up, and from about 500 ft the Saker responded with a cracking stoop (which missed), and she tail-chased a grouse for a long way before giving up. Any doubts about it being a fluke, were dispelled the very next day, when from an even higher pitch she bound to a hen grouse in good style.

Now I know that Sakers are fairly clever, but I still use her for displays, where without a dog's presence, she is obedient to the lure, and I also still hunt with her, and when she sees the pointer, she climbs to a good pitch, and waits on very nicely. On the strength of this I shall be stooping my new game-hawk (Pere/Saker) this year, I'll let you know how I get on. □

A Kestrel helps with Game Hawking

By Mike Coupe

Every now and then we all need some luck and help to improve our falconry. My Tiercel Peregrine 'Tao' can be a great performer but on an off day he can be most frustrating if he takes stand in a tree, when the game has been spotted.

This winter Harry Robinson came with me on a cold December afternoon to fly with Martin Hargreaves at Widnes. The land is mainly arable, crossed by many minor and not so minor roads, ideal to drive around and spot a covey of great partridges. Binoculars and telescopes are a must for this type of falconry and Martin has perfected the art of spotting the quarry and taking an accurate line across the field to flush the partridge. This is not as easy as it sounds, many a falconer has found himself in the middle of a large featureless field, falcon waiting on, but unable to find the partridge he had seen so easily from the car. Martin always lines up the vehicle with a distant landmark, puts his falcon up some distance away, then comes back to accurately follow his line. As soon as the falcon takes wing the partridge "clap" (lie flat and motionless) and even on a freshly sown winter wheat field are virtually invisible and only flush when almost trodden on.

Anyway that's the theory. We found a covey of grey partridges resting in a rough grass strip at the side of a field. It was 'Tao's' turn to fly and I looked around for any handy perching places - a row of pylons, telegraph poles along the lane, farmhouse roof, several oak trees. No time to think anymore we need a falcon up to hold the partridge, so off with his hood he rouses and then takes off. Yes, straight to the first telegraph pole, just like a high level block with a good view! The sight of a peregrine sitting on his telegraph pole

enraged the local kestrel, who called and stooped at 'Tao' knocking him off the pole but he only flew along the road to the next pole. By this time the kestrel was going absolutely mental, stooping so hard that 'Tao' called out in alarm and fell off the pole; he did look as if he wanted to perch on the farmhouse roof but was too much of a coward to try with an irate kestrel in hot pursuit. 'Tao' then ringed up to a magnificent pitch but the inevitable had happened and our covey

had sneaked off, but luck was with us and we disturbed another covey and a good long flight ensued.

Now if 'Tao' does not behave himself I am told I need that kestrel to get him going! Motorway journeys can seem very long when all the time fellow falconers keep on saying, "there's a kestrel Mike".

Later in the season I had some very good flights at duck and one in particular I shall always remember. 'Tao' had become friendly, you might even say fallen in love, with a large female peregrine who frequents our flying ground. He was waiting on nicely and I was just about to flush some teal from a pond on the middle of a large field when he was joined by the falcon. I ran in to flush, 'Tao' selected his teal, closed up, stooped and knocked the duck to the ground. The teal then promptly flew off into the wind closely followed by my tiercel who was gradually

losing ground. Out of nowhere came the falcon in a long slanting stoop, overtook 'Tao' and bound to the teal only to drop it for him to catch in the air and mantle on the field. She then just flew off as much to say, "that's how you catch a teal". □



Mike Coupe with 'Tao'.

Beware

From Farmers Guardian

A simple temperature adjustment during incubation has been found to change male chicks into fully functioning egg-laying females before they hatch, according to Professor Marc Ferguson, Dean of the biological sciences at the University of Manchester.

More than 15 years ago, professor Ferguson discovered the sex of alligators is controlled not by sex chromosomes but

by temperature.

He then carried out experiments pulsing chicken eggs at specific temperatures and found he could produce clutches which were up to two-thirds female or two-thirds male.

This may help solve the problem of unwanted male chicks which number around 30 million each year. □

The story so far

By Roly Evans

We started 1995 as a regional club with a long year ahead, with many changes which will shape the meetings at the Goshawk. Unfortunately Terry Finnigan resigned due to personal commitments which left the region without a secretary. In July 1995 the region held a democratic election halfway through the year, I was voted in as secretary and was pleased to take up the position.

Since myself with Robert Antonio and Philip Hudson became a team or committee for Area 1, we would like to think we have grown from strength to strength with more members and guests attending our meetings each month. This is a credit to the committee with regular speakers attending or some form of entertainment provided at every club meeting. I recall in December, my good friend, Peter Gill, came across from Yorkshire making a 200 miles round trip with his friend, Richard Hill. They brought one of his jerkins which Peter had imported from Canada for the small sum of around £5,000. Peter, for an hour or more, gave a talk on all aspects of falconry dealing with breeding, rearing and flying falcons. He left the meeting with members following him to his car still asking questions. Hopefully Peter and Richard will return for another meeting for the members who missed them.

The committee was desperately trying to arrange an end of season field-meeting. The difficulty was it was late in the season with most shoots fully booked for January. To ring a gamekeeper and ask for permission for yourself is difficult, try asking for twenty people or more with hawks. After asking a good number of shoots with the keepers saying maybe next year, Mr Ian Grindy from the Littlewoods shoot in Formby near Southport gave us permission to hold a field meeting. The only problem was it

being the first Mr Grindy and his under-keeper Matt Herbert had held, so the numbers attending were kept low. The parties consisted of Harris Hawks, Redtail Hawks and Goshawks.

The day wasn't going to be easy for man and hawk. This was January 1996, the weather dry but cold and the quarry was seasoned pheasants the hawks were about to pursue. The quarry head count was modest which on the day, with other under-keepers in the field, was an advantage for future field meetings. Paul Dooley started the day with his male Harris hawk catching quarry on its first slip which started the day off well. With harris and goshawks out on the same field, caution was taken regarding no mishaps on the day. As the day progressed Mike Fagan's female harris hawk caught quarry after an excellent chase through a wood, across a field into another wood. Hopefully the field meeting was enjoyed by everyone attending including the regular shoot beaters who had turned up with cameras. I hope they got some good photographs of the hawks in flight. The feedback was promising. Hopefully Mr Grindy will announce another day for the club in October when he gives a talk on October 2nd. Well done to all the members attending. I stood for another year with Bob and Phil. In March

we were elected to carry on, hopefully for a better second year, so thank you for attending your regional meetings at the Goshawk. I hope to see you in a second term and remember a club isn't a club without members. Special thanks to Antony O'Connor, Brian Heal, Guy Wallace, Peter Gill, and Richard Hill for excellent talks given at club meetings. One last word for the regional chairman, "get your TV fixed". □



The photograph was taken while the goshawks were working a wood.

Falconry and Conservation in Zimbabwe with notes on the Taita Falcon

By Adrian Williams

Compiled from notes supplied by Ron Hartley, President of Zimbabwe Falconers Club and several members of the ZFC.

Through various sources including as the Welsh Hawking Club representative to the International Association of Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey, I have long been aware of the contribution made to conservation by the ZFC and the important PR work by members on behalf of falconry. Having had the opportunity to visit Zimbabwe and meet some of the ZFC members I was extremely impressed to see for myself the efforts that these conservationists make to pass on important information in regard to research work not only on raptors but game species and others. They really are an inspiration and I am very proud to be able to relate to those wildlife lovers and conservationists who are non falconers how these falconers and sometimes their families spend a great deal of time, even their holidays researching for projects

like the one on the taita Falcon but also on the varied eagles present, with no thought to benefiting themselves directly other than perhaps for the satisfaction of having assisted. Some of the species are not suitable for falconry or else are not legally allowed to be used. Zimbabwe has a well thought out policy of cooperation between Government and falconers.

I observed with a feeling of honour on countless occasions whilst falconers like Geoff Boddington removed his African Peregrine from a Fancolin only to then take notes on the crop contents, weigh various organs, measure feather lengths and so on.

I am grateful to Ron Hartley who is research coordinator, for permission to use some of the data collected in the accompanying article. □

Falconry as an Instrument for Conservation in Zimbabwe

By R. R. Hartley

Zimbabwe Falconers Club, Falcon College, Esignodini, Zimbabwe

Hartley, R. R. 1993. Falconry as an instrument for conservation in Zimbabwe. Proc.VIII Pan-Afr.Orn.Congr. 105-110.

Falconry has been a legal pursuit in Zimbabwe for more than 23 years. A special falconry policy was established in 1976 by the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management and the Zimbabwe Falconers Club (ZFC), related to the new Parks and Wildlife Act of 1975. This Act sought to entrust a greater conservation onus on the users of wildlife. The bases of the falconry policy are a code of conduct and a grading system. These have resulted in a high standard of practical falconry and conservation practices and a modest but steady growth in the number of falconers. The ZFC conservation strategy has 4 components: education and public awareness through talks and demonstrations by experienced falconers and from 2 falconry clubs at private schools; veterinary care and rehabilitation; a research data base on raptor nest sites used for studies of populations, comparative ecology, DDT impact and the prey base of hawks; and, a

captive breeding and release programme mainly on the African Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus minor*.

Key words: conservation, education, rehabilitation, captive breeding, falconry, Zimbabwe.

Introduction

"Until recent decades falconers were frequently the only ally of raptors and much of the statutory protection is a direct result of the falconers' commitment to preservation of birds of prey" (Burnham 1990). Falconry has never been more popular than it is today, with 10,000-20,000 practitioners. They are found primarily in the Middle East, Europe and North America with lesser numbers in South America, Australasia, Africa, the Asiatic part of the former Soviet Union, Korea, Japan and the Indian subcontinent (Cade 1982).

Most falconry organisations have established strict codes of

conduct controlling the capture of raptors from the wild and how they are maintained and flown (Burnham 1990). In North America, where there are roughly 3,500 falconers, studies have shown that there is no negative impact on raptor populations by the demands of falconry (Burnham 1990).

