

J.D. Kolman  
June 2013



# Irish hawking Club Journal 2014

The Irish Hawking Club is a member  
of F.A.C.E. and the International  
Association for Falconry and  
Conservation of Birds of Prey.



## IRISH HAWKING CLUB

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## IRISH HAWKING CLUB

### POLICY AND OBJECTIVES STATEMENTS

The Irish Hawking Club is dedicated to the sport and practice of falconry and to the conservation and dissemination of knowledge of birds of prey. Membership is open to those, who support or practice the pursuit of Falconry to the highest standards and traditions. Objectives of the Club are;

To represent Falconry throughout Ireland and to foster International co-operation in order to maintain the sport, art and practice of taking quarry in its natural state.

To preserve and encourage Falconry within the context of sustainable and judicious use of wildlife.

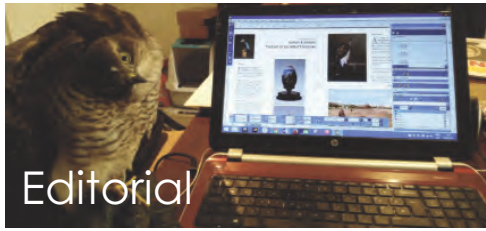
To foster good relations and co-operation with all National hunting organisations with like objectives.

To encourage conservation, the ecological and veterinary research of birds of prey and to promote, under scientific guidance, native propagation for Falconry and the rehabilitation of injured birds of prey.

To monitor National laws in order to permit the pursuit and perpetuation of falconry.

To require the observation of all laws and regulations relating to falconry, hunting, conservation and culture with regard to the taking, import, and keeping of birds of prey, the hunting of quarry species and the right of access to land.

To promote and uphold a positive image of falconry with specialist organisations or statutory bodies which regulate or otherwise affect falconry.



I'd love to say this edition of the 2014 IHC journal has been perfectly timed for the moult – when falconers have plenty of time to read the thing – but the truth is the lateness is a result of the usual delays that are now, alas, the norm. In trying to get as much quality copy in for your reading pleasure, things had to be put on hold and deadlines stretched.

Just as well then that this is a particularly strong edition to sit back with on these summer evenings. Despite the presence of Spar on the cover (courtesy of our own Dutch master Johan Kolman) and articles on the history of Sparhawking in Ireland and a Musket in the US, there is a distinct peregrine flavour this year.

Besides studies by Mike Nicholls and our friend Marc Ruddock (who we were delighted to have with us at December's Festival of Falconry in Abu Dhabi) the Falcon and Tiercel Gentle is writ large on this journal. Diana Durman-Walters gives her thoughts on last year's very successful game-hawking meet, and there is further coverage of how Ireland is quickly becoming the capital of snipe hawking with fiercels. A special treat is a sumptuous article by multi award-winning author and falconer Helen Macdonald on Dublin's Poolbeg Peregrines (reproduced here with the kind permission of *The New York Times*). It's as much as this iconic global symbol of our art deserves. As always, there's lots and lots more too.

2014 was a great year for the IHC, thanks largely to the great work done by the Committee. Hopefully, this is reflected in these pages.

Hilary White, IHC Journal Editor

All copy and pictures to be sent to the Journal Editor at [hylwhite@gmail.com](mailto:hylwhite@gmail.com).

Material is subject to scrutiny by the committee.

All news items, notices, short stories, tall tales, pictures, ads, comments etc to the editor at the above email address.

Members who are interested in helping in the production and distribution of the Newsletter and Journal please contact a committee member.

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### Cover Image

#### "Little Suzy"

by  
Johan Kolman  
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Manipulated by  
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We continually look for striking, memorable art images of raptors for our covers. If you have any, please forward to the editor.

The Newsletter and Journal are published and distributed by the IHC to members. The views expressed therein are those of the individual contributors and are not necessarily the official policies or views of the IHC. International articles may feature different wildlife laws to Ireland.

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# News and Updates

The Editorial always welcome pieces of info – sightings, lost hawks, conservation matters etc - from members.

### IRISH FALCONRY MUSEUM EXHIBIT OPENS

**IT WAS on World Falconry Day (November 16th, of course!) that falconry's place in the history of hunting in Ireland was cemented with the unveiling of a new exhibit in the Irish Fly Fishing and Game Shooting Museum,**

The museum – located in the tiny village of Attanagh, just outside Durrow, Co Laois – has been painstakingly curated by Walter Phelan. Over the years, Walter has put together the most comprehensive outline of three centuries of hunting sports in Ireland, exhibiting all manner of rods, reels, guns, tackle, tools and examples of Irish birds and fish in meticulous style.

World Falconry Day is a day for every falconer around the world to celebrate falconry's inscription as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, and last year it was decided that the opening of a historic exhibition in Walter's collection would be perfect way to demonstrate to visitors young and old that falconry has been around a long, long time in this country.

We had a robust turnout on a bright and crisp morning. Assembling in Durrow town centre, many members of the public came to enjoy the sight of the hawks weathering out on the village green. Carrying the hawks, the contingent then walked the beautiful 30-minute stroll from Durrow to Attanagh. Incredibly, a few of us were treated to a sight that, if you were a superstitious man, would seem to be a magical omen of falconry's growing strength here – a wild Goshawk gliding high over a field in full view before stooping down into some oaks after a woodpigeon. (And before you roll your eyes, we had one or two surly austringers and Gos breeders there to confirm the sighting!)

The IHC would like to extend its heartfelt gratitude to Walter and the Irish Fly Fishing and Game Shooting Museum for housing the exhibition, and to all members and non-members who contributed items for the display.

### DEPARTMENT MEETING

**MEMBERS will be aware that there were various issues with this year's Peregrine wild harvest, many of which the committee will have been in touch with about via email circulars.**

Suffice to say these administrative obstacles are problematic and the last thing anyone needs given the already considerable headaches involved in taking a hawk from the wild. The good news is that the Committee recently met with representatives of the National Parks and Wildlife Service for what I am told was one of the most positive meetings in recent memory. The Club is now awaiting the results of a review being undertaken by the Department. Rest assured that the situation is being watched like, well, a hawk, and there is ample scientific data on our side to prove that a small wild harvest is both sustainable and green.

### JULIEN RIGOREAU

**IT IS with sadness that we must report the tragic death of Julien Rigoreau.**

Julien, a keen French falconer, attended our first International Snipe Hawking Meet and impressed us all with his enthusiasm for our sport as illustrated by the fact that, on arrival at the meet after travelling by car for a solid three days, offered to fly first!

Our thoughts and prayers are with his wife and two young children.

### ROWLAND EUSTACE PERPETUAL SPARROWHAWK PRIZE

**WE ARE delighted to announce the revival of the Rowland Eustace Sparrowhawk Prize, awarded each year to the best sparrowhawk flown in the country.**

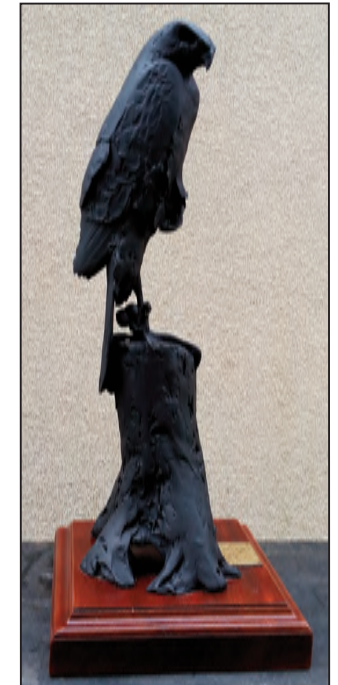
Due to damage, the prize has been out of commission for a great many years and was awarded

only once to Alice (flown by Tommy Byrne) in 1996. The trophy was designed by former IHC Committee member Derek Watson, and has been repaired with diligence and care by Conal Gallagher.

The prize (pictured below) is a way for the IHC to try and maintain interest in the flying of Spars, a raptor species that we have a long and proud tradition with (see [Page 25](#)).

For the criterion needed to win this prestigious award, I'll hand you over to Rowland himself:

*'It is to be awarded to a member flying a sparrowhawk in exemplary manner according to criteria decided by the IHC Committee. This is to encourage more members to fly Sparrowhawks which will give even experienced falconers extra knowledge and skills with this most versatile of hawks. So who is up for the challenge?'*







Irish International  
Snipe-Hawking Field Meet  
October 2015



The Irish Hawking Club is delighted to announce the 2015 International Snipe Hawking Field Meet is again to be held in the Midlands of Ireland in October 2015.

We cordially invite all Falconers (affiliated to their national or regional club) to come and fly their Falcons on the world renowned Irish raised bogs in pursuit of the most evasive of all wading birds, the Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*)

The field meet will be held over three days in October on several thousand acres of raised bogs in the midlands of Ireland. Trained Pointers and Setters will be available for use during the meet. Both experienced and beginning Snipe Hawkers are welcome.

This is an opportunity to witness this incredible and most intricate branch of Falconry and learn from some of the world's greatest Snipe Hawkers.

**When:** Thursday 29th October to Saturday 31st October, 2015

**Where:** The Midlands of Ireland

**Cost:** There is no charge for spectating or flying a Falcon at this meet.

Budget Accommodation with suitable weathering area has been arranged.

Places will be limited so it is advised to inquire early.

Preference will be given to Falconers affiliated to a national or regional Hawking Club

To book a place or for further information, please contact either,

Don Ryan at [don@irishhawkingclub.ie](mailto:don@irishhawkingclub.ie) or Eric Witkowski at [kerryfalconry@gmail.com](mailto:kerryfalconry@gmail.com)

**IRISH HAWKING CLUB  
ON FACEBOOK**



THE IHC have two separate Facebook entities. One is what's known as a page and the other one is a group.

A page is like a website for a company or club. It is meant to be viewed by the general public to keep them updated and informed on current developments in the club and falconry related matters throughout the world. People can also comment on the page and add photos.

The IHC page can be found on [facebook.com/irishhawkingclub](https://www.facebook.com/irishhawkingclub). When you go to this page, click the 'like' button and you will be updated whenever a new post is added. The page is monitored by the administrator so material unsuitable for public viewing will be removed immediately.

A group is more like a forum where you have to be added. Only current paid-up club members are permitted. After the annual renewal date, any members who do not renew their membership will be removed and any new members will be added.

To be added to the group, you must go to [facebook.com/groups/irishhawkingclub](https://www.facebook.com/groups/irishhawkingclub) and click 'join group'. A request is then sent to the administrator who will add you once your current membership is confirmed. The group has proved very popular with current members and has led to numerous events and meets been organised. It is also a great place for beginners to gain contacts, ask questions and generally see what is going on in the world of falconry.

If anyone has any questions or suggestions regarding the Facebook or website sites, please feel free to contact me at [don@irishhawkingclub.ie](mailto:don@irishhawkingclub.ie)

**GOSHAWKS**

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All proven in the hunting field.

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Tel: 0851230165

Email: [barkerskid@eircom.net](mailto:barkerskid@eircom.net)

**ADVERTISING**

Any members wishing to place an ad in the Journal must contact Editor Hilary White on [hylwhite@gmail.com](mailto:hylwhite@gmail.com)

For Newsletters, contact a committee member



**John R Moore**

Irish Wildlife and Sporting Artist

Commissions welcome

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## World Falconry Day 2014

Don Ryan, Co Dublin

If you ever had the pleasure of visiting the Irish Fly Fishing and Game Shooting museum in Attanagh, Co Laois, you will undoubtedly have met the charming owner and curator, Walter Phelan. Walter's vast knowledge of the Irish field sport equipment manufacturers from the famous fishing rod and reel maker, John Enright of Castleconnell, to John Rigby of Dublin, the third-oldest gunmaker in the world, is encyclopaedic. His passion for all Irish field sports is infectious and it was this enthusiasm that prompted the Irish Hawking Club to approach Walter to see if it was possible to establish a falconry section to his museum of eclectic field sport delights.

Falconry is one of the oldest field sports in the world and has a deep heritage in Ireland so we felt it was about time it shared a space alongside the other field sports in Walter's museum. Walter was only too delighted to help and with his typical encouraging manner, embraced the idea with open arms.

An appeal went out to falconers countrywide for items and artefacts that would be suitable for this new section of the museum and the great response we received was enough to warrant our return to Walter with a date to unveil the foundation of this future collection. The day was set for Sunday November 16th, 2014. This particular date was chosen as it coincided with the second World Falconry Day.

A World Falconry Day to fall each year on November 16th was announced in Valkenswaard, Holland in 2013 by the International Association of Falconry (IAF) as the date coincides with the same day in 2010 when Falconry was declared an Intangible Cultural Heritage of mankind by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Org-

anisation (UNESCO). This is a milestone in the history of falconry as it helps safeguard not only the history of falconry but also the future of falconry. It's much more difficult for narrow minded individuals to try stop a 'cultural heritage' than it is a field sport.