There is relatively little organised falconry in sub-Saharan African where it is restricted to Zimbabwe, South Africa and Botswana. In Zimbabwe there has been an extended period of successful operation and the sport has been recognised by the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management (DNP) as an integral part of conservation policy (Thomson 1984a, 1984b and 1984c). The DNP falconry policy (Thomson 1980) has been used as a model in South Africa and Botswana and has also been considered in Namibia and Kenya. There is still, nonetheless, considerable apprehension by African ornithologists in respect of legal falconry.

The aim of this paper is to show that the Zimbabwean approach of encouraging non-governmental organisations with a vested interest in a wildlife resource is working well with falconry and raptor conservation (Burnham 1990, Steyn and Arnott 1990, Hartley 1991). It highlights the government's unique falconry policy which has allowed the Zimbabwe Falconers' Club (ZFC) to achieve creditable results in conservation, education and public awareness, veterinary care and rehabilitation, research and base line projects, and captive breeding and release of raptors.

Policy

Falconry is legal in Zimbabwe and is administered by the DNP. It is regulated by a government-appointed coordinator who is also a leading falconer. Permits are issued as a code of conduct (Thomson 1976) which is a signed contract between the falconer and the director of the department. Falconers are examined and graded as A, B or C, reflecting their proficiency and determining the species they may use. Only indigenous raptors are permitted. All falconers with permits may fly non-protected species (group C) such as the African Goshawk *Accipiter tachiro*. In order to fly B category hawks (Lanner Falcon *Falco biarinius*, African Hawk Eagle *Hieraaetus spilogaster*, and Black Sparrowhawk *Accipiter melanoleucus*) the falconer must satisfy an examiner that he has reached an approved level of proficiency with one of the non-protected species (category C). To fly the African Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus minor* a falconer has to satisfy 3 specially appointed A grade examiners that he is highly competent with the Lanner Falcon.

The proficiency level is based on general hawk management, response to the handler and performance on wild quarry. This system has ensured high standards of practical falconry, coupled with the necessary expertise in managing the raptors and even their prey. Without the commitment to the sport itself (Hartley 1983a) there would not have been the same motivation in conservation activities.

No unreasonable constraints have been placed on acquiring hawks, including the peregrines, and there has been no commercialisation of raptors. Zimbabwe falconers are neither mere hawk keepers nor "Robin Hood" falconers (Glasier 1978). If there is no time to hunt a hawk properly it is hacked back or passed to someone else. Proper falconry is very demanding and should not become popularised.

Enthusiasts are encouraged to join the club and they are given assistance. The club has run an open, high profile operation in the country for 16 years yet there has never been a problem of an excessive number of members (Table 1). Some of the best falconers cease practising when they do not have

sufficient time to hunt their hawks. Most of these still remain strong supporters of the club and several participate in the research programme.

Table 1 Number of members and graded Falconers of the Zimbabwe Falconers Club

Year	Number of members	Graded falconers			Notes
		C	B	A	
1972	48	n/a	n/a	n/a	3 flying Peregrines
1977	46	14	27	5	6 A & B active
1979	55	15	35	5	21 A & B active
1981	49	6	16	7	15 A & B active
1982	n/a	9	20	9	16 A & B active
1983	57	14	25	8	18 A & B active
1984	70	14	25	10	19 A & B active
1985	76	18	13	11	25 A & B active
1986	97	19	23	13	25 A & B active
1987	111	14	21	14	17 A & B active
1988	119	20	23	16	15 A & B active
1989	140	25	24	19	25 A & B active
1990	134	15	24	19	22 A & B active
1991	141	12	23	19	22 A & B active

In return for use of hawks from the wild, there has been a willingness to participate in the research activities well beyond what the code of conduct requires. Members have to report nest sites, provide locational and mensural data on captured hawks and submit carcasses but a system has been established whereby they do not feel pressured by the research team and its coordinator. Members consequently offer this information freely and seek advice on relevant methods.

As a member of the research committee the DNP Chief Ornithologist has helped to plan and guide the projects.

Education and public awareness

Graded falconers have been helping apprentices for many years. This has been achieved partly by falconry clubs at Falcon College and Peterhouse private schools. Both clubs are supervised by A-graded falconers (Hartley 1987, 1988a). Prospective members undergo a selection test and successful ones become apprentices. Hawks are hunted on a daily basis, primarily during the winter.

There are 3 benefits from successful hunting:

- young falconers take out other students on hunts, enhancing and extending the principles of raptor conservation;
- students are educated in raptor management, constraints to keeping wild birds, and aspects of comparative ecology and behaviour of raptors and their prey; and
- the falconers are encouraged to record prey species, location, behaviour especially evasive tactics), weights and mensural data, breeding condition and feeding habits.

Many students are the sons of farmers and they are able to educate their parents and farm workers about raptor conservation. This is further enhanced by an annual field meeting, held in a different region each year. Local farmers are invited and are given every opportunity to see the hawks. Informal lectures are also given. It is likely that such exposure helps to reduce the risks of direct persecution of raptors by farmers and by their workers. The club produces and distributes "Don't shoot hawks" stickers that are displayed on vehicles throughout the country.

Many local and visiting groups are provided with lectures and hunting demonstrations. Regular talks have been given for many years on the national radio programme "Wildlife Forum". These have described falconry, biology and management of gamebirds and raptors, and the research and captive

breeding programmes. Presentations have been made on national television and numerous lectures been given to bird clubs and wildlife groups.

Veterinary care and rehabilitation

A veterinary surgeon and a specialist surgeon, both practising falconers, have provided the veterinary service for 16 years. The ZFC pays only for the drugs (Hartley 1988a). The service has achieved some remarkable results. Post mortems are conducted on all casualties with the assistance of the Department of Research and Specialist Services. Useful data have been collected, including a chronicle on avian tuberculosis.

Many road casualties and persecuted raptors have been successfully treated and rehabilitated. The club has assisted in building holding pens and several members (including the school clubs) have cared for and released hawks that have recovered, using standard falconry hacking techniques. A key advantage is that none of the falconers stands to gain by keeping these extra hawks, while they also understand that it is necessary to use proper hacking techniques and not instant releases.

Problem hawks, such as Ayres' Hawk Eagles *Hieraetus dubius* have also been trapped and relocated.

Research

As the practice of falconry has been largely dependent on taking raptors from the wild, a harvest must be justified on the basis of availability. Falconers must report nest sites to the coordinator. They are also encouraged to collect data on productivity. The success of the system can be judged by the increase in known Peregrine sites from 10 in 1971 to 47 in 1984, 107 in 1989 and 123 in 1992. The same has happened for other falconry species, such as the Lanner, Black Sparrowhawk, African Hawk Eagle, African Goshawk, Ovampo *Accipiter ovampensis* and Rufous-chested *A. rufiventris* Sparrowhawks, plus those not generally used as Taita Falcon *Falco fasciinucha*, Crowned *Stephanoaetus coronatus*, Martial *Polemaetus bellicosus* and Verreaux's *Aquila verreauxi* Eagles. In 1983, just 2 Taita Falcon sites had been confirmed, both in the Batoka Gorge. An additional 114 sites have now been identified (Hartley 1991).

The data bank has facilitated specialised work on DDT impact on the African Goshawk and the African Peregrine Falcon (Hartley 1991) and the ZFC has been involved in DDT research since 1976. The African Goshawk study is a joint project with the British Overseas Development Administration (ODA) while that on the Peregrine is in collaboration with The Peregrine Fund Inc (TPF) and the DNP (Hartley 1991).

Data have been used by the DNP to revise the list of Specially Protected species in Zimbabwe and in the Zimbabwe Bird Atlas project. Data are currently being analysed on the status and comparative ecology of the Peregrine, Lanner and Taita Falcon.

Falconers often trap hawks away from nest sites and receive injured birds from the public. All recoveries are documented with relevant information on location, date of recovery, moult, plumage characteristics, weight and measurements. Some useful work has been done on the Ayres' Hawk Eagle while 2 specimens of the little known Siberian Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus calidus* have also been collected (Hartley 1991). Whenever possible carcasses have been submitted to the Natural History Museum in Bulawayo or to the DNP.

Blood samples have been taken from a variety of captive raptors to assist scientists overseas. Studies have also been conducted on the food intake of captive raptors.

A special survey on the raptors of the Batoka Gorge system was started in 1983. This has now developed into a more detailed study on populations and ecology to assist both in environmental impact assessment and the mitigation measures necessary for a planned hydroelectric dam (Hartley 1993a). The ZFC has also proposed that the area be proclaimed a special bird of prey sanctuary (Hartley 1991).

Another key aspect has been the collection of data on quarry species, increasingly relevant from an organisation that hunts a wide range of gamebirds (Hartley and Mundy 1993) and other species throughout the year. Most versatile have been the African Goshawks, which take 101 species, including birds, mammals and reptiles (Hartley 1993b). The possibly most interesting study concerns the evasive tactics of the prey. The ZFC publishes its results and also produces its newsletter *Talon* twice a year.

The fieldwork team and other organisations

The ZFC has built up a strong team of supporters who know what they are looking at and how to go about basic fieldwork. Last year some 20 highly competent field workers were involved and a further 20 individuals helped. Key members are farmers, tradesmen, schoolmasters, doctors, accountants, businessmen, veterinary surgeons and wildlife biologists. A group with such diverse talents has proved largely instrumental in the overall success of the operation.

The ZFC has retained close ties with TPF since their first association in 1978. The ZFC is affiliated to the International Association of Falconry (IAF), the North American Falconers' Association (NAFA), the Endangered Wildlife Trust of Southern Africa (EWT), the Southern Africa Ornithological Society (SAOS), the African Raptor Information Centre (ARIC), the Zimbabwe National Conservation Trust (ZNCT), the Ornithological Association of Zimbabwe (OAZ), the Zambezi Society and the Wildlife Society of Zimbabwe. Working relationships have also been established with the ODA, the Transvaal Museum and the Natural History Museum in Bulawayo.

In 1989, the ZFC established the Raptor Conservation



Fund (RCF), administered by the ZNCT. It has supported all projects since then and has helped fund recent work on Verreaux's Eagles in the Matopos. TPF gave climbing and incubator equipment, a Landcruiser and 2 white water rafts. The UK National Birds of Prey Centre (NBPC) gave incubators and a computer. The EWT has provided spotting scopes.

Captive breeding and release programme

The programme has focused mainly on the African Peregrine Falcon but 4 Taita Falcons have now been added. The DDT threat and the need to be self-sufficient in producing hunting hawks stimulated the programme (Hartley 1983b, 1986, 1993c, Thomson 1984c). Started in 1978 as a joint venture between the DNP and the ZFC, the first successes occurred in 1981 when 2 pairs produced 3 young. By the end of 1991, 13 pairs had produced 109 young, 99 of these fledging successfully. Trained birds lost during falconry hunts amount to 10 and 27 have been released to the wild, mainly in the past 3 seasons (Hartley 1993c). Each released bird has been ringed and 5 have been recovered while 2 have been seen at the release sites several months later.

This programme is the only programme to date that has produced the African Peregrine in captivity. A total of 44 has been used including 28 from the wild and 16 bred in captivity: 23 of these have made 13 successful pairs. Careful changing of mates has helped to improve success. So far, 16 pairings have been unsuccessful while 6 are still unproven. The success rate has been 52.3% of the birds breeding, comparing well with levels of 30–50% achieved elsewhere (Lindberg 1982, Cade 1988). Nearly all birds produced have resulted from natural incubations and have been reared full time by the parents. Almost all of the breeding birds have been recruited from the pool of trained and hunted hawks.

A great strength of the programme is the participation that it has encouraged. It has avoided being exclusive and 14 individuals have held Peregrines for breeding, while 18 falconers have contributed birds. A wide base of expertise has been built up, plus the appropriate infrastructure and a substantial gene pool of Peregrines (Hartley 1993c).

The total cost of the programme in 1978–1991 (1990 prices) for food and equipment, has been Zim\$ 214 286 or less than the price of a second-hand Mercedes in Zimbabwe (Hartley 1993c). This is a cost of Zim\$ 2165 per fledged chick. Nearly all these costs have been borne by individual breeders.

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What is known about the Taita Falcon

The rare Taita Falcon occurs only in Africa – from northern Kenya to the eastern Transvaal. Much of the species data has been gathered in Zimbabwe by the Raptor Research Programme of the Zimbabwe Falconers' Club (ZFC), assisted by The Peregrine Fund Inc. (TPF, USA) and the Department of National Parks and Wild Life Management (DNPWLM). As the Batoka Gorge system is a key stronghold for Taitas, a proposal to turn it into a sanctuary is being considered. Ron Hartley (ZFC research coordinator) has spent over a decade studying this attractive and elusive falcon, publishing four papers and a popular article on the species. He highlights . . .

An adult male Taita Falcon (*Falco fasciinucha*) (weighing 200g) sat on a falconer's perch like a little avian jewel one April afternoon in 1975, providing my first opportunity for detailed observation. A schoolboy, Mike Bull, had found it injured by the roadside north of the Forestry Training school at Christmas Pass, near Mutare. This Taita made it back to the wild – courtesy of Ray Black, a falconer.

At that time the Taita was known only from 11 sites in five countries:

- Taita Hills (type specimen; Reichenow and Neumann, 1895) and Voi in Kenya;
- Yavello and Olisiraw Mountain in Tanzania;
- Fort Johnson and Mlanje Mountain in Malawi;
- Muchinga Escarpment and Batoka Gorge system in Zambia;
- Chimanda Reserve, Batoka Gorge, Birchenough Bridge, Nyanga Downs and Sengwa Gorge in Zimbabwe.

However, the only two breeding sites located were in the Batoka Gorge, near Victoria Falls. All but one of the other records consisted of specimens.

One seen in 1975

In 1975, a single Taita had been sighted by Carl Vernon flying along the escarpment at Chizarira, while in the same year a pair was found breeding on a low sandstone cliff in the Chirisa area. At about the same time, J. G. Williams located the northernmost distribution of the species in northern Kenya, near the border with the Sudan – two pairs were resident on a 10-kilometre line of lava cliffs overlooking Lake Turkana.

Then in 1976, Nigel Hunter observed young flying around their nest on a steep-sided granite hill in the Mwanza district of Malawi. Taita falcons were also sighted in the Milimanjaro and Samburu areas of Kenya.

Interest in the species increased when it became apparent that a dam was planned for the Batoka Gorge, a key stronghold for the species. In August, 1983, Professor Tom Cade and Mr Jim Weaver of TPF visited me at Falcon College, en route to Zambia, where they collected four Taita nestlings

(three females and one male) under permit for a captive-breeding project.

TPF had led the highly successful programme to restore peregrines in North America, using a large-scale captive-breeding and release operation – the first of its kind. They have now bred Taita falcons, while the ZFC has recently established four pairs in captivity. Cade and Weaver were keen to continue research on the Taita, particularly as TPF had just established its World Center for Birds of Prey in Boise, Idaho.

In Zimbabwe, Ron Thomson (DNPWLM and ZFC) and Dr Arthur Dunkley (ZFC) were already investigating the status of the species and had collected information on sightings of single birds and pairs at an additional seven widely separated localities in Zimbabwe.

Meanwhile, in Uganda, German ornithologists P. Moller and K. Otte were surveying a 70-kilometre-long cliff line at Mount Elgon, where they found four nesting pairs of Taita falcons (Moller published an informative paper in 1989).

Collaboration

Jim Weaver returned in 1984 to assist with fieldwork in Zimbabwe, and so a collaborative effort was established between TPF, ZFC and DNPWLM. ZFC data helped in the location of two new Taita nests that year, while Weaver also located two new nest sites in the Batoka Gorge. While young were not collected from the site in 1984, an immature male with a broken wing, from the Chimanimani area, was given to the

TPF project by the DNPWLM falconry coordinator, Dr Arthur Dunkley.

Since then, fieldwork has been conducted by the ZFC research unit, sometimes assisted by Weaver. A great deal of new information has now been assembled and much of it published.

A total of 17 nest sites have now been identified in Zimbabwe, while pairs have been located in another five locations, where breeding is likely. It is possible that there are more than 60 breeding pairs of Taita falcons in Zimbabwe.

In 1990, a pair was found breeding in South Africa – the



An adult female Taita falcon.

first time the species had been confirmed in that country. Consequently, it is likely that the Taita falcon occurs more or less continuously from northern Kenya to the eastern Transvaal, always coincident with cliff habitats (where they breed), in well-wooded river valleys or in gorges.

These are also the conditions favoured by the similar, but much larger African peregrine falcon (*F. peregrinus minor*). The peregrine is the dominant species and most likely affects the distribution and abundance of the Taita.

In the Batoka Gorge, peregrines outnumber Taita falcons by about two to one. Overall in Zimbabwe, the ratio is 7:1 in favour of the peregrine. As yet, no Taita falcons have been found breeding in the granite shield areas, where lanner falcons (*F. biamicus*) generally outnumber peregrines. Thus, in these circumstances, the Taita is most likely outcompeted by both of the larger species.

By contrast, in the wooded river valley systems of the lowveld areas peregrines dominate, and lanner falcons are much scarcer. For instance, I have yet to see a lanner falcon in the Batoka Gorge, although I have seen one on the plateau about 10 kilometres away.

Peregrine and Taita falcons are very similar in structure, feather texture and hunting behaviour, being specially adapted to fast, attacking flights at flying birds. As specialist bird hunters, both species are able to exploit avian prey that ventures over the woodland. Such circumstances are optimum over river systems.

Being 40% the mass of the peregrine, the Taita specialises on smaller birds (mean prey = 36g) than its larger relative (mean prey = 125g). Virtually any bird a Taita can capture (25 species recorded) will also be potential prey for a peregrine (over 60 species recorded).

By contrast, lanner falcons are generalists: that is, they prey on a wider range of species, including birds, mammals and reptiles. Consequently, they prefer more open habitats, to the extent that they have been replacing peregrines over areas of the highveld and middleveld where there has been extensive clearance of land for agriculture.

Fitting in where it can

Generally, Taita falcons occupy less favourable sites for breeding than peregrines nearby: either smaller cliffs, less dominant features or faces with a less favourable aspect. Wherever Taitas have been found, peregrines have been found also, and the smaller falcon has been constrained to fit in where it can.

Despite this, a pair of Taita falcons have bred successfully when their nest was just 300 metres from an active peregrine site. Although much more secretive, Taita falcons are now shy when encountered.

There have been fears that DDT – used widely up to 1990 for tsetse fly control – may have affected Taita falcons in the Zambezi Valley, especially in Chizarira and Chirisa. Four sites studied here in the mid-1980s have been abandoned, although another site has yielded young regularly. Detailed research on the impact of DDT on the peregrine in the same region has revealed significant levels of DDT in the eggs, but not sufficient to cause widespread failure. However, it is possible that the Taita falcon is more sensitive to DDT than the peregrine, in the same way as the merlin (*F. columbarius*), a comparable small falcon of the northern hemisphere.

As DDT is no longer used for tsetse fly control, its effects should decrease in future. Fortunately, DDT levels were very low in a Taita egg sampled from the Batoka Gorge, while

shell thicknesses were just less than normal for a site in northern Zimbabwe. Neither of these areas were ever sprayed for tsetse fly control.

Habitat destruction has affected Taita falcons in north-east and eastern Zimbabwe. This threat may now increase in the Zambezi Valley, where the tsetse fly has been eradicated, notwithstanding the fact that much of their habitat is too rugged for settlement. About 25% of their estimated breeding population occurs in the 122km Batoka Gorge system and immediate tributary areas. It is important that the area is properly conserved. Fortunately, much of their range in the remainder of the Zambezi Valley already consists of protected areas.