In conjunction with the unveiling of the falconry collection, a falconry display was held on the morning of the event in the square at Durrow. This was to be followed by a 5km sponsored walk along a scenic route by the banks of the river Nore to the museum. Unfortunately with the heavy rain on the days preceding the event, the banks of the Nore were flooded which meant creating a 'plan B' walk along the back roads to the museum. It was nonetheless, a very entertaining and enjoyable stroll. There were much appreciated refreshments on arrival followed by a tour of the newly acquired falconry collection. The day was well attended by members and guests and all were treated to a very informative presentation on the 'History of Falconry in Ireland' by Eoghan Ryan, past president of the Irish Hawking Club.

The Irish Hawking Club would like to thank all those who contributed towards the collection, with a special thanks to one of the Club's long-standing members and honorary vice-president Rowland Eustace who donated a number of items including a cherished Oifig an Phoist weighing scales that was much sought after by many Sparrowhawk enthusiasts for its perfect size and accuracy. Thanks must also go to the Honorable John Morris, founding member of the Irish Hawking Club who donated many interesting pieces of Irish interest including a falcon perch belonging to one of the great gurus of International falconry, Ronald Stevens who migrated to Ire-

land in the late 1950's and took up residence in Fermoy lodge which subsequently became a mecca for falconers worldwide. Also of interest was an egg from Farah, a Saker falcon given to John Morris by General Nasrollahi, a friend of John's father, Lord Killanin, past patron of the Irish Hawking Club. She was taken from a nest outside Tehran, Iran in 1966 by Kent Carnie a falconer and US army soldier posted to Iran at that period. Farah, Named after the Shah of Persia's wife, together with a male Peregrine belonging to Ronald Stevens produced the world's first captive hybrids in Galway in 1971. This breeding achievement came during a period in falcon history when the species was at its greatest danger due to the pesticide known as DDT and captive breeding was considered almost impossible. Farah now rests in the natural history museum in Dublin along with some of the young she produced. Ironically, Kent Carnie, the falconer who took her from the nest became the founding curator of the Archives of Falconry museum in Boise, Idaho in 1986. John Morris was recently recognised by the IAF for exceptional services to Irish falconry. A just award indeed for a man who helped protect and promote Irish falconry through many decades.

Walter intends to build a separate 'mews-style' outhouse for this collection and is hoping to have it complete and open to visitors by the end of the year. For those interested in helping out, donating items of interest and old artefacts, old photographs (which are crucial), hawking diaries, or any other items that would be of interest to visitors, please contact either Walter Phelan by telephone at 057 8736112 or the Irish Hawking Club via email on [info@irishhawkingclub.ie](mailto:info@irishhawkingclub.ie)

## The Hon. Johnny Morris

### IHC Honorary Member



**O**ver a glass of wine, the Irish Hawking Club's newest honorary member Johnny Morris spoke to Robert Hutchinson about his life-long passion for falconry.

BORN in 1951, the Hon Johnny Morris spent his early years exploring the wild landscape in the West of Ireland. Like many, his passion for falconry emerged first out of a love of nature; watching falcons and Sparrowhawks on the soar above the bogs in Spiddal, County Galway.

Johnny's most important mentor was Ronald Stevens who had recently relocated from England to the West of Ireland. What the young Johnny learnt from Ronald, whom he describes as being very meticulous and great fun, instilled in his pupil the importance of doing it right (which may account for his belief that no field sport can come near to 'good' falconry but there is nothing worse than bad falconry).

At Ronald's, he met many colourful characters including American falconer Henry Swain, English falconer Geoffrey Pollard and the artist David Reid-Henry. In pre-telemetry days, having excellent hearing, Bill Rutledge was always glad to see him appear at his side out lark hawking.

His real falconry education, however, began when he started to fly his own falcons; Mer-

lins at larks and casts of Peregrines at magpies and grey crows (hooded crows), sometimes off sturdy Connemara ponies. What was to follow was many eventful hawking seasons with fellow falconers including Alec Finn, Captain Robert Nairac and Tony Hus-ton.

A free and contented spirit, he has no regrets looking back on his decision to divide his days between children (mornings) and falconry (afternoons). Although not in the best of health at the moment, he is always keen to get out. We recently enjoyed a morning's sport flying Goshawks at pheasants and despite the freezing conditions, he insisted that we flew our tiercels at snipe on his favourite bog in the afternoon.

His achievements include breeding the first ever hybrid falcon in captivity (in partnership with Ronald), setting up the Irish Hawking Club and securing licensed wild harvest for Irish falconers. He is also an honorary member of both the Irish Hawking Club and the British Falconers Club.

But perhaps Johnny's greatest achievement is his lifelong dedication to 'good' falconry.

Robert Hutchinson

*Editor's note: Johnny was also recently recognised by the International Association for Falconry when he was the recipient of the IAF Presidential Award for Exceptional Services to Falconry*





Member profile  
**Johan Kolman:**  
**Portrait of an Artist Falconer**

**The Artist**

**J**ohan Kolman was born in the Netherlands in 1954. He studied at the Art Academy in The Netherlands, where he was tutored by H.J.Slijper, a well-known Dutch artist and a falconer as well.

Johan has been a professional painter since he finished art school in 1978. He is known for his knowledge about the techniques of painting. He works mainly on commission. One of these commissions was working in the Middle East for six months painting portraits of the favoured falcons of high-placed Arabs in 1982.

Over the years, he has specialized in making portraits of people and birds of prey. He is very much appreciated for combining these specialities in making portraits of falconers with their birds, a combination rarely seen. He works mainly in oil and gouache (water colour)

Johan is also well known in many countries for illustrating annual yearbooks and newsletters for falconry clubs. Besides being a member of the Irish Hawking Club (he represented Ireland in the art exhibition of the Third International Festival of Falconry), he has been a member of the Dutch falconry club Adriaan Mollen since 1972, for which he made the front covers of their annual yearbooks for many years. He was the editor of Adriaan Mollen's recently published 75th anniversary book.



**The Falconer**

**A**s a young boy, Johan was attracted by birds in general, keeping a group of 14 jackdaws flying around his family home, fascinated by the social behaviour of these birds (probably why he never flew at jackdaws with his hawks). Falconry came later when he went out after school hours with his tutor Henk Slijper who was flying a Lanner Falcon on magpie and a Sparrowhawk on blackbird. Since then, falconry played a very important role in his life.

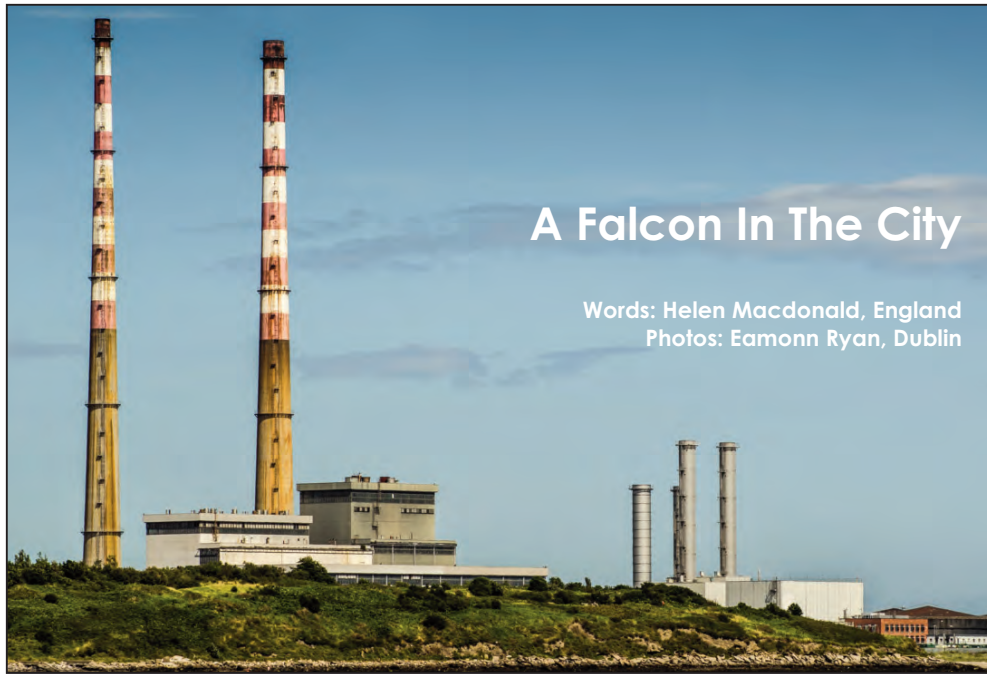
From the Seventies onwards, he flew mainly Goshawks and many (rehab) Sparrowhawks. He is a passionate falconer attracted to the restless nature of the Accipiters, but also charmed by the friendly nature of the Peregrines.

As a fan of the cocker spaniel for the Goshawk, he is also passionate in that field. One of his dogs became a field-trial champion in The Netherlands.

He lives in Ireland for a good part of the year. Living first near Doolin, he is now based in east Clare near Ennis. He has always been attracted to Ireland for its space, nature and music, but above all, the people.

[johankolman.com](http://johankolman.com)





## A Falcon In The City

Words: Helen Macdonald, England  
Photos: Eamonn Ryan, Dublin

I'm standing on cracked asphalt by a high security fence at the eastern edge of Ireland. The sky is cold pewter, the salt wind bitter. I've come all the way here to watch wildlife, and I have just turned my back on the only birds I can see. The miles of sand behind me have been washed by the Irish Sea into a perfect blankness, pearly with gulls and flocks of migrant waders. It's beautiful. But my friends Hilary and Eamonn have told me to look instead at Dublin's Poolbeg Power Station, a giant's play set of brutal turbine halls facing the shining sands. Set amid sewerage works, derelict red-brick buildings, wharves, cranes and shipping containers, this is a bizarre spot for a wildlife pilgrimage. Two decommissioned cooling chimneys tower above us, marked with vertical washes of rust and horizontal bands of red and white. Rising from the horizon, they are your first sight of Ireland if you arrive from the east by sea and the last when you leave. Visible throughout

the city, they have come to mean home for a whole generation of Dubliners — and for the peregrine falcons that have nested on them for years.

For a while, not much happens. We watch flocks of pigeons clattering about the roofline in shadowless winter light. My face grows numb with cold. I shiver. Then, below the chimneys, a pigeon cartwheels like a thrown firework through a broken window into the darkness beyond. There is something horrible about its descent. Had it been shot? Had some kind of fit? It takes me a bit to work out that the pigeon was trying to get inside as fast as possible, and then I know that the falcons have come.

A narrow black anchor appears suddenly, falling fast toward the west chimney as if on an invisible zip wire. Seeing something alive descending to earth at such speed brings a hitch to my throat. A faint, echoing call drifts toward us, the unlikely ee-

chip ee-chip of a swinging, un-oiled door. It is the male, the tiercel. He swerves, spreads his wings wide to brake and alights upon the rail by a nest box fixed by a worker to a metal walkway a hundred feet above. He shakes his feathers into place and sits looking toward the estuary, flat-headed, an inverted bullet—shape black against the sky.

"Do you want to see?" Eamonn says while gesturing to a telescope. Through the device, the falcon is oddly two-dimensional, rippling in the bright circle as if seen through water, and my eyes ache as I try to focus on small points of sharpness: the barred feathers of his chest, his black hood, a faint chromatic fringe ghosting him with suggestions of dust and rainbows. He's exquisite, the color of smoke, paper and wet ash. He starts preening his feathers; he puffs out his belly, half closes his eyes, angles his head back to zip single scapulars through his neat, curved

beak. Gusts of wind rising up the chimney face blow his feathers the wrong way. His talons are curled around rusting steel. The wind has ice in it. He looks utterly at home.

This perch gives him vantage on miles of hunting territory: estuary, docks, city streets, parks and golf courses. The divisions between those things are of little consequence to him. But they are to us. What we are watching is a small, feathered rebuke to our commonplace notion that nature exists only in places other than our own, an assumption that seems always one step toward turning our back on the natural world, abandoning it as something disappearing or already lost.

For much of the 20th century, falcons were celebrated as romantic icons of threatened wilderness. The mountains and waterfall gorges where they chose to nest were sublime sites where visitors could contemplate nature and meditate on the brevity of human existence. But there's a romanticism to industrial ruins too. The rusting chimneys and broken windows of the Poolbeg site have their own troubling beauty, the beauty of things that have outlasted their use. Falcons haunt landscapes that speak to us of mortality: moun-

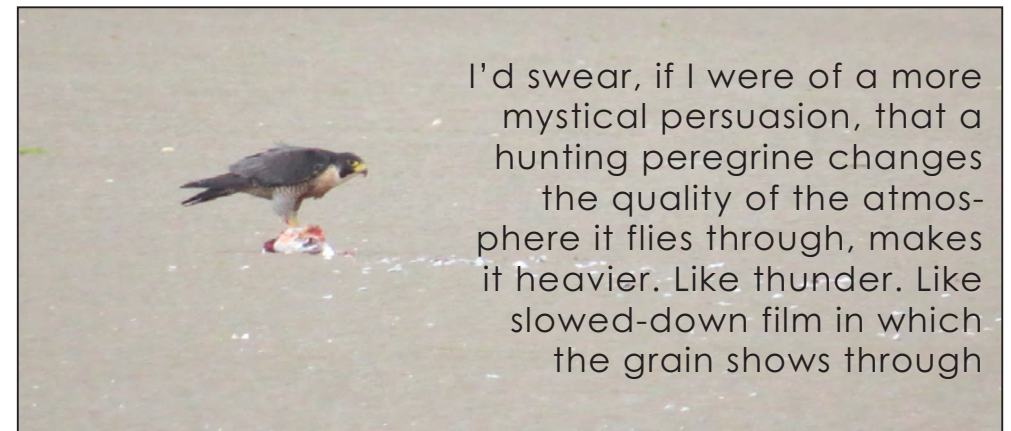
tains, by virtue of their eternity; industrial ruins, by virtue of their reminding us that this, too, in time will be gone, and that we should protect what is here, now.