The Taita falcon co-exists in the Batoka Gorge system with another 30 species of diurnal (including migrants), and seven species of nocturnal, raptors – 8 to 10 pairs are estimated to inhabit the stretch from Victoria falls to the planned dam site. Together with the estimated 15 to 18 pairs of peregrines, this constitutes the most densely populated zone for falcons known in Africa.

Proposal for sanctuary

Not surprisingly, it has been suggested that the area be set aside as a sanctuary, and last October I was asked by the DNPWLM to present a formal proposal to this effect. Although Victoria Falls is a world heritage site, only a limited section along the Zimbabwe side is officially protected, while there is no management plan for the gorge rim, along the extensive section of the Hwange Communal Area. It is preferable to provide nesting raptors with some degree of privacy, so development along the top of the gorge system in particular should be kept to a minimum.

Already there are six access paths for rafting along the Zimbabwe side, while a safari operator has recently erected a chalet, plus servants' quarters, at the Dibudibu recess, some 20 kilometres downstream from Victoria Falls. As the exit points are used episodically during the day, it is unlikely that they have had a significant effect overall.

However, no one has even considered whether these points unduly encroach on nesting territories, while some of the terminuses have been significantly cleared of woodland at the top, presumably to provide better views. Occasionally litter also builds up.

RAF Hercules in gorge

Once, when conducting some fieldwork down a cliff face, I was startled by a thunderous roar of engines. A Royal Air Force C150 Hercules transport plane sailed past, inside the gorge! Clearly a crew looking for kicks during the period of the Commonwealth Conference in 1991. Helicopters often sally forth into the gorge as well. It is evident that the time has come to develop a management policy. Helicopters on rescue or research missions – yes. On pleasure trips – no! Nestling raptors and black storks (*Ciconia nigra*) can easily be flushed prematurely, at their peril.

While the building of a dam will create its own impacts, it is probable that the secondary developments from tourist-related activities and the sheer numbers of people could outweigh these for the cliff-dwelling raptors, especially, for example motor boats cruising around a narrow, gorge-fringed dam. With a carefully considered management plan such impacts could be minimised, without preventing reasonable levels of utilisation. Having an established management plan for both sides of the river should be a priority, particularly before a dam is built. □

You don't know what you've got until it's gone

By R. Bebbington

Prior to the commencement of the 1995/96 season I had high hopes of flying a female black spar. The breeder from whom I expected to obtain this hawk, decided to retain all progeny produced, in the hope of establishing further pairs.

As so often happens, finances set aside for the purchase of this hawk were soon channelled into various "home improvements", leaving me hawkless and penniless (well almost!).

Rather selfishly (I'm trying to be as honest as possible here!) my thoughts and hopes turned to the club breeding scheme.

I should imagine like a good many others, I had never given the scheme much thought in the past. I had previously always been in the fortunate position of always either owning a hawk or of having sufficient funds to purchase one.

I decided to put pen to paper and apply to the club for a female goshawk. I had all the right ingredients for a full season, plenty of time, access to large areas of land and plentiful amounts of quarry, just no hawk.

To cut a long story short, I was fortunate enough to be allocated a female goshawk. 'Grace' as she was named, progressed quickly through the rudimentary stages of basic training.

Something unexpected happened once we reached the stage where she was flying attached to the creance, approx. 30 yards. I became puzzled by her obvious interest in some concealed object in tall grasses close by. I sent my dog over to the spot, where the hawk was interested. The dog went on

point, our mystery object broke cover and ran straight towards 'Grace'. 'Grace' instinctively left the fence post, pursued and bound to her first rabbit. So what's so unexpected about that, you're probably wondering? Well, up to now, she had never seen as much as a rabbit lure, let alone the real thing. I gave her her fill and the day after off came the creance and we went out hunting (incidentally she caught two bunnies on her first day free of the creance). The area over which I fly my hawks is probably quite untypical of what would be considered as the norm for an accipiter.

It consists of large open areas of moorland and fell sides. This has always allowed me to give my hawks a large amount of independence. They sit on my fist only as long as they wish. Not being restrained results in less frustration, more time on the wing and a higher degree of fitness. In fact you would be quite amazed at the length of time a hawk will actually choose to sit on the fist if the fist represents a pleasurable place to be.

Young hawks have a naivety and innocence that can only be found in children. No one had prejudiced their minds and everything is fair game. The exuberance of youth spurred 'Grace' on in the pursuit of brown hares and she actually took a total of three before she wised up to the fact that they were more trouble than they are worth. Bearing in mind she began the season with a flying weight of 2lb it's amazing she managed to secure three.

In one or two areas, we have small ghylls with sides extending to a height of 60-80ft. By walking the bottom and beating



Smile for the camera!

Month	Number of days flown	Quarry taken
August	21 days	30 rabbits 1 starling
September	20 days	26 rabbits 3 brown hares 1 curlew (released unharmed)
October	21 days	32 rabbits 3 pheasants 1 moorhen
November	19 days	32 rabbits
December	17 days	18 rabbits 1 mallard (drake)
January	14 days	11 rabbits 2 pheasants 1 moorhen
February	2 days	7 rabbits
Totals:	114 days flown	169 head

it affords you the opportunity not normally experienced of viewing an accipiter from below.

It's a splendid sight watching the hawk criss crossing the ghyll side. Obviously a little control is exercised, especially in a game rich area, to prevent total independence and a self hunting bird. 'Grace' hit a thermal one day and within seconds was a dot in the sky, thankfully she came down to the lure. I wish I could have ended this article by stating that 'Grace' is now at liberty, moulting in preparation for next season. But alas not! One moment of carelessness and an overweight bird flew quickly out of her chamber, aided by a week of strong westerly winds, I have never as much had a single glimpse of her since.

As the title of this article states "You don't know what

you've got till it's gone". Not only does this apply in a personal vein to myself and 'Grace', but also to the club breeding scheme. How would you feel if your only way of obtaining a hawk was through the club and in turning to it, found it was no more, due to lack of interest.

I've heard it said that a club bird never feels like your own, but let me finish by stating that as far as I was concerned, 'Grace' was very much my hawk, whilst we were together, and the season's total caught by my hawk is documented in the table on the previous page.

Thanks are extended to the following: Adrian Williams and Bill Buss, 'Kizzy' my GWP without whom we would only have found half of what we did, and last but not least 'Grace' the WHC bird. □

The Future Wife

By Roly Evans

I have imprinted a Peregrine x Merlin in the house and also a male Goshawk last year and hopefully a female Sparrowhawk this year. So many falconers ask how do you get your wife to let you keep a bird in the house? Well, there isn't a straightforward answer to this question. I suppose I am very lucky.

While I was in Texas 1995, at a NAFA field meeting, I went out flying with a falconer called Chris Patterson, at the time he was flying a female prairie. While in conversation he mentioned that had imprinted a Coopers Hawk in the house, we joked regarding keeping a bird in the home.

This year a very good friend of Chris Patterson came to stay with us and mentioned he had written an article regarding how to go about training, not the hawk, but the wife using falconry techniques.

Young falconers should read the following article carefully just in case they are ever thinking of imprinting in their home of the future, make sure you train your wouldbe wife correctly.

Training your wife using falconry techniques

Much has been written on training raptors. William Shakespeare was the first to recognise how falconry techniques can be used in wife training. The story *The Taming of the Shrew* is just that, though a bit dated.

The first thing every young falconer asks is, where can I get a bird – I mean wife? Unlike falconry regulations, haggards are legal to acquire. These are usually found at bars and hotel lounges. Be cautious though – haggards are often set in their ways. Eyasses (chicks) can sometimes be located near universities and college pubs. These tend to be highly strung and quite temperamental. Falconers who specialise in accipiters may do well with these. Passage wives are preferred by long-wingers and hawkers alike. These are obtained at ball games, parties and everywhere else. These passage caught wives are often the best, you know, the ones you'll intermew.

Unlike raptors, these wives are best acquired in the spring months due to the extended manning period required. Most falconers do have the necessary time during the moult.

Trapping tips. Rather than using pigeons or mice as bait, I suggest lots of money. A shiny car is something these birds always look for. Nice clothes and clean fingernails help too.

During this early phase, never, never mention falconry. Simply say you enjoy spending time enjoying nature. Evening sunset walks ending with a nice dinner is time well invested. Later on this will become flushing game ending with a gorge.

Titbitting is highly recommended. Wives do not react well to dead quail parts, but jump readily for diamonds. This is the proper time for intermewed phase manning. This is done slowly and cautiously. At first mention your small involvement with birds. Build upon this over a large period of time.

By the time fall arrives you should be ready for advanced phase manning. Your wife should be accustomed to the idea that falconry is all wonderful and nice. You should be describing the joys of spending time afield, sunsets, and the possibility of adding another member to your relationship.

Initially, most wives enjoy accompanying you and your raptor afield. Since our ultimate goal is long term, additional manning and titbitting is constantly required. Again the use of money is indispensable.

As your wife's abilities develop, be certain to reinforce all your previous training. New brush pants for her at Christmas is ideal. Later she can receive hoods, telemetry, and kangaroo leather; anniversaries and birthdays are very good times to use positive reinforcement.

Initially the only surprises your new spouse discovers in the freezer should be steaks and pork chops. Of course, this will change. Rabbit faces and dead quail will soon become the freezer fare. The transition from loose change on the carpet to chalk spots isn't too tough.

If all is going well, soon vacations will become meets. Weekends are for trapping rather than "visiting". Hawking and falconers' parties soon dominate the social calendar. Good investments are now rare hoods and obscure books. Hopefully you'll spend a lifetime afield with your new bird – I mean wife. Good hawking! □

Roots of the German Versatile Hunting Dog in History

By Josef K. Schmutz

The development of our modern versatile hunting companions included a thousand years of German history. During this time, the criteria for selecting breeding stock changed, responding to improvements in the instruments of the chase, changes in hunting rights, political boundaries and socio-cultural events. Historians did not anticipate our attempt to trace our dogs' roots. We contend with fragmented notes and clues carved in bone or coating fragile canvas. The retrospective telescope is cloudy, but a recognisable pattern does emerge nonetheless.