Perhaps the peregrine is becoming the living essence of landscapes like these. When Eamonn was a child, he went with his father to search for peregrines in the Wicklow Mountains because books told him they nested on cliffs and crags. He saw none at all. His first wild peregrine was sitting high on a Dublin city gasometer. Falcons have nested on tall buildings for centuries, but the rise of urban peregrines is a relatively recent phenomenon. In the 1950s and 1960s, the pesticide DDT sent peregrine populations into a free fall across Europe and North America, before it was gradually banned. As their numbers recovered, peregrines moved into cities, lured by flocks of feral pigeons. In the Eastern United States, no wild falcons remained, so the Peregrine Fund released captive-bred birds to artificial nests on towers and tall buildings to repopulate their former range. Traditional nest sites on cliffs were deemed too dangerous; lacking parents to protect them, inexperienced youngsters fell prey to great horned owls. When grown, these falcons gravitated to buildings and

bridges, searching for nest sites that resembled their own. Additional release programs followed.

Today peregrines have become a familiar sight in cities. New York has about 20 breeding pairs, London more than 25. Nesting on high-rises, coursing pigeons through city streets, they have developed novel behaviors in response to their surroundings. Some have learned to hunt at night, ascending into darkness to grab migrant birds lit from beneath by streetlights. Urban environments are not without risk: The sheer sides, reflective glass and unexpected gusts of wind around tall buildings can result in crash landings when young birds take their first flights, and dedicated locals who follow the lives of particular pairs through binoculars, telescopes or webcams sometimes intervene to rescue grounded birds from traffic. Even so, peregrine populations are growing in cities; perched high on corporate headquarters, scanning the sky and streets below, the falcons can readily be viewed as reflections of our own fascination with vision, surveillance and power. But falcons are not merely handy symbols for human anxieties. Their greatest magic is that they're not human at all.

Eamonn comes to this site in



I'd swear, if I were of a more mystical persuasion, that a hunting peregrine changes the quality of the atmosphere it flies through, makes it heavier. Like thunder. Like slowed-down film in which the grain shows through



Dublin nearly every day and has been doing so for years. He started watching the Poolbeg peregrines after a great be-reavement because it "was ... away," he told me. I understood what he meant. At times of difficulty, watching birds ushers you into a different world, where there are no words to be spoken. With urban falcons, this is not a distant world, but one alongside you, a place of transient and graceful refuge. These days, working in Dublin, Eamonn keeps one eye on the sky, scanning churches and city towers. Up there, he sees falcons looking down on the streets below. "Bits of eternity," he calls them. Sometimes he sees one speeding overhead, a black silhouette over Temple Bar or the Olympia Theater. In an instant, his city is transformed. Buildings become cliffs, streets canyons.

Time passes. The tiercel has gone. Now the female appears on the edge of the nest box. She is larger and paler than her mate. For a minute or two, she sits undecided, looking about. Then she opens her wings, wheels and glides down

toward the other chimney. I raise my binoculars, wincing at the difficulty of focusing them with frozen hands. I see her wings flex and primaries flare. She turns slowly in midair. There is a change in the quality of her flight. I'm not sure what it is. Then with a skip of the heart, I see an incautious pigeon flying low toward her, flapping in a leisurely manner. It can't have seen her. But she has seen it. The world shrinks to the space between the two birds. I hear an intake of breath from my companions as she sideslips and falls toward it with the finality of a rock flung from a bridge. The stricken pigeon dodges, closes its wings and drops to last-minute safety in the buildings below. The falcon circles, climbs and disappears inland.

We take the binoculars from our eyes and look at one another. We have all been reminded that a day can be cut in two by three seconds of a hunting peregrine and leave you stilled into silence and the memory of each curve of its flight. I'd swear, if I were of a more mystical persuasion, that a hunting peregrine changes the quality of the atmosphere it flies

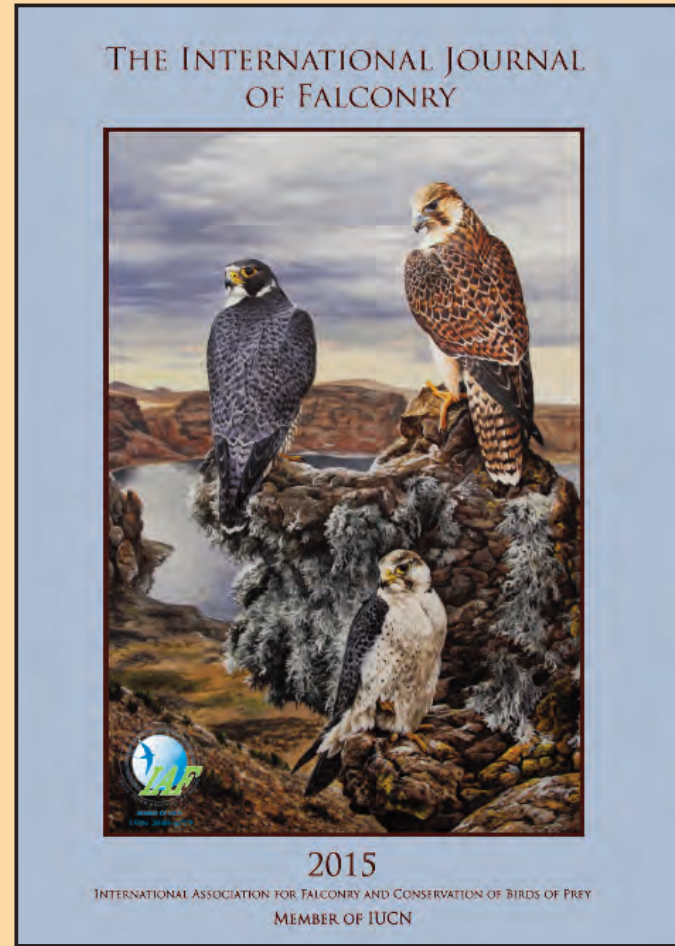
through, makes it heavier. Like thunder. Like slowed-down film in which the grain shows through. The Poolbeg site is about as far as you can get from a thriving natural ecosystem, but watching a falcon chase its prey above the scarred and broken ground beneath feels like an act of quiet resistance against despair. Matters of life and death and a sense of our place in the world are tied fast together in a shiver of moving wings across a scrap of winter sky.

*Helen Macdonald teaches at the University of Cambridge. Her most recent book, 'H Is for Hawk,' won the 2014 Samuel Johnson Prize and was the 2014 Costa Book of the Year. Reviewed on Page 17*

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**To see a short film about the Peregrines of Poolbeg featuring IHC members Eamonn Ryan and Hilary White, go to Youtube.com and search 'Quill To Power'**

The world shrinks to the space between the two birds. I hear an intake of breath from my companions as she sideslips and falls toward it with the finality of a rock flung from a bridge



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# Book Reviews

by Eoghan Ryan, Gary Timbrell, Hilary White



## Looking For The Goshawk

by Conor Mark Jameson  
(A&C Black, 2013)

Reviewed by Eoghan Ryan

I was asked by our Club Director, Don Ryan, would I review this book. Was this a joke? Was it because I had lost 'The Duchess', his large female Finish Goshawk which I acquired from him later in her first season in 2013? I lost her due to a faulty cable tie that had attached the transmitter to her ankle following a pursuit on a cock pheasant (there's a bit more to that story!). I had spent hours 'looking for the Goshawk' myself and I continue to hope that she is out there somewhere doing her bit as part of an unofficial reintroduction programme...

Back to the book review. Conor Mark Jameson was born in Uganda to Irish parents, brought up in Scotland and now lives in England in a village an hour north of London. He is a columnist and feature writer for *Birds Magazine* and suspected seeing a Goshawk near his village. This led him on a quest to investigate further. Over several years – during which time he wrote this book - his journey brought him to different parts of the UK, the US and Germany where he sought out expert ornithologists and Goshawk enthusiasts to learn more about this 'phantom of the forest'. He cites many individuals in the book, including Jemima Parry-Jones and our own Marc Ruddock (whom many will know from the Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group and may have met at the International Snipe Hawking Meet in October, 2014).

In his attempt to learn about the Goshawk, he explores as many historical records that he can about the Goshawk until it became the first bird of prey to be shot and trapped to extinction in Britain and Ireland. The falconer will take interest in the fact that TH White's book *The Goshawk* (1951) becomes a source of inspiration to the author, who seeks out the cottage where he lived while training his Goshawk in 1937. As Jameson states himself, 'rather than dwell on the lack of insights on wild state Goshawks, I have become intrigued by the author'. He becomes fascinated in the man, his life, his other books and his travels. White's influence has been widely felt, yet he remains curiously marginalised in literary history (JK Rowling cites one of his characters in *The Once And Future King* as the spiritual forebear of Harry Potter). It is interesting to read that White had Irish connections and even lived in Roscommon for four years after writing *The Goshawk*.

Much of the book is an exploration of the Jameson's local countryside as he strolls about or sets out to local woods to follow up on suspected sightings of Goshawks. He describes the buzzards, kites, hobbies, sparrowhawks, etc on his daily excursions – or the remains of kills – as he tries to decipher what might be a Goshawk kill or the tell-tale sign of one. He notes that many reported sightings of Goshawks are considered closely but

frequently dismissed as mistaken identity. At times, I wondered where the book was going with all this but overall I enjoyed it as it reminded me of some of my own countryside ramblings and search for raptors. The book is very insightful, providing fascinating and interesting facts and observations. For example, local Goshawks in one area were noted by one observer (and the author) not to always hunt in 'the stealthy, under the canopy way'. Instead, they often circle up several hundred feet above a wood and patrol determinedly and accelerate into a stoop, peregrine-like while hunting and outside the breeding season. At another point in the book he writes –

'Manuel Diego Pareja-Obregon, falconer and author of the book about Spanish Goshawks *God Made You Eternal*, has a theory that the wide diversity he's encountered in Spain's Goshawks can be traced to the historic trade in the birds from all over Europe. There are Irish and Norwegian genes in these birds, and huge variation in young birds within a brood, he believes.'

Jameson's work took him abroad. He visits Central Park where Red-Tail Hawks have taken up permanent residency whereas many others pass through on migration. He even witnesses a kill on a pigeon one morning. There is a fascinating chapter on resident and breeding Goshawks in Berlin – which have now been found nesting in small parks and cemeteries within the city. By the mid-1970s, there was one pair of Goshawks in the west of the city; today there are 90 pairs and the city is thought to be at capacity with roughly ten pairs for each 100sqkm. Hamburg and Cologne are some of the other German cities that have encountered thriving urban Goshawks. Accounts of birds perched on 20-storey apartment blocks scanning the city streets and parks for potential prey dispel the myth that the species is exclusively a deep forest

dweller (though later accounts in the book from the US would indicate it lives deep in the forest and at much lower densities than typically found in Europe).

Throughout the book, the author looks at the threats to the Goshawk and other bird of prey species – both historically and present day. He cites vermin records from large estates in the 1800s (noting that 63 Goshawk were killed between 1837-1840 at an estate at Glengarry, Scotland, in addition to some other remarkable numbers; 27 White tailed Eagles, 15 Golden Eagles, 462 Kestrels, 285 Common Buzzards, 78 Merlins, 63 Hen Harriers, 6 'Jer Falcons', 371 Rough-legged Buzzards, 18 Ospreys

and 98 'blue hawks'). The author also cites modern day legal cases where gamekeepers and landowners are being prosecuted for poisoning and trapping raptors. He also examined attempts at reintroducing Goshawks from Norway, Sweden, Finland and Germany to the UK in the late 1960s-1980s. Interesting figures are provided on lost falconry birds making their way into the wild, with over 500 Goshawks imported between 1970-1975 and as many as 25 finding their way into the wild annually. That's 225 Goshawks in nine years.

The author travels to some of the hot spots for wild Goshawk breeding in the UK, notably the Kielder, a wide forested upland area of Northumbria

with an estimated 28 breeding pairs. (From recollection, I think it is estimated there are approximately 500 breeding pairs of Goshawks in the UK.) Jameson notes that the Goshawk is doing pretty well in the extensive state-owned forests of south-west Scotland and speculates that they might even be able to move out over the Irish Sea to reclaim Ireland. I think that might be a fitting way to wind up this review, with prospects of the Goshawk following the Buzzards colonization pattern.

Overall, I found it an enjoyable read, informative, insightful and a fitting book for my shelf.

This is my first book review since about 2002. Back then, the reviewers always got the book free so it was harder to pan it, and it was also a time when good falconry books were still quite hard to find. Around that period, the bad books started coming every year: 'Last weekend, I gave my husband a weekend course at a falconry centre, he bought a hawk, a perch, a scales and a book; this weekend he wrote one.' There were definitely too many general falconry books back in the 2010s, mostly plagiarizing other peoples' work.

I paid €32 on Amazon for this monograph so I don't have to be all-praising of it. It's the most comprehensive book on hawking with Sparrowhawks since our own Liam Ó Broin's *The Sparrowhawk: A Manual for Hawking*, although it's a shame the proof-reading was not as meticulous as Michael Comyns's was for Liam; the older I get, the less tolerant I am of bad spelling and typographical errors. OK, back on track before this review begins to be a treatise on 'How to make enemies and not influence anybody'.

There were several things I liked about this book: it comes from obvious experience and well-reasoned logic for one thing. Crane not only tells you what you should do, he tells you why this is the best way and you can tell he has learned this from his own experience and from taking the



## Sparrowhawks: A Falconer's Guide

by Ben Crane and Co  
(The Crowood Press, 2014)

Reviewed by Gary Timbrell

best of the experience of others, not from just plagiarizing their work. Another good thing, he spends considerable time on Muskets as well as Spars, not dismissing them as so many more general authors have. The hunting chapters and initial training to hunt are interesting, illustrated with photographs and diary entries from various falconers (sorry, I still can't use the word 'sparviter', it sounds too contrived).

Its forté is imprinting and showing the way to get the most out of imprinting an aviary-bred Spar, but Crane freely acknowledges other ways of training them. He has incorporated ideas and advice via guest contributors from several countries, including Ireland (our own Hilary White writes this section of Chapter 5, although he is poorly credited for his 14-page contribution), Croatia, Turkey and Pakistan, which was very nice to see. However, his acknowl-

edgements of the people in those countries are occasionally a little inadequate. For example, he mentions few foreign falconers by name, especially those who obviously went out of their way in Asian countries to show him sport. The incorporation of these authentic artisan falconries into a modern falconry book is testament to the importance of the UNESCO Inscription. Before IAF started working towards this in 2004, no-one knew these people existed. Now they are influencing the way we practice flying spars through books such as this one.

Crane took a stand to promote his book at the UK Falconers' Fair last May and it sold out on the first day. Would I recommend it? Of course I would recommend it – it's about Sparrowhawks, isn't it?



## The Goshawk

by Robert Kenward  
(T & A D Poyser, 2006)

Reviewed by Eoghan Ryan

This is an excellent book that I thoroughly enjoyed reading. It is a fairly comprehensive examination of the Goshawk that pulls together Prof Robert Kenward's own research and fieldwork – in the UK and Sweden in particular – and draws on a variety of other publications and research from Europe and North America. It is a scientific publication that fits into the long established Poyser (the publisher) series of species monographs. The book covers a lot: etymology, racial variation, weights and measurements, productivity, nesting, courtship, incubation and rearing, diet, flight and foraging behaviour, prey selection and predation pressures, mortality, population dynamics and even a section on domestic breeding.

It is full of facts and figures with a multitude of graphs representing trends and characteristics. I spoke to a wildlife ranger who found it a bit 'heavy' going and I think abandoned reading it. However I agree with the cover sleeve which states that *The Goshawk* is both a valuable resource for ornithologist and raptor specialists, and a great read'. I would add, though, that it is a particularly interesting book for the falconer or austringer for a number of reasons. Kenward, who is a raptor biologist and conservationist, is also a falconer and frequently draws on his experience in flying and hunting with Goshawks as a means of offering the reader insights into behaviour and habits. Kenward also has had a 30-year plus association with the IAF. There are probably few serious ornithological studies written by falconers that clearly draw on and highlight

their falconry experience (there is even a chapter on falconry and management methods). For me, this makes it a landmark publication as it clearly demonstrates the valuable role and insights that falconers can play in raptor research and behaviour. Most chapters end with a section or focus on the implications for conservation and management, including game management, with pragmatic and realistic suggestions.

A lot of the research was drawn from radio tagging and then tracking them to determine the extent of their home range, foraging habits, etc.

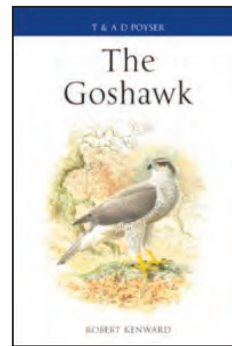
The largest birds tend to come from North Scandinavia, in particular north-east Siberia. In fact, Goshawk wings in Europe get about 4% longer, on average, for every ten degrees of latitude towards the north. The Goshawks from North Fennoscandia have wings 10% longer than hawks on the islands of the Mediterranean.

There are many fascinating insights into this raptor's behaviour. One such fact is that where suitable nest trees are scarce, Goshawks sometimes nest on the ground or very close to it (such as in Tundra regions of Alaska and Siberia). In the Netherlands, one tried to nest on an electricity pylon and while in Norway one nested on the stump of a spruce tree that had been felled one Spring after being used as a nest tree. The book also dispels the myth that Goshawks must have large and extensive woodlands in which to nest and breed. This is demonstrated through data on nest sites in Europe and even the urban nests

cited in German and Dutch cities. Kenward compares the duration of the moult in both wild and trained hawks, with the duration being less for the trained hawks (by up to 50 days). He examines the density of nest sites and the interdependency on prey density. He looks at the manner in which young birds disperse from the nest once they fledge; how young fledglings have been known to switch broods (finding a nest of another pair with possibly more food supply); and he provides insights into how dispersal movements occur and homing (which, in my view, offers insights into how a falconer might go about tracking a lost Goshawk).

The book has so many in-depth insights into this incredible species that I can hardly do it proper justice. However, if you are an austringer with a love and passion for Goshawks then I think you'd find this book a well worthwhile purchase.

As I undertook these book reviews, I received a report of from a reliable source of a Goshawk sighting on multiple occasions not far from my home. The anticipation and excitement of 'wild goshawks' in my area added to my pleasure in reading these books. I did manage to spot the Goshawk on at least one occasion but it looked like a male (not the female I lost). But it nonetheless offers hope for the future that our woodlands and countryside might be graced by the presence of these impressive creatures once again on a permanent basis.



After the death of her beloved father, writer, poet, Cambridge academic and falconer Helen Macdonald sought out one of falconry's most challenging charges – the Northern Goshawk, 'the ruffian' of the hawk world. It would, she hoped, consume her so greedily as to soften the waves of remorse she felt for her father, a photojournalist whom her nature-mad childhood had revolved around. The decision chimed with the other absences in her life; a man, a family, a job or a permanent abode.

Any falconer reading this will know that training a Gos is not the kind of thing you'd wish on anyone going through a time of emotional fragility. Few things consume the mind or test the resolve as wholly in falconry as these mercurial, spring-loaded accipiters. Macdonald's gut and subconscious took her and her grief into the world of this solitary species, a place where human connections and feelings would only get in the way. *H Is For Hawk* is about that process and what the author discovers on the other side. But there is also much more going on here.

As a child, Macdonald was a 'hawk bore' to her parents, obsessing over them, poring over all the old falconry literature and drawing them at any spare moment. One of the texts was TH White's *The Goshawk* (1951). White – who was honoured at a special event at the Archives of Falconry in Idaho, US recently – had, as Macdonald biographs with forensic sensitivity, a sorry life. He was abused by his violently incompatible parents as well as at school, and lived with little in the way of human companionship due to his closeted homosexuality.

The Gos he disastrously trained in 1936 was similarly White's way of 'disappearing into nature' to treat a very human wound.

White is thus a prism through which Macdonald tries to understand her own self-imposed feathery exile. Where once she scorned White the novice falconer she now finds herself softening to him. She stands back even further then, questioning the romantic myth of nature being a refuge for bruised hearts. Mabel – her Ulster-bred Goshawk – is a predator, a 'spooky, pale-eyed psychopath', no matter how comfortable and playful she comes to be in the author's company. It is ultimately the hawk's cold-eyed lack of humanity in the field that reminds Macdonald of her need for human warmth.

And yet for a book that has death and dead people at its core, *H Is For Hawk* is some of the most charged nature writing to appear since JA Baker's evergreen *The Peregrine* (1967). Macdonald's ruminations on Mabel, her prey, English wildlife and habitat are gilded, shimmering things, like graffiti being precision-flung before your eyes. Here, a cloud of bouncing linnets are 'half midges, half musical notation'. There, a wild hawk's swoop is 'a knife-cut, a smooth calligraphic scrawl'.

Literary judges and the book-loving public have taken *H Is For Hawk* to heart in spectacular fashion (she has won both the Samuel Johnson and Costa Book of The Year awards, two of the biggest in the English-speaking world), connecting with its brave beauty and genre-bending. For the falconry com-

## H Is For Hawk

by Helen Macdonald  
(Jonathan Cape, 2014)

Reviewed by Hilary White

community, however, it is a milestone and arguably the most significant work of the last 20 years. Centuries of falconry texts have shown us how to tie knots, man hawks and swing lures, but never before has the emotional and psychological relationship between human and hawk been pieced apart with such precise sensitivity or affection.

Translations into some ten languages are on the way for *H Is For Hawk* and this is good news. It's too important to be confined solely to falconers in English speaking regions.

### Review a book

**Has your day been saved by a trusty piece of text, or do you find some are not worthy of the hype they get?**

**Tell the rest of your club your verdict on a falconry book, old or new, and why you think it does or doesn't deserve to live in every member's bookcase.**

**hylwhite@gmail.com**



## International Snipe Hawking Meet, October 2014

Diana Durman-Walters, UK

Four years ago whilst discussing the merits of high flying falcons with Irish falconer Martin Brereton, he mentioned that he had a tiercel who was showing great style and ability on Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*). In passing he noted, that should I like to see this good tiercel, then best make it sooner rather than later, in order to experience the brilliance of him on this quarry. I saw him in action for the first time at last year's IHC Snipe Hawking Meet. Fortunately for me, he has been graced with longevity and at 14 years of age, is still a remarkable falcon to see flown at this demanding, supremely fast, species of wader.

Landing at Dublin airport with its bustle and traffic and predictable movement of passengers already faced with heavy rain and hire car congestion, was a far cry from the short drive out of the city into the open spaces of Co Kildare. This part of the Irish midlands is renowned for its rich natural beauty such as lakes, waterways and canals.

The Moy Valley Hotel and Golf Resort was the central base for the week-long event was very

well appointed. Ample room to weather the falcons with very good facilities for guests and falconers alike.

Traditional game hawking produces high pitched flights, the focus of which is on either partridge or Red grouse. It is capable of producing quite dramatic stooping and mastery of their quarry. A great deal has been written on this element, as not only does it require excellent falcons that are tremendously fit, but equally requires pointing dogs that are great gamefinders and work as part of the team with the falcon and falconer. This style of falconry is in a stand-alone class and has been promoted as the ultimate challenge for any falconer.

Ireland has a lack of suitable quarry in this respect and has traditionally been known for its falconers who excelled at flying sparrowhawks. Snipe hawking you might feel doesn't have many comparisons, but that would be very far from the reality.

Irish falconers are blessed with enviable snipe terrain that is tantalising for those who have

chosen this as their ultimate quarry. Snipe test a falcon's ability, skill and discipline. Their exceptionally quick flight, rolling from side to side with flicked wing-beat action and a rapid, fast escape require a very fit falcon and one that has taken a dominating pitch into the bargain.

This year's event was in the capable hands of Don Ryan, Martin Brereton and Robert Hutchinson, who was field master each day.

As Robert pointed out, most kills are in fact from a lower pitch (by comparison to game hawks) and rely on a bind style to secure their quarry. This is why a lot of tiercels kill on their second or third attempt. It is rare to take snipe from an incredibly high pitch in a vertical stoop. The most successful falcons need to master the techniques of applying a different approach in descent and adjusting their flight pattern to connect with the snipe just as it comes out of the jinking phase of its flight and before it starts to pump upwards. Many proven grouse hawks fail at snipe, as they all too often overshoot the quarry, or may refuse to take them once flushed. The latter



Snipe test a falcon's ability, skill and discipline. Their exceptionally quick flight, rolling from side to side with flicked wing-beat action and a rapid, fast escape require a very fit falcon and one that has taken a dominating pitch into the bargain

may well be to do with becoming "wedded" to large quarry from a young age, therefore it is important that young falcons are introduced to snipe from the onset.