Ancient dogs were classified and bred according to utility. In contrast, modern versatile breeds are distinct by appearance, largely by coat characteristics. The Celts, for example, would have classified today's North American English setter into three types; a pointing type, a rare versatile type, and a non-hunting, companion type. Because of this utilitarian approach, dogs with a common purpose often looked radically different.

Dogs of the chase were among the first used in the birthplaces of European civilisation, the plains of the Middle East, Egypt and southern Europe. Fading representations of sleek, long-legged canines on the grave of Antefas XII pay tribute to an over 4,000-year-old bond between a hunter and his dogs. As the rise of agriculture spelled an end to tribal life, settlements and cities appeared. Travelling traders allowed an exchange of equipment, customs, and also dogs. Tribal residents of what is now Germany probably imported dogs from the Middle East and subsequently selected the heavy boned individuals for breeding. Large, strong dogs were better suited for pursuing the big game hidden in German woods and marshes.

Records of German tribal hunting practice and hunting dogs in use are provided by the Romans, who kept score during the occupation of their German neighbours. The oldest and most valued hunting dog, judging from severe levies for killing, was *Segusius Magister Canis*, or "Leitihunt" in old German. This large, deliberate "Leading Dog" was so named because it led the hunter via a leash to game, similar to tracking specialists and versatile dogs tracking wounded game in Germany today. Two other hunting dog types also existed. The "Triphunt" or "Drive Dog" forced game to stand in defence, moved it into enclosures or traps. The "Spurihunt" was smaller and remained closed to the hunter, acting as a flushing dog.

Hunting for meat was widely practised in Germany. Dogs played a prominent role. During the reign of Charlemagne around AD 800, the first of a series of political and, later, technical changes occurred that had a profound influence on hunting dog development. Human population density kept increasing. Domestic animal production began to exceed even this fertile land's carrying capacity. To compensate, livestock was slaughtered at the end of each growing season and meat

was preserved. Wild game was sought as a respite from salted meat. Soon, however, hunting was reserved by and for the nobility. The degree of this restriction varied in time and place depending on personalities of the ruling gentry, size of landholdings, and political moods. Some restriction remained in effect until the German revolution in 1848. By forbidding commoners to hunt, a shift in the prevailing types of hunting dogs followed. The motley array of the commoners' dogs practical for meat hunting was gradually replaced by carefully bred dog types. In comparison to its ancestor, the evolving type was more uniform in appearance and utility and pleasing to the eye, compared to its ancestor.

Changes in hunting methods further influenced dog type. While peasants employed various contraptions to net or snare birds and small mammals, the nobility and clergy practised falconry for sport. Falconry had a remarkably pervasive influence on the types of dogs used, in fact even on other aspects of mediaeval society. To this day, knowing the species of bird or prey employed by a falconer allows a remarkably accurate prediction of the type of dog that is also used. Those using falcons seek game in the open landscape, often hunt on horseback, and tend to be accompanied by a wide ranging and reliable pointing dog. Falconers using one of several species of hawks hunt areas with medium to dense cover and use close working flushing or pointing dogs. Falconry flourished during the crusades, when prized falcons were traded among kings, sometimes for political prisoners. Falconry too was regulated. Falcons and eagles fell in the domain of the nobility. Eagles still rank among "High Game" in Germany today. Small falcons were flown by the ladies of the court. Persons of less than noble but still elevated stature, included the clergy, practised falconry with various species of hawks available to them. This division meant that falconry with hawks was practised by more people than falconry with falcons. This also meant that biddable flushing or close working pointing dogs were common. One of the earliest records in Germany of a strict pointing dog identifies a pointer imported from Spain in 1467. The Earl of Hesse used this pointer for hunting with a red-footed falcon.

Guns were used in war for the first time during the 14th century. These heavy guns were soon modified for big game hunting. Waterfowl were the first birds shot with a gun. The gun mounted on wheels scattered shot and was aimed at flocks of birds on the water. A medium sized water-loving dog, sporting a wavy-haired coat not unlike a poodle, was used as a retriever. Not until the end of the 16th century was the gun firing mechanism improved so that guns could be swung, shooting birds in flight. This improvement led to a decline in falconry. Falconry died out in 19th century Europe and was revived again in the 20th century.

We are also able to trace the evolution of the modern versatile dog in Germany through the eyes of artists who

painted from 100 to 800 years ago. This artwork provides insight into socio-economic conditions and hunting practices of the times, and thus into the formation of our present-day hunting companions. Several different scenarios are informative.

In one scenario, the oil darkened with age portray a huntsman straddling a bench of roughly hewn beech wood. On the man's thigh, beckoning, rests the head of a long-haired dog, white with black and brown patches. Drooping dog ears partially conceal a pantleg worn thin on the knee. Augmenting sparse supper scraps, chunks from a hearty loaf of dark bread clutched against the man's chest fall into an earthen bowl. The expression in the hunter's weathered face, coyly directed toward his canine companion, conveys respectful appreciation. A jacket draped over the cold, cast iron stove suggests fall or spring.

An entirely different scene displays an ornate spectacle of men adorned in elegant 18th century French costumes. Some men wait on nervous mounts while others dress a stag. The stag's swollen tongue lies limp on the lush carpet of moss in a small forest clearing. A uniform pack of sleek hounds can be barely restrained from starting another chase.

While the former work of art is small and pictures modest conditions, the latter is large, colourful and smacks of wealth. The former work probably was the result of an artist's inspiration and desire to capture moods relevant to the period. The latter was commissioned, and was the reason for the artist's presence at court. Historians are aware of the need for caution in interpreting artistic representations. For the same reason, a hunter's photo album examined 500 years later will misrepresent what the person did most often.

A third scene portrays a man, connected via a tight lead to a short-haired, long-tailed dog, ears trailing by a few centimetres the nose tracking scent. An air of joviality springs from yet another painting, in which a medium-sized, long-haired, long-tailed dog bounds in front of a horse bearing a lady falconer.

Versatility in hunting dogs has had different meanings over time. For hundreds of years "v"ersatile served to chased, flushed, tracked, and retrieved. Not until pointing was added to this behavioural repertoire could the dogs be called "V"ersatile. The early transition to pointing began in the 14th century under the influence of the Spanish pointer and the French Braque St. Germain. In his 1820 handbook on hunting, Winkell calls for a pointing dog that at the same time retrieves reliably and tracks for hare hunting.

During the last 800 years, Germany underwent many changes. At times fragmented into small, sovereign landholdings, at other times united by the strong hand of a powerful king, the country evolved through periods of prosperity, devastation and war. Prosperous noblemen who had an interest in hunting or "killing" hired scores of men to support their pastime pleasures. Big game was often chased into enclosures. The enraged and frightened animals were then shot from behind barricades. Shots and the faint groans of dying game were drowned by the cheering cries of spectators. Count Albrecht ordered a hunt for wild boar in 1729, involving 1,270 men, 282 horses and 12 wagons hauling 508 dead wild pigs. Such hunts often involved hundreds of dogs.

In 1848, the noblemen in power could no longer quell the discontent of the oppressed. Merciless exploitation ended in revolution. Pounds that housed the nobleman's pack were never to resound again with the anticipating howl of a hundred throats. Of thousands of well bred hounds, including many varieties, only few individuals of a total of three

breeds are still known today (Deutsche Bracke, Dachsbracke, Österreichische Bracke). France sported 24 breeds of chasing dogs before its political revolution; most were lost.

After the 1848 revolution, hunting was again open to anyone. Scores of hunters went afield. They relished both their newly acquired personal rights and fresh meat for the pot. Several German folksongs capture the enthusiastic hunting freedom of this time. Fortunately, the resulting chaos was short lived. Game populations declined rapidly under the enormous hunting pressure. This led to controlled hunting after only a few years. This hunting system has persisted in its basic form until today. Owners of large tracts of land, the required minimum size varied by state, retained the right to hunt on their land. Smaller holdings in a township were combined and hunting rights leased. The leaseholder answered to an elected official and is held accountable for over-hunting, improper game management, or crop damage.

With the renewed hunting opportunity came a great demand for dogs that were practical for procuring a variety of game for the pot. The pedigreed canines of the courts were useless for the lone hunter who had no mounts, no enclosures and no hired assistants. Instead of being rooted in the extravagant breeding schemes of the wealthy nobility, most ancestors of our modern versatile dogs shared the drafty homes and meagre rations of people barely getting by. The founding stock for today's Versatile dogs came from three sources. First, the pointing or flushing dogs whose ancestors were commonly used for falconry, were immediately useful to the new hunter. Second, some versatile dogs were owned by commoners who were employed at court or otherwise allowed to hunt for themselves. Third, dogs with hunting blood in their veins were kept as companion or guard dogs; some of these no doubt were used for poaching.

The years after 1848 also brought about a transition in attitude toward game among the citizens of German states. As it often occurred in history, changes were more influenced by the current mood than by design. With regard to hunting, the mood was dominated by a reaction against the blatant disrespect toward game displayed by some of the gentry. Nonetheless, some popular traditions derived from the hunting nobility were maintained, and these traditions still permeate hunting practice in Germany today. Traditions include the use of hunting horns in ceremonies, or for signalling on party hunts. Also, elaborate guidelines exist regarding the use of bows to adorn some game species killed, and to honour any dog instrumental in the successful recovery of crippled game. Views toward wildlife which espoused the mass slaughter of helpless creatures in enclosures was despised. A new romanticised hunter-guardian role evolved. The hunter was to cull game animals and keep small predators in check, assuming the perceived stabilising role of by then extinct large predators. The hunter was to guard against poaching and provide feeding stations in winter. This movement placed former advocates of kindness to animals in a guiding position. St. Hubertus became the patron saint of hunting. Hubertus was a bishop and avid hunter at the turn of the 7th century. Hubertus, it was said, laid down his crossbow forever after he and his dogs encountered a white stag bearing a cross between its antlers.