There have probably always been falconers that have attempted snipe as a quarry, but it has been with limited success. Ronald Stevens mentioned as much in correspondence to others and Richard Browne targeted the species in the 1990's in County Kerry. It wasn't until approximately 15 years ago when Robert Hutchinson moved to the Bog of Allen and arranged for a number of English falconers who flew perlines and peregrines at small quarry to come

over for the first snipe field meet, that snipe hawking came of age and was taken seriously. At this event, Greg Liebenhals took the first snipe with his perlin.

Martin Brereton attended the event with his then un-entered tiercel, which was unsuccessful. It took another 20 days before he had his first kill. Success breeds success and as the seasons rolled on, this tiercel was to be unstoppable in its ability and talent at this quarry. It is Martin's enthusiasm and his generosity in bringing falconers on that has played a most significant part in the sport's development. His falcon showed how it could be done successfully on such a regular basis that it became, for many Irish falconers, a dedi-

cated branch of falconry.

Grant Hagger, who is very well known for his perlines, has also been a great influence. Totally committed to the sport, and producing flights at the highest level, he lives in Ireland during the winter, where he is totally devoted to flying snipe over his setter.

Ireland has traditionally produced, both past and present, great Pointers and Setters. The landscape is made for hard-running dogs, despite the sparsity of game. As a consequence, this group of gundogs have evolved to be tireless runners, strong hearted and capable of locating points where there is a shortage of game.



Snipe in abundance, are excellent for getting dogs to point. There are few distractions as far as scent goes and Pointers and Setters can excel at this quarry. In particular, dogs that are worked solely on these birds, especially in difficult cover, become exemplary in locating them.

In attendance during the week were eight Irish falconers flying 11 falcons in total, namely Kevin Marron, Trevor Roche, Jason Deasy, Don Ryan, Martin Brereton, Bruce Wilkie, Robert Hutchinson, whilst overseas visitors came from Austria, Belgium, France, Holland, Isle-of-Man, Poland, Spain and the UK.

Snipe are found on wet marshes and boggy heaths at all times where they can use the soft ground cover to probe for worms and small crustaceans. Blanket bogs are found wherever there is high rainfall, which is typically in western Ireland and also in mountainous areas. They are called blanket bogs because of their appearance as from a distance they appear

uniform and hug the landscape like a blanket. They are dynamic ecosystems, rich in unique flora and fauna covering 20% of the land area and making 50% of the bogland of Western Europe. Snipe arrive from Northern Europe and join with resident birds usually the second week in October and can be flown until end of January, which is the close of the season.

However, traditional turf cutting on bogs on an industrial scale can be seen and was very evident in certain areas of the fieldmeet. How this will impact on these specialised environments is a subject that is already hotly debated and hopefully will resolve in good conservation measure taken to preserve these unique landscapes.

A fairly large party of spectators and falconers alike took to the bogs each day. Very easy walking, but the entry to some of these grounds can present problems in navigating onto it. Soft wet peat banks can be dif-

ficult to climb over, and irrigation trenches to leap across, but there was never a shortage of helping hands to get you into the best place to view the hawking.

As soon as one, or a brace of dogs were cast off, it was a joy to be able to see these fast, accomplished gamefinders, running out questing for scent and indicating they were drawing onto point. Here one can appreciate the running style of pointers and setters compared to HPRs, particularly dogs running boldly in unison then backing whilst the first dog claims the point. It's exciting to watch.

All of the tiercels flown were quick to take flight once the hood had been struck and begin to take a pitch that would give them the advantage. Noticeably, the more experienced of them flew into a commanding position over the point and kept gaining height between falconer and the dog. Once the snipe had broken cover and flushed, the

Once the snipe had broken cover and flushed, the falcon's reactions were immediate and those that had taken a good pitch made some exhilarating stoops



falcon's reactions were immediate and those that had taken a good pitch made some exhilarating stoops. The sudden fast escape, with undulating flicked wingbeats that snipe are masters of, ensure that this is no easy contest. Quite often the flight can be taken over some distance before the tiercel can gain an advantage and make a kill. They are superbly matched; they feature very much as part of a wild peregrine diet and as a consequence have evolved to be a tricky, fast quarry capable of outmanoeuvring its natural predator.

Only one hybrid, a gyr x merlin tiercel, attended the meet, flown by Jason Deasy and com-

bined with a very good Hungarian Vizsla. Whereas for him the high-pitching style of the peregrines was not so evident or compulsory, the formidable flying skills of merlin and gyr provided him with the skill for this quarry. In addition, he was undaunted by cover when his snipe used the trees and bushes on the edge of the bog to fly through. For his size and weight he was outstanding to watch on this challenging quarry.

Another equally talented combination was that of Irish Red Setter and peregrine tiercels, flown in excellent style by Eric Witkowski, a resident in County Kerry who has been flying Snipe for the last six years.

There can be few falconry fieldmeets that allow a large gallery of spectators to see excellent falcons flown at snipe. The Irish Hawking Club is emerging in a distinctive branch of falconry that has some outstanding dogs, falcons and falconers flying at a very challenging quarry. The sports development is a tale of generous sharing of knowledge and know-how and enjoying flights on the bog. It is without doubt a falconry meet that should be experienced.

## IAF International Meeting Ireland, 2016

Ireland is to host the AGM of the International Association of Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey in 2016.

This prestigious event will showcase Irish Falconry to visitors from all over the world and is set to be the biggest falconry event the country will ever have seen.

A sub-committee has been set up to handle the many important elements that will need to be in place to receive so many overseas guests. Help will be needed to make sure the show goes off without a hitch so we are appealing for volunteers to contact a member of the Committee if they would like to help.



### 2015 JOURNAL CONTENT

Members are being urged to contribute copy in good time in order to prevent delays to the 2015 journal. Fieldmeet reports are great but what we really need are more opinion pieces, reviews and anecdotes on any aspect of falconry, conditioning, fieldcraft, husbandry, equipment, health, food etc.

Hi-Res images only please, and always send as separate attachments.

Thank you!  
hylwhite@gmail.com

## TELEMETRY

The IHC strongly recommends the use of telemetry by all members when flying their birds of prey.

Not to do so, especially in the case of non-native species and hybrids, could jeopardise the good will that exists between responsible falconers and other non-government organisations concerned with conservation and wildlife and with wildlife authorities themselves.



**Nigel**  
**Bill Johnston, US**

**N**igel is an imprinted Eurasian Sparrowhawk, a bird all too familiar to most IHC readers. As common in the UK, Ireland and Europe as Red Tailed Hawks and Harris Hawks are here in the US, sometimes it's the exotic that hold appeal to falconers that despite advancing years yearn to explore.

He was pulled from the chamber at seven days, and raised alone in the breeder's home until at 14 days he was shipped to me. I could have purchased several tiercel Peregrines or a grey phase Gyrfalcon for what I paid for the pitiful looking mass of down and feathers standing on two elongated toothpicks that looked back at me from the interior of the shipping crate. Once home and comfortably installed in his 'nest', my little guy settled right in.

I subscribe to the notion that accipiters must be taken at an age where they show no fear and are exposed to everything that one can think they will see later on. Until hard penned, Nigel was kept in my family room amongst people, dogs, TV and any other distraction that occurs in a normal household. Never hand fed, his dish was always full. He also took frequent car rides, sitting on a modified box strapped to the front seat of my truck. I even remembered to turn the windshield wipers on. Many of our excursions took us to a local farm and a trash recycling plant where I planned to hunt him. He saw cows, cars, sheep, trucks and all manner of industrial and farm equipment.

About the time Nigel was hard penned, he was introduced to the lure. Thereafter, the dish was removed and all food was taken

on the floor, from the lure. My theory is; they must learn to love the lure and be willing to come any distance to it. Not only does this remove the falconer as the target, it also helps ensure that a wayward hawk can be retrieved as long as it can see the object of its affection.

House Sparrows, European Starlings and Common Rock Doves are abundant and not protected in the United States, either by state, or federal law. They are generally considered exotics or pest species and are therefore available to hunt, trap and kill in any number at any time of year. In fact, it's been my experience that their droppings, and the grain that they consume or spoil, make them a prime target for control. Hunting pheasants and sometimes even ducks can be difficult because they are not always easy to locate or

landowner permission is not readily granted. All songbirds are protected and can never be hunted. Plus, everyone loves them and I cannot imagine a scenario even if it were legal where permission would be granted.

As soon as Nigel penned, I began trapping sparrows and starlings. Bagged quarry is legal here and young, inexperienced birds were easy to acquire. Most days would see several dozen in the traps. Most were killed and frozen, but each day, Nigel was allowed to pursue and take one. As soon as he had dispatched it and eaten some, he was transferred to the lure, then to the fist. I have flown Goshawks, both North American and European as well as passage Coopers Hawks. All accipiters, albeit with decidedly different dispositions, and all with one thing in common – when on weight, its chase-kill-eat now! Nigel fit the profile perfectly. Pity the poor sparrow or starling that looks into those implacable, staring, unblinking, yellow eyes. There is no mercy there. Please, just make it quick!

I have been blessed with relatively good health and the means to feed my passion. Shortly before I retired and left work some 11 years ago, I bought

a small home in Central Nebraska that allowed easy access to fields of prairie chickens and ponds of ducks. The downside is it's an 1,800-mile drive and in some years the ponds are dry and grouse numbers fail. However, when the constellations align and the falconry gods smile, it's nirvana. Unfortunately the last several years of drought have seen a precipitous decline in chicken numbers and the migrating ducks just keep going. So, I choose to stay home here in Massachusetts and fly ducks in the cranberry bogs and coastal salt marshes.

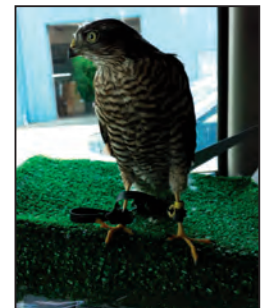
Last year was particularly bountiful, with large numbers of ducks, both local mallards and visiting blacks. It worked out well and I have been able to make the 100-mile drive to Cape Cod several days a week during the season, from mid-October to early February. But what of the other months of the year, and how about something a little closer to home? Well, there isn't much in the large-avian department close to home, except sparrows, starlings and pigeons. And these mostly in industrial parks and building interiors. So any raptor that requires open space in which to hunt is pretty much out. The ideal hawk for the job is therefore reduced to small accipiters. Goshawks are too large and Coopers Hawks

and I don't get along. The Sharpshinned Hawk is ideal, as is the Eurasian Spar. Biddable, birdy, with a strong prey drive, either of these two close-working shortwings would do. Initially, I wanted something that would take pigeons, even crows, which are also abundant. However, the choice of US breeders is small. One that I know of was selling both of his breeding pairs in order to concentrate on other species. So when the DNA test showed all Muskets, there really wasn't any choice.

**N**igel topped out at 147g. His first flight was at 142g and I spent the better part of an afternoon swatting bugs as I chased him through the woods behind my home. As might be expected, his response improved as his weight decreased. That's not to say we arrived at his hunting weight overnight. Another basic tenant of flying imprints is that in order to avoid behaviour problems, don't reduce them too quickly. We finally arrived at 128g and have since increased to 132g. At this weight Nigel responds instantly to the lure and will fly long distances to it. He can be somewhat possessive of it and quarry, but he has never tried to attack, or foot me.



I have been told that were Sparrowhawks larger, no one would fly a Goshawk. I can't attest to that but for my purposes, a micro hawk with tenacity and the heart of a lion is perfect for the quarry I have available.





Our first flights were tentative but determined. He soon learned, however, the art of surprise and ambush. Sparrows have been Nigel's principal prey. Not that he wouldn't take starlings, but principally because sparrows are what we are finding where we hunt. Our favourite venue is a veterinary college a few miles away. They are plagued with sparrows and pigeons. Especially concerned about disease born from bird droppings, they welcome my frequent visits. Generally we have three opportunities, which in turn provide numerous slips – the sheep barn, the cow barn and an enormous compartmentalized chicken coop. At first, Nigel would chase any small bird that got up, wherever it came from or wherever it went to. He would only break off when his target eluded him by dumping into tall grass or finding some other refuge to hide in. In time, however, he became selective, only pursuing inside structures or those close by on the ground feeding when we could get within 15ft of them. His readiness to launch an attack can at times be confusing. Most of the time he will launch himself when we are in position and he deems the quarry is vulnerable and subject to capture. Other times, when I think he is going to attack, I have to throw him. He does not seem to mind being thrown and quickly composes himself for the chase.

When hunting at the vet school, I usually start at the sheep barn. If there isn't much human activity, sparrows are usually to be found in the hay used for bedding, or in the feed troughs scrounging for leftover feed. Because they see people all day long, the sparrows are desensitized to human pres-

ence and will allow a relatively close approach. Holding the Musket close to my chest, I sort of back into the barn. There is a group of maybe a dozen birds in the bedding, around and under the sheep as well as in the troughs. I get as close as I can without spooking the birds and quickly turn around and launch Nigel.

All pandemonium breaks loose! Some seek shelter in the stacks of hay; others find little nooks and crannies, while others make a run for it and head out the open side of the barn. The action is so fast, with sparrows and Sparrowhawk flying in amazingly tight circles, jinxes and turns, that I lose track of the little spar. I turn on the receiver and find him atop a hay bale clutching the shadow of the now departed sparrow.