This changing status of hunters influenced the hunting dog's status greatly. While the nobility expected exquisite style in dog work and could afford to develop specialists to do the

tasks, the new German dog was to be versatile and prominent in game conservation. A tribute to a dog written in the 1500s epitomises this modern attitude:

A huntsman may proclaim himself a sportsman, without shame.

Yet he resembles without a dog, a rungless ladder, useless, lame.

Joe Schmutz is a wildlife biologist, falconer and long-time NAVHDA member who hunts with large Münsterländers. In preparing this summary, he used the following major sources and numerous written and painted records collected over years:

Bernd Ergert. 1984. Die Jagd in Bayern-von der Vorzeit bis zur Gegenwart. Rosenheimer Verlagshaus Alfred Förg GmbH, Rosenheim, W. Germany.

Ernst Hofmann. 1981. Jagdmuseum Schloss Kranichstein. Roetherdruck, Darmstadt, W. Germany.

Hans Schultze. 1965. Jagdhundeinst und jetzt. Landbuch-Verlag, Hannover, W. Germany. □

A dream come true

By Gary Cook

The day began like any other day, my turn to drive, late up so a late start to the day. In the van with me were Chris Brown, Rob Kelly, Nigel Manning, one Brittany, one ferret and their Harris's. The female I was flying was the product of a jointly owned pair between myself and Chris Brown. This particular morning her flying weight was 2 lbs 4.5ozs.

On our first visit to the ground we flushed some ten very large brown hares. The first slip came when a hare got up some ten yards to my right, running up hill and out of sight closely followed by my bird who also disappeared over the hill top. Off I ran doing my Linford Christie impression, as I do every time I can't see my bird. When I reached the hedge at the top of the hill, I glanced over to see my bird in the middle of the field. I walked over to pick her up seeing her surrounded by fur but not holding anything. Shortly after this we were walking a stubble field and we disturbed another hare in a form. It ran up hill towards Rob who slipped his bird but the hare was well on its way and Rob called back his very obedient bird. Yet another hare got up some twenty feet in front of me as the Harris began bating. I slipped her but she was upside down, so the hare had a very good start but my bird made up good ground and struck the hare soundly on the back. A tremendous tussle followed with the hare jumping a small stream and through the hedge leaving my bird wondering what had happened.

While we all rested and stood having a chit-chat about what might have been, yet another hare broke cover some two fields below us. Rob and my bird both bated on seeking the hare but for some reason as our birds left our fists, Rob's headed for some nearby trees, whilst mine started to climb to my right with the hare running left. As I began thinking she had lost interest following her earlier failures, she suddenly flipped over to her left and soon caught up on her quarry binding to the hare, but again in the struggle the hare managed to evade the Harris's clutches. As I walked down towards the bird three more hares got up but she showed no interest. I picked her up and returned to the lads to continue our hunting.

We came towards a long bank with thick cover and Chris sent in 'Kelly', his Brittany, who quickly came on

point, flushing a pheasant on command. Nigel's male Harris was off the fist like a bullet, but pheasants being what they are was soon out of sight and the male returned. After flushing more pheasants without success I decided to cast my bird into some trees to follow on as we began walking. As I called her on, she passed over our heads, looking very much as though she was after something. As I was about to do my Linford impression she flew on hitting a hare sitting in a form. I began running over to find a way into the field, keeping an eye on the hare. By the time I got through, the adrenalin was going and I was thinking about my first hare but as I got close I fell over and looking up saw the hare leaping in the air with my bird hanging on. As I tried to get up to the bird she let go and off went the hare, I was shaking like a leaf and my legs were like jelly. Not for one minute did I feel disappointed, I was happy that after being kicked up in the air and jumped on so many times, she was still chasing.

By now we were in sight of our van and we were walking in a straight line through another stubble field. We were half way across when I spotted a hare some twenty feet to my right. I gave a soft whistle and the rest of the party stopped walking. I walked forward and the hare got up making for a getaway with my bird by now in hot pursuit followed closely by Nigel's male. Everything happened so fast, but both birds struck the hare, riding it like a jockey during which time Nigel's bird let go leaving my bird to hold onto it. Falling down, getting up and falling down again I reached the bucking pair and managed to grab the hare. When I had both back legs firmly in my grip, I dispatched the hare and fed my bird a reward from my bag. After a long chat reliving our catch we made our way to the van and then off to the pub to celebrate.

When I eventually arrived home, I weighed-in the hare at 7lb 2.5ozs. I had this, my first hare stuffed by John Jones. Looking back to the beginning of that day, I could never have envisaged a day like it and it will stay in my memory forever. □

Country Sports: The Arguments

Country Sports: The Facts



"While we have hunting, shooting and fishing interests in this country we will have better landscape management. Without these interests Britain would have become a prairie landscape."
Dr. David Bellamy, world-renowned biologist and conservationist

"Country sports make a huge voluntary contribution to conservation of the countryside. Angling clubs fight pollution and excessive water abstraction; shooting and hunting enthusiasts maintain woodland and hedgerows. The State could not equal the investment or commitment of country sports in nature conservation without massive regulation and a heavy burden on the taxpayer."
Leave Country Sports Alone (Labour Party group)

"The importance of game conservation as an incentive for habitat management benefiting other species is well established. Research by the GCT clearly shows that a proper range of techniques for controlling wild mammals is essential for game conservation."
Game Conservancy Trust

"Country sports can make a positive contribution to creating and maintaining habitats for wildlife. English Nature works with national representative bodies and local clubs, providing advice and guidance on how country sports and conservation can work together for their mutual benefit."
English Nature

"Sporting shooting can and does make a positive contribution to creating and maintaining habitats for wildlife."
Nature Conservancy Council

"A ban on hunting would result in the destruction of a large number of brood mares. It would cause unemployment among ancillary workers responsible for horse welfare and it would have a serious effect on the country's ability to produce top quality competition horses."
British Horse Society

"We recognise that important wildlife habitats like lowland woods and heather moors often owe their continued existence to management for the shooting of pheasants and red grouse. Where there has been no shooting, the loss of such habitats has been severe."
Graham Wynne, director of conservation, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

"To me, the benefits of country sports are not only obvious but vital: the damage that would be done by banning them would be on a massive, unacceptable scale."
Robin Page, conservationist and TV presenter of One Man and His Dog

Over 5 million men, women and children participate in country sports in the United Kingdom.

Total expenditure on country sports in Great Britain was £2.7 billion* in 1990.

Some 65,000* full-time jobs are associated with country sports in GB.

Coarse, game and sea anglers throughout the UK number nearly 4 million.

The annual value of fishing tackle, sporting guns and saddlery exported from the UK is over £140 million*; over 14,000 UK trade and service organisations are dependent on fishing, shooting, stalking and hunting.

There are 320 registered packs of hounds hunting fox, hare, mink and deer; some 250,000* people from all walks of life go hunting; there are over 20,000 days of foxhunting in the UK every year.

80 per cent of agricultural, forestry and rough-grazing land in the UK depends for its conservation on private ownership.

70 per cent of all new woodland planting on farms in England and Wales is for sporting purposes (*Country Landowners Association*): 82 per cent of owners of small woods indicated that the primary reason for planting new woods was for game cover (*Nature Conservancy Council*).

Some 850,000* take part in shooting sports, contributing £313 million directly to the UK economy each year and employing 28,000 people.

The total value of game caught or bagged in Great Britain was £36.6 million* in 1990, of which £17.5 million was sold as produce.

British Field Sports Society has 80,000 individual members and overall affiliated membership of 450,000; about 10 per cent of the UK population enjoys one or more country sport. □

*Survey report by Cobham Reserve Consultants, 1992.

DoE Records

In 1995 the DoE launched random DNA testing on some of our sensitive species bred in captivity. Certain cynics suggested that with the threat of these tests, the numbers of Peregrines, Merlins and Goshawks, etc., bred in captivity and offered for sale would dramatically drop. It is interesting to note from the last available breeding figures from the DoE that this has been dispelled. In fact, the successes of most of these species has increased rather than decreased.

I would expect these figures to perhaps show a decline this year. The number of breeders I have spoken to in this breeding season have generally had a bad year. This includes non-sensitive species, so DNA analysis would appear not to be the reason, especially as the DoE have temporarily suspended DNA testing. Even large game rearing establishments have had a poor year and have been struggling to meet orders for game birds. However, the following breeding figures make for interesting reading and comparison. — *Editor*

Book Review

Hawking with Golden Eagles

By Martin Hollinshead

Published by Hancock House Publishers, Surrey, UK and Blaine, USA. 176 pages; \$22.95

Reviewed by Ian Blantem

Many of us dream of flying golden eagles but realise that we either lack the ability or do not have the experience to do so. Most of all, we do not have access to the wide open spaces in which to fly them and at which they are at their best. Although the golden eagle is by no means the largest of the eagles, it is by far the most manageable of the mid range group to train and fly.

With this in mind and with years of experience flying eagles, mainly in Europe where he has lived for some years, but especially on the great plains of Hungary, Martin Hollinshead is able to describe and explain in great depth how hunting is achieved with one of our truly magnificent raptors.

He explains how the golden eagle is a falconry bird, associated traditionally with Central Asia where its association with the indigenous people is almost as old as falconry itself. It is here its prowess was matched against large animals such as the saiga antelope, gazelle, roe deer, fox and even wolf. Add to this list the accepted quarry of rabbit, hare and pheasant and there isn't much left that the eagle can not attempt and can be flown at. Against such a variety of quarry it is one of the great birds of falconry.