I pick him up and proceed to the cattle shed where I find people working and no sparrows. On to the chicken coops.

There are over 200 chickens running around inside the various enclosures and a bonanza of at least 50 sparrows. Here, we are able to hide behind a partition and exercise some stealth, sneaking up on the unsuspecting sparrows. The Musket is off of the fist in a flash and disappears up and over the partition. He does not come back up or perch nearby so things look good. I run out of the door of the pen that I am in and into the one adjoining it. Where is the Musket? If he has caught a sparrow I have to get to him while he is still in a catatonic state or risk him carrying his prize to some secluded spot.

The chickens are going ballistic in one of the nesting areas, so that's

where I look. He is under a nest box, glassy eyed with his feet firmly implanted in a sparrow, still as a statue. I carefully hook him up and allow him to break in and feed. After a few minutes, I offer the garnished lure which he quickly switches to. He is then taken on the fist for the remainder of his well-earned meal.

It's a rare occasion when the Musket fails to take quarry. I recall Gary Timbrell when asked "what do you feed your spar?" replying, "whatever he catches." That might have been a facetious remark but it isn't far from the truth. I have been told that were Sparrowhawks larger, no one would fly a Goshawk. I can't attest to that but for my purposes, a micro hawk with tenacity and the heart of a lion is perfect for the quarry I have available. One of the most fundamental rules of falconry is to fly a bird for the game that is most common to where you hunt. Urban sprawl and loss of habitat has reduced opportunities for traditional quarry, plus seasons where it can be hunted limit what and where we fly our hawks. Here in the US, at least as far as sparrows are concerned, there is no limit to where and when they can be legally taken.

One word of caution – Musket Sparrowhawks are delicate. I keep Nigel in the house where the temperature is constant, and even so, he cannot miss a meal. However, if lots of action and plenty of game in the bag is your objective, consider a spar, or here in the US, a Sharpy.

## Ireland and the Sparrowhawk – Past, Present and Future

Hilary White, Dublin

It would be disingenuous to say that Ireland fell into a love affair with the Sparrowhawk because it appealed to something in our nature or was a cleverly devised scheme to exploit the land and game that was available to the small number of falconers here. This would be to make virtue of what was initially purely down to necessity. The truth is that the story of the Sparrowhawk in Irish falconry is one of having to make do with what was to hand and accidentally becoming quite good at it in the process.

In a 1991 review of Liam Ó Broin's treatise *The Sparrowhawk: A Manual for Hawking*, the great Ronald Stevens, who had become an adopted Irish falconry guru by that stage, commented that 'in the Ireland of today, Sparrowhawks surpass all others in popularity'.

It was not the typical sort of promotional blurb that adorns most book covers; Stevens understood that little was really known about what shape the sport had taken in Ireland and wanted to provide contextual insight into his country of residence for the foreign reader. During the late 70s, 80s and much of the 90s, Ireland was a falconry anomaly; a small country on the western edge of Europe that was forced by factors economic, environmental and legislative into one of the most challenging strands of hunting with hawks.

In an Irish Hawking Club journal of the same year, then-editor Michael

Comyns reviews Ó Broin's book and phrases the situation neatly as being 'a curious situation'. 'The hawk reputed to be the most difficult to train, keep healthy and to fly with consistent success is the very one with which we are most familiar,' he said, a statement that resounds with a skewed sense of order that must make the international reader chuckle. However, he goes on to say: 'It reflects no mere national chauvinism to say that in all probability, we, the present members of the Irish Hawking Club, are collectively the world's best authority on the use of this species for falconry.' He seeks to qualify the opinion by saying that overseas IHC members report that they 'do not see Spars flown with the same easy confidence elsewhere, or to such killing effect'.

This is quite something to consider. Looking back, it is a reductionist statement that can easily be quashed in the era of globalisation – we now know that countries such as Tunisia and Turkey have far more established and standardised Spar-hawking cultures – but where Europe, and particularly Western Europe, is concerned, there is something to be said for Comyns's statement.

There are a few reasons why Irish falconers came to be so familiar with *Accipiter nisus*. It was not a conscious choice to disregard the falconry texts that warned against the flying of Spars – it was something they had to do

if they wished to hunt to any standard with a raptor.

During the 1970s and 80s, Ireland's economic circumstances dictated that many people lived on a shoestring, especially where their pursuits were concerned. Unemployment and emigration were facts of daily life and the country was borrowing up to the hilt to sustain itself. The Sparrowhawk was not only a plentiful raptor species that could be obtained under licence, it was also, as falconry goes, an inexpensive form of the sport, one that didn't necessarily require you to have a car, a dog, ferrets, access to game birds or specialised equipment (even during the advent of telemetry, many Irish Sparviter hawked without it for years). Almost wherever a wild Spar can be seen to hunt, so too can your own hawking be carried out and that contributed to the little accipiter gaining a kind of everyman appeal.

Peregrine licences were and still are available but in those days the land and game for large longwings had been developed only by a handful of aficionados from the Stevens/Morris school, and even then it proved difficult for them to get a full season on the scant pockets of grouse around the country. Magpies were of course a worthy and traditional quarry for the Irish tiercels, but one can be fairly confident that the Spar men were catching more slip-for-slip. (Ó Broin always said that if you were



## This is gun-slinging falconry at its fastest, loosest and most boisterous

to send two men out into the wilderness, one with a Peregrine and the other with a Spar, the Peregrine man would soon starve to death!).

Another obstacle facing the Irish enthusiast was the difficulty and costs involved in importing birds of prey. A ban on avian imports had been firmly in place for many years under the guise of an agricultural health precaution. The widely held suspicion, however, was that this was nothing more than protectionism for the nation's poultry industry. Either way, it meant that bringing a hawk into the country wasn't an option for the Irish falconer. It was not until the early 1990s, when I first stepped into falconry, that exotic broadwings and longwings began to appear at Irish Hawking Club fieldmeets. Very soon, these were being bred on the island, but the Spar would remain a staple of the sport here for a number of years to come. We all flew Spars, and if you didn't it was because you had lost yours or had the cash and resources to justify importing a Redtail, a Harris or, if you really wanted to go to town on things, the highly prized goshawk.

Besides being available with minimum fuss, another advantage suggested that the Spar was a paradoxically 'safe' option for the Irish falconer – sociability. The point is made by Ó Broin, who recalls that at the time if you had a Spar in your mews, the chances were that there would be someone not a million miles away who also had one going or was at least willing to hunt vicariously through you and your charge. Birds could be crèche-reared together, bushes could be beaten for one another and lost hawks could have more than one lure being swung for them in different places.

This point itself is salient – as is discussed here, Sparhawking is a particularly gregarious form of hunting with hawks, one where making noise,

rustling bushes and quickly alternating slips are all part of the visceral thrill. There is none of the hushed calculation and choreography that goes into game hawking, nor the tippy-toe murmuring that soundtracks the periods when a ferret is underground. This is gun-slinging falconry at its fastest, loosest and most boisterous.

*That was marvellous because everyone got excited, not only the hawk, everyone shouting that they'd spotted this bird and that bird and so on. When a bird did flush, great excitement broke out, including a fella nearly hitting my hawk with a stick as it went past! The shouting and roaring*

*was great. And of course when the bird took cover they were blagardin' the poor bird calling it a coward, 'give yourself up!' etc. R. Eustace.*

It was for all these reasons that the 80s and 90s were a golden age of Sparhawking in Ireland. A look

back through the IHC journals of the time would lead the outsider to believe that Spars and Spars alone were being hawked with seriously. 1980 saw the commencement of licensing to take wild peregrines and Spars. Shortly afterwards came the aforementioned importation ban. The Spar's case was strengthening.

The following year, the IHC journal featured articles about imprinting Spars, hoods and hooding for Spars and training a haggard bird. Paul O'Donohue, one of the era's top Sparviteers, reports on a fieldmeet in Sligo where six hawks were hunted at walked-up larks on a bog. By 1986, Ó Broin, who had been IHC editor during the period, announced that it had been a superb year for the club and "particularly with Sparrowhawks". In that same issue, he wrote an article entitled Safari In Leitrim that makes for inspirational reading. It tells of a style of falconry that is singular, poignant and quite at odds with how the sport was executed in Western nations



then, or, indeed, today.

Setting off with hawks, dogs and tents, a small band of men drove up to the north-western county of Leitrim. Over a weekend, they hawked all of each day, slipping in turn across the hedgerows, riverbanks and bogs. By nightfall, they sat around the campfire, drinking whisky, playing poker and thinking up mischief to set upon one another. Amid the painterly descriptions of the countryside, Ó Broin conveys a sense of another era, a band of brothers and their hawks traversing the wilds and bonding over the hunt. It is hard to imagine being able to pull off something similar in its organic simplicity with the larger species of falconry raptor. 'We didn't go to hotels and B&Bs,' recalls Ó Broin today, 'because we weren't able to afford it. But also there was that attitude that we wanted to wake up in the morning with the hawk by the end of the sleeping bag.'

Further evidence of the Spar's esteemed role at the time is littered throughout journals from the following years. Articles on flying Spars over decoys, instructions on throwing, training spaniels for Sparhawking and reports of other 'safari-style' hunts abound. The equipment maker Ben Long, who was a regular guest at IHC events for a while, comments in one piece that 'most of the Irish Hawking Club seem to be in the lucky position of flying only Spars where a dog is largely unnecessary'.

With the publication of *The Sparrowhawk: A Manual For Hawking* in 1992, the experience and expertise developed over the period was somewhat crystallised in print form as well as being augmented by Ó Broin's knack for innovation, fine draughtsmanship and a teacherly way with explanation. It was the first falconry treatise written by an Irishman since Bill Rutledge's *Falconry For Beginners* (1949) and it more than made up for the dearth. A national reputation had now been chiselled in print.

### Spar Hawking in Ireland Today and Tomorrow

*I hope people will keep training Spars and keep the tradition going because it'd be a pity to lose that expertise that we've built up.*

R. Eustace

In his report of the Irish Hawking Club's 2001 Sparrowhawk Field Meet, Gary Timbrell spoke of a turnout of 43 at the gathering, a good number for the modestly sized IHC, and finished up by stating: 'The Sparrowhawk is symbolic of Irish falconry and the Sparrowhawk field meet has become symbolic of the Irish Hawking Club. After a weekend's hawking such as this it is easy to see why.'



*The cover of the IHC October 1999 newsletter showing images from a Spar meet*

It wasn't to last with quite the same fervour, however. A couple of years later, in the 2004 club journal, Rowland Eustace had penned *Urban Cowboys*, an article that seemed to mark something of a sea-change. He spoke of all his local hunting ground being 'chewed up' by the rampant development that characterised the fundamentally flawed Celtic Tiger era of the Irish economy. This was indeed a game changer for those of us in the South Dublin area. Where once we were able to have

fine sport with corvids and black-headed gulls on quiet weekend mornings in industrial estates or walk-up game birds in plots of wasteland, the area was now devoid of anything resembling a bush to beat or a quiet green on which to slip.

As the country grew richer, falconers were also being lured away from Spar hawking by a new-found access to 'big' hawks, especially Harris hawks (and, arguably, the slightly less stressful hawking lifestyle they afforded too). You probably also had the financial resources to buy your own telemetry set now rather than sharing one with your friends as I did. It is sad, and a little puzzling, as the Sparrowhawk is easier both to obtain and to serve with quarry. One wonders why the necessities of ferrets, dogs and land with rabbits is deemed an easier option by the Harris hawk converts. Whether it was a symptom of Ireland's increasingly frantic work ethic is unknown, but with circumstances as economically fraught as they are at the time of writing, it remains to be seen if we gravitate back in any numbers to the humble local champion of Irish falconry, she who provided us with endless thrills and spills for so many years.

Let's hope that we do. The training, hunting and keeping of a Spar is a challenge that every falconer should experience. It is intense and head-spinning, and heaven knows when it's not going to plan the Spar can test your resolve and spirit. But an afternoon spent barking, throwing and beating along a bush with three friends and their hawks is singularly satisfying. The death-defying plunges into cover after a yelping blackbird or the twists and turns of hunting pipits over open land. The speed, guile and strength on show before your eyes as she out-maneuvres a jackdaw. That special connection with a predator that was borne of the wild not far from where you're living, and who may yet return there one day. All this is the very DNA of falconry itself.





## The Silence of the Bells

Don Ryan, Co Dublin

She sits on her bow perch in the garden now with her talon tucked neatly beneath her elegant ivory petticoat, oblivious to the restless night she caused me. Oblivious to the knowledge that I woke several times in the five short hours of sleep I managed to snatch from the damp September night.

Each time I woke, I turned towards the window straining to hear her bell; hoping for the faintest glimmer of that metallic tune that falconers grow to rely on. A falconer will choose the bell by its tone which is determined by the combination of metals used in its fabrication. Over time, the falcon's bell becomes finely tuned to the falconer's ear. Its diminutive size is deceiving and it can draw attention over great distances like a church bell to its flock. But it was silent last night. The drone of the traffic from the main road was all I could hear and I cursed them as they drove up and down wondering where they could possibly be going at that god forsaken hour. They could hardly have lost a hawk like I had.

I glance out the French doors at her light colouring and form to admire her and reassure myself she's still there. The turmoil and dread I felt from the previous evening and early morning had subsided and I potter around the house unsure of what to

do next. Tired but greatly elated.

It's often the lack of the meticulous in our practice of falconry that can cost the lives of hawks. Thankfully this was not the case on this occasion.

Noticing the creance line was looking a bit shabby and with The Duchess, my new lady goshawk having a lot more horse power than my male specimen, I thought a change of line was in order and went looking for the reel I purchased a year earlier. I surprised myself with how quick I found it as I'm not the most organised and only ever manage to put things back where they belong if I happen to be finished with the item in the exact place I found it and where the wife tells me they belong. Of course, belonging places often alter to fit in with the household's regular changes so no one in the house gets too comfortable. I would know this if I had bothered to listen but I have many flaws, and my selective memory, not listening and not putting things back where they belong are right up there with the best of them.

The line didn't take long to wrap onto the dog-chewed ash handle and a sturdy snap swivel completed the kit.

I got delayed up the hills fly-

ing the falcon and as there was but a couple of hours of light left in the evening sky, the goshawk's training would have to be around the grounds of the house. I clipped her on to the new line and as the glove went up, she effortlessly covered the 20ft for her first reward. The second flight had all the hallmarks of the first except the front door opened behind her and my daughter and friend exited, startling the gos and causing her to keep flying over my head. With my new line, I thought nothing of it, but once the line strained went on, the line snapped like spaghetti. I can't remember exclaiming any expletives as I just stood gobsmacked as she sailed into the nearest tree with 3ft of creance line trailing behind her.

'Right,' I thought after a lapse of 5 minutes or so as I stood open-mouthed staring into the tree she had alighted in. I considered the situation, the options to retrieve her and why the bloody string had broken. I guesstimated she was up 60ft or thereabouts. Certainly higher than a set of extended double ladders. The tree was right beside a busy arterial road too so it was not the most ideal situation. First I needed to get over the wall to get under the tree as I didn't believe she would come any distance and would need to be cajoled

down very gingerly.

Once under the tree, I tried different positions to get the best vantage point to let her see what was in my hand. She had never seen a lure as she wasn't that far in training so it was not the most opportune time to introduce it. I blew the whistle and shook the food on my glove to encourage her and thought she looked like making an effort to come but her advances were stopped by the trailing leash. She made one or two efforts to stir but was getting nowhere so I gave up in case she became entangled.

I phoned a couple of friends. One who had a large ladder and the other who is a tree surgeon who I hoped could climb the tree and rescue her as I was unsure if the ladder would get me up that high.

The friend with the ladder arrived first and as we got closer to the tree with the ladder, she got agitated and tried to fly away. This time she was successful and she crossed the busy road with the line trailing behind her. I phoned the tree surgeon to cancel his visit and thanked my friend for the ladder which I asked him to leave with me just in case. With only a half-hour of daylight left, I swiftly went in search of her. I swore I heard the bell on a number of occasions but when I went towards the sound, all was silent. As the last light seeped out of the sky, my senses became more attuned to the night sounds; the traffic on the distant road sounded louder and I became aware of the chattering of the nearby river but no bells. As the night became deeper and the surrounding sounds more pronounced, I listened intently but never heard the bell. She must be settled in for the night, I concluded,

and at midnight, after assuring as best I could that she wasn't at ground level, I gave up the hunt, resolute that I would wake before first light and search again.

From where I believed she flew, my bedroom window is less than 500m away and I faced in the same direction. I left it more open than usual foolishly hoping I'd hear her bell. As I lay there, my anxiety caused my mind to race in all directions.

Inevitably, it tripped back to memories from a few years before and my first male peregrine, a super little tiercel that I was training to the kite. He did all he was asked and more. He arrived in my life during a period of turmoil and I failed to name him for a number of weeks but his eagerness to learn and his merriness was such a tonic, I eventually called him Pip.

It was to be his last flight on the kite as I was bored with it at that point and planned to put it to 600ft and go hunting from there on in. I drove to one of my usual locations at a good height beside a quarry. It was a moderate wind when I first set out but on arrival at the elevated location, it was a lot stronger. As I had flown him in stronger winds, I decided I'd go ahead as planned. I had changed the usual food on the lure from quail to a mallard's head and wings so he'd get familiar with the various quarry species. With the strong wind, the kite didn't take long to rise to 700ft with the lure dangling 100ft below.

As soon as he was unhooded, he glanced upwards and left my glove instantly. As he rung upwards, a cloud of a few hundred feet in horizontal length drifted in and as Pip looked

to reach the lure, the cloud obscured the view. It blew over quickly and the kite was again visible. I looked for Pip but couldn't see him. The lure was still in place so maybe he was still ringing up. I thought I caught sight of him over a distant forest and swung the lure but with no reaction so concluded it wasn't him. I waited longer, hoping he would come into the lure still dangling from the kite above. As I waited, I noticed the lure had risen higher and realised he must have had a go at it and pulled it from its release mechanism. With the strong wind, it blew up rather than down. I saw this happen many times in his training where he grabbed it with open wings and ended up going up rather than down. In these instances, I would assist his descent by reeling in the kite. I began to believe that maybe he had grabbed the lure but was unable to hold on and drifted off with the cloud. I took the receiver out to check the direction of his whereabouts. Sure enough the receiver indicated he was towards a distant forest. I was quiet high up so the signal would have appeared strong. I now had two options – start walking or wrap up and drive around.

I tried to reel in the kite but despite the geared reel, the wind prevented me getting anywhere. I would have to walk it down. I decided this wasn't an option as it would take too long and opted instead to go in search of Pip. The signal was relatively strong and to my mind didn't appear too far away but this turned out to be deceiving due to the height I was at. After 20 minutes of walking, I came to a point of a deep ravine where I would have to scuttle down the broken shale and find a way back up the other side. I changed plans and opted to go back

and drive around.

All the time the darkness was seeping into the sky. I ran back to the van as quick as I could and, leaving the kite and equipment in situ, I drove around until I got to a layby near the point I would have arrived at had I kept walking. I jumped out with the receiver and the signal reassured me I had made the right choice in driving as it was coming from the forest behind me. At this stage the light had all but vanished from the sky. The signal was strong outside the forest but not strong enough to indicate he was on the edge. It looked like he may be 100yds in. The forest was the typical densely packed Coillte wood that suffocates all light from reaching the forest floor. With only moments of light left, I opted to move back into a field and swing the lure, hoping he was on the treetops and would spot me. I tried a number of different vantage points but no Pip. Taking the receiver out again, the signal indicated he hadn't moved from his location.

I returned to the forest edge and made an attempt to go in on hands and knees, but after 20yards or so, without a flashlight or secateurs to cut my way in, I realised the hopelessness of it and backed out. The kite and equipment were still where I left them so I had to go back for these. I assumed Pip had settled on a tree somewhere and was settled for the night. On getting back to the kite location, I noticed the lure had finally made it to the ground due to the wind easing off. The head of the mallard was gone from the lure leaving the two wings and it dawned on me why Pip had taken off. He must have pulled it from the lure and made off with it. The kite was a lot easier to reel in with the wind eased. Getting all the

equipment back in the van, I made my way back to the forest.

The night was as dark as it was going to get at this stage and I stopped near the location I had last picked up the signal. Sure enough, the receiver indicated he was still there. I drove home with the intention of being back before first light to pick him up.

I didn't need the alarm clock to wake me the following morning and was back at the forest before daybreak with a spaniel in tow. I was barely out of the vehicle before the antenna on the receiver was sprung open. The signal indicated he had moved 100yds. "Curious," I thought and made my way through the wood. It wasn't so dense in this section although from the top of a tree he wouldn't see the lure swinging below the thick canopy.

As the signal strength increased, I called to him, waiting to hear the bell respond, but only the soft swish of branches from the morning's gentle breeze could be heard. Light began to creep into the sky and I expected at any moment to hear the bell's dulcet tone. With the gain down to the lowest signal, I stopped and listened. I walked in one direction until the signal faded then returned and went in another direction only to return moments later to the same spot where the signal was strongest.

All the time I held my good ear skywards anxiously waiting to hear the awaking falcon. When I finally stopped at the spot where the receiver indicated he could be nowhere else, my worst fears were realised when my spaniel Marley scraped up the left wing of Pip from the forest strata at my feet. I took it from him and wiping

away more of the damp flakes where Marley dug, I recovered the decapitated remains of my tiercel Pip.

The memory of what I did next is still vague. I think I stayed on my knees on the forest floor cradling Pip for some time, trying to convince my nuzzling Spaniel, unused to this strange behaviour, that I was alright.

On the drive home, I remonstrated strongly with myself. The full dawning of what happened and how I had failed Pip consumed me. He had obviously taken the mallard head to the forest floor. On finishing it, he would have waited for me to come and pick him up. And he would have waited as I frantically wasted time crossing a lot of ground because I hadn't secured the mallard head properly. And he would have waited as I foolishly swung a lure outside the forest when he couldn't possibly have seen me from the floor through 100yds of dense forest. Perhaps he even heard my attempts at entering the forest and would have wondered why I retreated. Being familiar with spaniels running around his block in the garden, he would not have been concerned at the approaching fox.

As a falconer, I was tested and found wanting. All I wanted to do at that moment was go home and release my male goshawk as I didn't deserve to possess a bird of prey. I should have overcome the challenges. I should have had a torch, and if I didn't, I should have gone off to get one. When I discovered the mallard head gone from the lure, I should have realised he would be on the ground. I was in a goshawk state of mind, believing the falcon would have the same survival instincts and go to the top of

the tree, but that was no excuse. I should have made every effort to get through the forest until I could be assured he was safe in a tree for the night. The thought of Pip waiting for me on the forest floor whilst I drove home for a night's sleep haunted me for months and still casts a dark shadow on my falconry past.

These were the images that plagued me as I rose to go in search of the female goshawk. The possibility that I may find another dead bird of prey because I was careless choked me. I had failed to perform a simple task. A quick tug on what I thought was the creance line would have shown it was my wife's light parcel twine that she bought for wrapping gifts.

I didn't have the luxury of telemetry this time and had to work on instinct and where she'd most likely go. I went first towards the river to a line of trees where I believed I last heard her from the evening before. I hoped I may pick up the sight of mobbing by corvids. I searched up and down the river, praying to hear the sweet sound of her bell to announce like the town crier that she was still alive. But the murmur of the river was but a whisper compared to the deafening sound of the bell's silence.

After three hours of unsuccessful searching, I returned home for a re-think and quick cup of tea. I booted up the computer and opened Google maps on the satellite layer. Across the river, near the grounds of a hospital, was a small wood. Could she be there? I drove around to the hospital and walked towards the river from the other side. An hour's

search resulted in nothing. Then I heard the faint chatter of magpies but it sounded like it was coming from the far side of the river from where I first started the search earlier that morning.

As I got nearer, the chattering increased. And then I heard the sweetest sound. More melodious than a full philharmonic orchestra – a size 9 Noble bell. It sang to me like a siren at sea enchanting me to drive onwards through the dense brambles to the river's edge.

As I broke through the last thicket to the river, the magpies became silent and I saw her on the far side trying to break free from the sally bushes that overhung the river. A couple of inches of parcel twine tied to the swivel were all that remained of the 3ft of line she made off with the evening before. It was also all that prevented her escape from the bushes and I knew I had to get to her promptly.

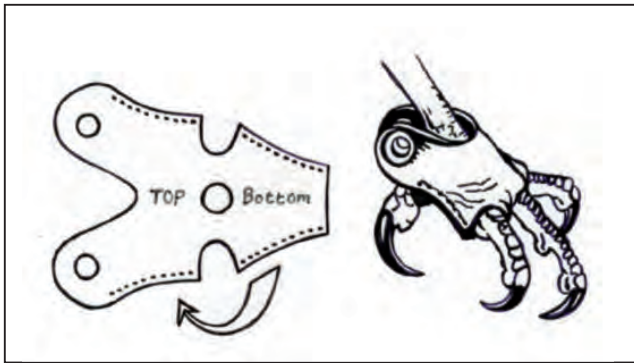
The river wasn't deep and I waded quickly through to finally grasp her jesses. She looked at me sideways with open mouth panting. I don't believe she felt the same level of relief of being rescued and back on my glove as I felt. I examined her for injuries and damage and found her feather perfect. I laughed and talked openly to her. Anyone passing on the path beyond the hedgerow must have thought a madman was in the river. She wasn't impressed either and looked disdainfully at me.

Resolving never to be so careless and to be a lot more meticulous in my practice of falconry – something every falconer owes to his hawk – I took the Duchess home.