During the 70's and 80's Martin Hollinshead was to be regularly seen at European field meetings flying golden eagles and so it is, with this unrivalled practical field experience, he describes in every detail, the methods of training and flying this particular species. He describes for instance how, at one field meeting he attended in the former Czechoslovakia, no less than 28 golden eagles were registered. His observations and stories from many field meetings are shared as are the numerous coloured photographs which illustrate his book.

It is a book to be recommended, not only because of its specialist nature, but because Martin attempts to put right, any misconceptions regarding golden eagles and their position in modern day falconry. □

Total numbers bred in 1994 and 1995

Species	1994	1995
Barbary Falcon	7	6
Barbary Falcon x Saker Falcon	—	1
Bearded Tit	26	36
Black Redstart	—	12
Chough	5	14
Crossbill	152	127
Crossbill x Canary	2	—
Dartford Warbler	4	4
Goshawk	118	141
Gyr Falcon	12	6
Gyr/Peregrine Falcon x Lanner Falcon	—	6
Gyr/Peregrine Falcon x Saker Falcon	—	2
Gyr Falcon x Lanner Falcon	2	2
Gyr/Saker Falcon x Peregrine Falcon	—	3
Gyr Falcon x Gyr/Saker Falcon	—	1
Gyr Falcon x Barbary Falcon	1	—
Gyr Falcon x Peregrine Falcon	2	—
Gyr Falcon x Saker Falcon	23	30
Gyr/Saker Falcon x Saker Falcon	1	8
Hen Harrier	3	—
Hobby	18	17
Marsh Harrier	—	5
Mauritius Kestrel	—	5
Merlin	95	121
Peregrine Falcon	226	256
Peregrine/Gyr Falcon x Peregrine Falcon	—	8
Peregrine Falcon x Barbary Falcon	1	5
Peregrine Falcon x Lanner Falcon	3	19
Peregrine Falcon x Merlin	5	1
Peregrine Falcon x Prairie Falcon	13	7
Peregrine Falcon x Saker falcon	20	22
Peregrine/Barbary Falcon x Peregrine falcon	5	—
Peregrine Falcon x Red-necked Merlin	1	—
Peregrine Falcon x Gyr Falcon	12	—
TOTAL	757	865

Numbers of young produced (inc. hybrids)

Species	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Peregrine Falcon	234	269	319	290	360	286	318
Goshawk	129	79	155	141	154	118	141
Merlin	115	109	108	81	134	95	121
Golden Eagle	3	0	1	—	—	—	—
Gyr Falcon	3	9	8	13	32	41	58
Hobby	8	11	14	9	14	18	17
Barbary Falcon	—	—	6	7	3	7	6
TOTAL	492	477	611	541	697	565	661

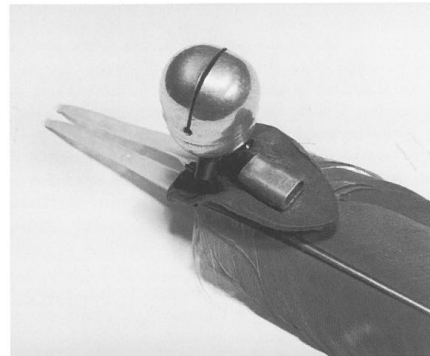
Transmitter Tail Mounting?

By Ian Blantem

I have reasons for the question mark after the title of this little article. Transmitter design and the recent improvements in aerial mounting, encapsulating the transmitter in neater cases and shorter aerial lengths have led to greater use of tail mounting as opposed to leg mounting. I never did like the latter form of attachment for aesthetic reasons and another which I shall enlarge on later. Neither am I totally in favour of tail mounting because I like a tail bell as well and combining both seemed difficult. The marketing of permanent brass fixing barrels to a single deck feather and the modern spring clips on transmitters, all but does away with the need for endless supplies of cable ties and the need for two free hands to attach it.

However good these advances have been, I pass on a few observations and warnings from personal experience. The brass barrel for fitting to the deck feather only attaches to one feather which in normal operation should be quite sufficient. The first time I began to question this, was on the occasion my

problems that a pulled feather can cause. The danger is that a pulled feather, as opposed to a naturally dropped feather (when a new one is ready to come down) can cause the hole to effectively heal over and close up, thus preventing a new one from pushing through. This can cause further damage because the new feather can be trapped and forced to turn and grow back inside the body. My enquiries eventually led me to Carole Scott in Scotland who had considerable experience in preventing this happening. Her remedy is to plug the hole to prevent this. It must be done as soon as a feather has been dislodged. You can achieve this either by inserting a grain of rice in the hole or as was subsequently suggested, by making a plug of warm beeswax and inserting this. The purpose is that you try and keep the hole open, ready to allow any new feather growth to come through. This usually occurs after ten days has elapsed by which time you must remove the rice or wax plug to allow new feather growth. The theory is excellent, but in my case it did not work because the feather



Plectrum, bell and transmitter mounting from side and above.

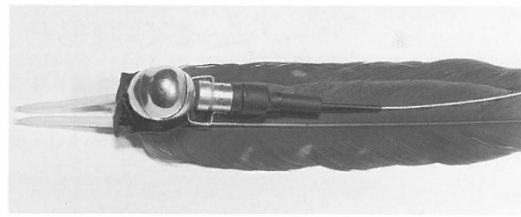
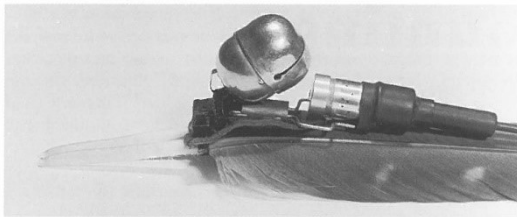
tiercel peregrine x saker caught a partridge and although I say it myself, in brilliant style. It was from his usual pitch of 400 to 500 ft (I have never been able to say for certain what any bird's pitch is, but he always looked spectacular in the stoop) and with the advantage of this height he always hit with a thunderous thud and missed very few. I picked up the bird, allowing a small reward for the kill and eventually returned to the car where I usually remove the transmitter before returning the bird to the box cage. On this occasion, the transmitter had disappeared and with the assistance of my receiver I retraced my steps to near where the bird had killed. Looking around the area I came across the transmitter and to my consternation I found it and the feather to which it was attached. Matter not how this had happened, although I suspect that in the struggle while on the ground, the partridge had caught the transmitter with its feet and taken the feather and transmitter clean out.

To continue further, but away from the point slightly, I had remembered an article, or overheard a discussion on the

never did grow again. It didn't present too much of a problem because I still had the remaining deck feather to mount my transmitter.

No it didn't! It caused another major problem because exactly the same thing happened again in every detail. No feather and no regrowth, leaving what was now quite a wide gap although it did close up slightly after the bird moulted. This left me with the problem that I had no centre deck feathers left to attach the transmitter. After this, I had to leg mount my transmitters on this bird and because of these episodes I have never used single deck feather attachments since.

That isn't the end of this little story or my problems. My aversion to leg mounted transmitters remains because there is much more chance of trailing aerials at this low level of mounting, being caught up in fences, making contact with electricity wires or inadvertently being pulled out by birds plucking quarry – it just gets in the way at every opportunity.



Plectrum, with bell and transmitter in position from side and above.

In theory, tail mounting has so much more in its favour. My next catastrophe I can only assume happened by the last of the problems mentioned. My hybrid was flying at his normal pitch when he stooped at something out of my view and because he did not throw back up into the air I guessed he was down on quarry. I resorted to my trusted receiver, only to find that I couldn't get a signal. After three days I gave up looking, I considered I had covered every inch of my flying land to no avail. Four days later my bird was found shot, with the transmitter still attached but with no aerial and just to add further insult to injury, sometime later I found what I considered was his kill, a pile of pigeon feathers in a hedgerow no more than two hundred yards from where I had originally lost sight of him.

This was a very sad ending for what had been a brilliant hunting and flying bird. He will probably remain the best bird I have had the luck to own. To illustrate my misgivings for single deck feather mounting as well as leg mounting, I vowed never to use either methods again and to devise a method I liked and which would combine tail mounting both

transmitter and bell in one unit.

I have always liked the plectrum style bell mount which attaches to both deck feathers. This gives greater strength and balance and in theory requires twice the force for the feathers to be knocked out. I also thought that there could still be room to add the transmitter barrel attachment as well. In practice this has proved to be the case, although the bell does have to ride a little higher on the plectrum than I would ideally like to allow room for the transmitter to fit. The leather plectrum is attached by cable ties around each deck feather and are glued to add further strength. To make room, the one small adjustment needed is for the bell loop to be mounted horizontally across the plectrum instead of vertically which I hope the photographs clearly illustrate. In Nick Fox's book, he illustrates how he attaches his tail mounts to the two feathers either side of the centre decks which allows even greater support for the mount. He further lays great trust in the neck mounted or halisband bell, although provision still has to be made for transmitter fixing, so I personally still prefer my all-in-one rig. □

Team work 'Jenny', team work . . .

By Tim Randles

There's nothing to match it when everything clicks, ask the longwing lads. Just picture it, the pointer on scent and pointing, the falcon beating her wings looking for lift as she reaches her pitch. The falconer checks her, then sends in the pointer to flush the quarry of English partridge. She folds her wings producing a stoop as she selects her prey out of the covey. Wallop, after the strike she completes a victory roll before returning to her kill. A text book flight.

Well 'Jenny', my English springer took this scenario too far on this particular day. We had worked various pits which are dotted around Budworth Mere and had already got a moorhen in the bag after 'Ringo', my two year old Harris had taken it earlier in a reed bed. Or at least I found him in the middle of it tucking into his prey. I called him 'Ringo' because of his resemblance to the Beatles' drummer. Bob Antonio's young female Harris had taken an early bath in pursuit of another moorhen.

I must say that 'Jenny', my springer is at her best when working pits and she always lets you know when she's onto something by her whimpering. She flushed a brace of mallard from the corner of the pit and the drake came past 'Ringo's

branch he was on like an exocet locked onto its target. 'Ringo' tightened up, not as if to give chase, more as if to say what the hell was that? Needless to say he didn't go after it.

With Bob's female looking like a drowned rat we decided to work the last pit and call it a day. As we approached the pit it looked dead from the point of view of quarry, until 'Jenny' flushed a moorhen which dived across to the other side of the pit. At times I'm just a spectator with 'Jenny' working and 'Ringo' following on. Every now and then when 'Jenny' decides to come out of cover without flushing anything, he stoops towards her as if to say get back in. 'Ringo' had attempted to chase this moorhen to the other side and was perched on a briar bush overhanging the water. As I tried to keep up with 'Jenny', Bob shouted out "he's got it", "are you sure?" I replied. "No, 'Jenny' has got it, call her out". Before I had time to put my whistle to my mouth 'Jenny' had swum towards 'Ringo' and once under him dropped the moorhen which he grabbed with a thank you. I made into him, letting him feed up on his prey with a token reward for 'Jenny' who does all the work. So as I said earlier, 'Jenny' took team work a bit too far. . . . □

Grouse counting

By S. J. Marsh-Smith

Grouse counting and the use of Pointers HPRs and Setters

Reproduced from the BWWGS Yearbook.

For a number of years I have enjoyed the help of the HPR section of the Bristol and West Gundog Society who have undertaken our July counts at Ireland moor, Powys, Wales. In 1994, this included a count in March. Shortly, a project involving the Countryside Council for Wales, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Game Conservancy Trust and interested owners will be announced that will be surveying the entire population of grouse in Wales both historically and at present. The aims of the Welsh Grouse Project is to redress the decline and demonstrate that a healthy grouse population can exist with other land uses. (So we will need counters.)

When I first became involved in running a moor, one of the less interesting questions which I was frequently asked was: "How many grouse do you put down?". After a discreet

Before explaining how this is actually done, it is essential to understand the nature of the bird itself. When one hears that a grouse is territorial, this means that during part of the year – the breeding season, a pair defends its part of the moor against all other erstwhile breeders. When flushed, it returns and so when counting numbers of flushed singles, pairs or coveys, the chances are that all will have arisen from their own territory.

It is not a great problem on the moor I look after in Wales as loneliness is much more likely, but on the classic moors of the Pennines and elsewhere, breeding success coupled with good management and keeping can in some years produce a considerable surplus. An increasing surplus, in some years can bring about disease and a consequent crash in numbers. So an accurate assessment is vital as shooting remains the main balancing factor. Equally, in poor years, it is essential to know well in advance that numbers are down and that days will have to be cancelled, so the appropriate action can be taken. In my own circumstances, where we are starting from scratch, as opposed to managing a moor that has been established, counting is the only means of evaluating the success of our efforts.

After that prodigious preamble, I can turn to the essential business – how and when is it done? Twice annually: in the spring, before nesting but after pairing (second to fourth weeks of March ideally) and again in late July when the young grouse can fly and reveal the exact strength of their numbers. HPRs, Pointers and Setters being the ideal dogs for this purpose (listed alphabetically to avoid any hint of prejudice!). Compared with finding pheasants, relatively large areas of ground are covered and anyone who thinks walking across heather is easy should speak to the BWWGS team of counters after a hard day.

In their 1990/91 survey of grouse in Wales, the RSPB compared the difference between counting by walkers and dogs. They concluded that there was little or no difference in the end result. The technique used on these large acreages is to count a sample square kilometre in ten 100 metre transects. This was compared with similar counts from other moors and a picture of the whole country's population is thus gained.



English Pointers on the moors.

chuckle I always try to explain, without being too haughty, "One doesn't: they are already there and we merely have to look after them". The brighter of my questioners often follow up with: "Well how do you know how many there are?"

Until I had taken on board the essential nature of this question, I would just say: "We count them". In my early days this meant a perfunctory run over certain bits with a dog or two, usually where there most certainly were a few birds so that one would be reassured to find that there were at least a few. As one's knowledge increased, it became increasingly apparent that a more accurate and detailed method of assessing the quantity and quality was required. For example, in an area that had been burnt, and now had regrown it was not enough to know that a pair or two had taken up residence in the spring. Suddenly it was how many pairs? Where? What success in breeding, how many young? And of course how many failures or losses? Quite simply, counting gives the moor manager details not just of relative numbers; information regarding the usage of new ground; some idea of the damage to the overwintered stock and most obvious of all, the extent of breeding success.



GSPs on the moors.

In my opinion, there is a great advantage in using dogs of the wind scenting variety: firstly when dealing with low populations, missing one or two coveys can make a significant difference to the result. Dogs are much less likely to miss compared with humans. The effect of this can be remedied by taking larger sample areas but that of course takes up more time. The counting "window" is very short both in the spring and summer so dogs would have the advantage: one man plus dog could only be replaced by three humans. In the spring, note is taken of the location of each pair that is found. The same route is followed each year. This is chosen to be representative of the whole moor and ideally allows an outward and return path. Year on year results are compared and shifts in favoured areas are noted.

In the summer, there are extra difficulties: July is not always noted for its good scenting days (though there is amply opportunity to get a soaking!) so sometimes it is necessary to start early before the scent and the grouse disappear. This is where we see the result of all the year's work: each covey flushed and

counted tells us of the success (or failure) of each year. The covey size (hen plus offspring) can number as many as ten. All are noted down along with the location. Barren pairs or single hens spell out the effect of disease. The presence of squeakers show that a successful second brood was hatched though these broods are seldom as numerous as first clutches. So the end of the summer count tells us what is in prospect for the coming season.

Incidentally, when you have seen plenty of grouse you can tell the difference between the cock and the hen almost as easily as with pheasants though last July did reveal a few problems for some people!

Hopefully, one will have grasped the essential quality required of the dogs: The ability to range but only as required; Wind scenting in what is sometimes difficult conditions; Steadiness on point; Firmness and stamina at a time of year that most gundogs are "out to pasture".

And the handlers: Patience, stamina, keenness and of course the ability to count up to ten!!! □

Would you believe it – (a falconer's dream)

By Mike Clowes

It was middle of winter in the depths of North Wales that this story begins. A heavy frost and bitterly cold winds promised a successful day of exciting hawking. The intrepid party made up of two Belgians, two northerners, one fenman, three locals and four partners, having had a typically large farmhouse breakfast, set off armed with six Harris's, determination, full hip flasks, thermal underwear and telemetry, were prepared for any eventuality.

Eager for the chase the Harris's scanned the horizon for the slightest sign of potential quarry. A couple of pheasant in the bag were to provide a taste of much greater things to come. No one present could even have anticipated the thrill of what was in store.

Up ahead something that could not be seen by the humans in the party was flushed by the springers and two females and a tiny male being flown by Ludwig from Belgium took up the chase. The Harris's soon disappeared amongst the trees

putting in stoop after stoop at the unknown quarry. Suddenly there was an ear-splitting scream and then nothing.

Hearts beating wildly, unsure of what they would find the falconers sped as if on winged feet across bog and brambles until they came across the sight they would never forget. The two females were perched on the lowest branches of two trees surrounding a small clearing. In the centre of the clearing proudly mantling his prey was the tiny male, hackles raised as he gripped the head of Reynard the fox in both feet. He had begun plucking tufts of bright red hair from its coat, scattering it in the strong breeze.

How had Reynard met his end? Coronary? Stroke? Or had he met his match in the fearless little Harris?

Now you may find this story a *little* far fetched but you must know the old saying, the camera never lies!!!

PS: The Harris has been re-named 'Aquila'. □



A Day's Hunting

Thomas Hourigan

It was a lovely summers morning when I awoke from my slumbers to the sound of my alarm clock. Today we were going hunting. Harry, my male Harris, was now two years old. Harry, as I entered the mews, jumped off his perch, the old Devil always seemed to know what was going on. As I went to pick him up, his eyes searched my hands to see if I had anything for him. As I stepped from the mews, the sun's rays beat down on my rosey red cheeks and my breath misted warmly before being taken away on the chilly morning air.

I went up to fetch Chloe. She was my young German Wirehair Pointer. Although still only a novice she was coming on nicely. She was beginning to learn how to hold her point from moving. Today would be her first day out with Harry.

Although I had them quite used to one another this would be their first time in the field together. Hawk and dog were put into the boot and off we set.

At last we arrived. Unhooded Harry and let Chloe out of the boot she jumped around with great joy at being let out. Harry now began to rouse and preen his feathers. And later began to stretch himself.

As we walked through the countryside the scent of flowers and hay wavered around my nostrils. The hedgerow was amass with brambles full of ripened berries, and the sweet smelling honeysuckle in flower and berry form. A curtain of greater burdock with its white and purple flower and very

strong scent coated the ground as we walked.

As I watched Chloe quartered side to side in front of me. A cascade of dew drops distinguished by the glow of the sun's rays upon them alighted on her thick coat from the tall scutch grasses. I could not help feel a sense of freedom and happiness. Chloe was now beginning to pick up wind of something and she began to pick up the pace.

We were all now starting to get excited. No matter how many times I go hunting I never fail to get that overload of adrenaline. All of a sudden Chloe came to a rigid point. I now gave Harry's jesses a good tight turning and moved in. I told Chloe to put up, in she went. Up flew the pheasant and away went Harry in Chloe's pursuit. I now began to run as they, the predator and the prey, went out of sight.

My heart now began to beat faster. Obscene thoughts rushed through my mind. Was she down somewhere on top of her kill? Or had she decided to go AWOL and cool off. My eyes began to search everywhere and my eyes attentive for the sound of his bells. Sure enough from the quiet I heard them. He had missed and alighted into a tree. I put a piece of meat to my glove and on he came gliding back. There would be more days. But after that we decided to look for some rabbits where he has had better luck.

We went home with a bag of four Rabbits. Not a bad days hunting. □