It's often the lack of the meticulous in our practice of falconry that can cost the lives of hawks. Thankfully this was not the case on this occasion





'Without a sound, firm hoof, you and your horse will go nowhere'

## Falcon Shoes for Injured Feet

Thys Walters, South Africa

I took on a young female Peregrine whose parents bred on an oilrig at Saldanha and abandoned their chicks as the rig was towed to Cape Town Harbour. She turned out to be, wild at heart, and had a nasty habit of chewing off the Astro turf till only stubs were left.

She did this to three separate layers, till I designed a top layer of soft woven nylon rope, smeared with silicone rubber (hardware stores), which is woven through holes made into a round Perspex disk. The rope follows a sequence of holes that spiral to the centre. Each time the rope comes to the top, a loop of +/- 2cm high should be left. These loops are then joined at the top by another rope, which spirals through each loop toward the centre. Continue to weave in a zigzag motion and join the spiral from side to side, creating a spider web effect. This enables bird's claws to fit through these spaces while the foot rests on a soft uneven surface.

I can imagine that a flat surface will be very uncomfortable

able to sit on, and will definitely lead to foot problems. The web of rope should be covered with a layer of silicone rubber to join rope where it comes in contact with another. Keep in mind that an uneven surface is required with spaces in between of different sizes. Spaces where your little finger will fit into, some slightly bigger and some smaller. A layer of silicone should also be put at the bottom to prevent the top area from moving down through the holes. Thus creating a strong, comfortable web on stilts, away from dirt, ventilated and easy to clean.

Unfortunately this design came in to late and the damage was done. I did not notice my problem until the young falcon lay on her chest too often. A huge shock overtook me when both her feet had an injury of dark, dead skin in an oval shape at the bottom. This is one of the worst things that could happen to a bird as it sits on the injury constantly.

If this goes untreated, bacteria will enter the cracked,

dead skin and start an infection called bumble foot, where the foot swells up, filled with puss. Fortunately my falcon was at the beginning stage and my first plan of treatment was to use cotton wool with ointment under the wound and wrap plaster bandage around the whole foot. The bird constantly bit at the plaster bandage and got it off in a few hours. Hooding the bird is not an option as the healing process takes weeks to complete.

I therefore started to design a comfortable leather shoe that the bird can wear for a prolonged time. This method was such a huge success that new skin replaced the dead skin after a few weeks of treatment. No sign of the injury is visible anymore. This pattern is designed for a Peregrine of +/- 700g and should be adjusted to the size of the bird's feet (see figure ).

With the shoe on, the feet underneath will stay clean, and new dressing can be put on with ease while the bird sits hooded. Dead skin has to

be removed as the wound closes. The best way to accomplish this is with a very sharp, small gauge that artists use to carve wood with. I sharpened mine on very fine sandpaper, which you hold at a curve for the blade to follow. Be very careful, not to damage living tissue, otherwise bleeding starts. Carefully remove dead skin till you think you are close to living tissue and do not go further as there isn't much besides tendons and bone.

Use a good, healing ointment to soak into a bit of flat cotton wool. This can easily be inserted between the foot and the shoe with a flat, pointed object. Fold a bit of cotton wool over the point of the object as this part enters first and leaves the cotton in place when removed. Keep the shoe on till the next day to enable the dead skin to soften before you try to remove some of it. If you cut at it when hard, you will only do more damage than good. The back of the shoe opens when the jess is removed through the two eyelids, which is situated above the back toe. New dressing should be put on every day while old dressing can be hooked out with bent wire.

Dead skin should only occa-

sionally be removed to enable new skin to grow back without hindrance. This could easily be accomplished by one person as the bird sits hooded on a screen perch enabling the falconer to work from below. Remove the jess from the eyelids and move the shoe forward without the toes slipping through the holes. Holding on to the shoe and the toes will keep the foot still while the falconer works. If the bird does not sit still, an assistant some movement without injuring the loose skin in-between the toes. The leather should be soft, thin and strong to enable the foot the open and close with ease, like a glove. Grease the inside of the shoe with the ointment to moisten the leather and aid in the healing process.

The pattern is 82mm by 70mm and suitable for a peregrine of +/-700g.

The two sides should be sewn together. If you do this by hand, use an awl to make small holes before it is joined by needle and thread. If the shoe needs adjusting at a certain area, it can be wet with water and pushed or stretched with the back or

sides of an ink pen.

Two eyelets at the back of the shoe will help keep it in shape.

### Footnotes:

1. When I read this in the *Farmer's Weekly* (21 April 2006, p.63), I found it applicable to the disturbing encounter awaiting me a few months ago.

2. The foot structure ("Understanding the bird of prey", Nick Fox, p.52): "To perform tasks effectively the foot must be light in weight for maximum agility and with a surface that is easy to keep clean of blood, dirt, and bacteria. To meet these requirements the foot has evolved so closely to the physical limitations of living tissues that there is very little margin for error and it is not surprising therefore that the foot is so prone to disorders. The foot basically is a series of bones and sheathed tendons...The tendons slide in grooves in the underside of the toe bones and are held in place by tough sheaths. The sheets are lined with fine ridges rather like the grooves of a fingerprint and engage with rough ridges on the tendons themselves."



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## Never Give Up – My Search for a Lost Falcon

Shay O'Byrne, Co Wicklow

**Day 1:** In early spring, on a clear crisp sunny Sunday afternoon in County Sligo, I flew my eyass captive-bred male Peregrine for the last time. Location was about a mile inland from the coast between Skreen and Dromore West, near the family home place. My tiercel Rothko was pretty steady at waiting on and was gaining experience hunting. Generally doing everything right bar catching that elusive quarry; the snipe.

After his customary rouse, he left the fist and began to climb. Little did I know what fate had in store. When up around 600ft though a fair distance away, just a small spot, he turned and began working his way into the wind back towards me. As I watched, I took my eye off him for a second, and looked again. He had disappeared.

I scoured the sky and reached for my telemetry receiver, pointing it in the direction last seen. Then in all directions, up and around, switching to try both channels, but no signal!

I started walking on to higher ground, whistling and swinging the lure, looking for signs of mobbing or disturbance from crows, magpies. Still no sighting or signal.

I began to doubt the receiver. Was it still working? It tested OK with his transmitters just before.

Still doubting the receiver batteries, I rushed back in the car to my wife's place and relieved their fire alarm of its battery and continued my search. When darkness came down, my heart began to sink. I

persisted until late that night, driving around to various vantage points, pushing further out, particularly downwind.

But I found nothing.

Every falconer's nightmare, and of course it would have to happen the day we were due to return home to Wicklow.

**Day 2:** Before dawn I returned to the area of disappearance with no luck. Then I drove to the Ox Mountains, scanning the whole area and continuing on eastwards to Knocknarea Mountain which I climbed. At the summit (Queen Maeve's burial place), I expected some indication from this lofty position with views stretching across Sligo/Donegal Bay and counties of Sligo, Mayo, Donegal and Leitrim. However nothing but static interference came back as the wind howled around me.

I put the word out to local radio stations Mid West Radio and Ocean FM, and the bird of prey centre Eagles Fly in Ballymote. Also to friends Don Ryan (who alerted some falconers in the north west) and Eoghan Ryan (who happened to be travelling to Sligo the next day would check with his receiver along the way). Having looked around Lough Gill, I drove northwards up to the foothills of Benbulbin then back west out the coast road to Ballina, all without success. That night I had to drive home to Wicklow for work the next day.

**Day 3:** With work sorted, that afternoon I headed back to Sligo armed with my roof aerial and a

second telemetry set lent to me by my friend Ken Smith. Now with two receivers, two roof aerials and a renewed energy, I drove northwest, checking en route. A number of calls were received from the public through radio stations, which turned out to be either Sparrowhawk or Buzzard. I stayed out until late again, driving blind, this the third day without picking up a signal.

**Day 4:** As dawn broke I drove up around the Ox Mountains, then back to Knocknarea Mountain, which I climbed for a second time, now with two receivers, but unfortunately no pick-up from either. After lunch, I contacted Ocean FM again and agreed to do a live interview. A local friend enquired with the Air Sea And Rescue helicopter based at Sligo Airport, if it were possible to take a receiver on board, but to no avail, due to possible interference with their equipment. After the interview, I was off to Mayo this time – Ballina, Crossmolina, Lough Conn, Foxford, Lough Easkey – and returned via the Ox Mountains overlooking Sligo Bay. I didn't stay out as late that night as I was feeling rather disheartened, with no signal, and no particular direction to search.

**Day 5:** 8am. It was lashing rain just to add to the fun of it all. I drove around some high ground, with ever-diminishing hope, and contacted the NPWS to notify the local rangers. I extended my search to County Leitrim, Ballygawley, Dromahair, Manorhamilton, to Sligo Town, Lisadell, Ballyconnell, and northwards towards Donegal, stop-

ping at Grange for a sandwich and a coffee as the rain cleared.

I pushed on further to Ballyshannon, Donegal Town, and then Killybegs, which is on the other side of the Atlantic Bay from where Rothko was lost. Just beyond Killybegs, I stopped and walked the beautiful Fintra Beach. Now with hundreds of kilometres travelled and nothing to go on, I felt weary and started to doubt my own sanity. As daylight waned, it was time to go home.

As I left, instead of turning for home, I don't know why, purely on a whim, I decided to try just that bit further out the coast road towards Slieve League. Within minutes as I approached the viewing point carpark at Largy, both receivers suddenly kicked into action beside me. 'Bip. Bip,' picking up on both transmitters! I couldn't believe my ears. Wow! He was very near.

I gathered myself together. The signal was coming from the bottom of some fields which sloped sharply down to rocks by the sea. I swung the lure and blew the whistle, expecting the little fellow to wing his way up to me. As I ran down the steep fields, hitting the ground in spots, I noticed a man standing on the rocks way down below. As I got closer he began to walk away. I realized then that the signal was following him. I'm now like a lunatic charging down after him, shouting and roaring as to whether he'd seen a falcon? He slowly turned to me and said 'do you mean a live or a dead one?'

My heart sank. I knew the answer as he pointed to where he had been standing earlier. I also knew he had something belonging to me. After an initial denial, he realized how serious I was and took out Rothko's two Marshall transmitters, bell, and anklets from his inside coat pocket and returned them. He had taken the equipment off, claiming his intention to respond to the call for a lost falcon heard on local radio.

I went over to where Rothko lay. He was entwined in seaweed on the rocks under an overhang, just along the high tide line exactly where the guy had found him. I'd gone from pure elation to now being bitterly disappointed and saddened. The poor bird, my little partner. I thanked the guy as he stood in disbelief, before climbing back to the carpark.

On reflection as I drove, it was pure chance that I continued on. A few minutes later I could have ended up tracking that man to his house. What's ironic is that if he hadn't removed the transmitters, I'd probably never have gotten a signal from the road to where the bird lay hidden way down below.

Whatever happened to him I'll never know. Perhaps he was blown off course and crossed the bay, although the wind wasn't seawards on the day. He may have tried to catch a bird over the sea and got into difficulties. Although saddened, there was some small consolation in that the search was over, also in knowing that the telemetry had worked and my transmitters were returned.

I use Marshall transmitters with a Lumsden receiver and have found it very reliable over the years. Why there was no pick-up at the beginning remains a mystery.



In falconry, despite the best of training, precautions and contingency plans, one never really knows where a free flight is going to lead

**T**o sum up; in falconry, despite the best of training, precautions and contingency plans, one never really knows where a free flight is going to lead. Rothko was found over forty miles across open water from where I last saw him. After five days searching without a signal, through four of Ireland's most idyllic counties, from vantage points as high as Knocknaree in County Sligo to the low-lying golden shores of Donegal's Fintra Beach, the moral of the story is trust your telemetry and never give up!

Paintings by Shay O'Byrne - seamusobyrne.com





## Coumaraglin

Bob Walton, Co Waterford

**C**oumaraglin lies around 12 miles north of Dungarvan, Co Waterford, on the southerly edge of the Comeragh Mountains. It is a glaciated 'U' shaped valley, with pasture on its floor, and moorland stretching up the mountain slopes surrounding it.

Coumaraglin is also one of the best kept archaeological secrets in Ireland. Within it, a wide variety of Bronze-Age monuments can be found, including kerb circles, standing stones, barrows and burial cairns.

What is today a relatively barren area covered in heather was once a hub of activity. Both the Araglin River and one of its tributaries, were both diverted along their upper reaches over 3,000 years ago, and now enclose an area of around 1km square. It is believed that this was the main settlement site, with the diverted watercourses forming a protective barrier around it. Archaeologists believe the climate was considerably warmer during the Bronze Age, allowing settlement of what is now considered marginal land.

The valley was occupied until recently, with some 30 children from the valley once attending nearby Kilbrien school. The harsh and prolonged winter of 1947 however – or the "Little Famine" as it was locally known – finally drove the last inhabitants down into the lowlands, their resolve finally broken.

Evidence of ancient ironworking has also been found there, including a smelting site, which suggests a considerable population. Smelters were fuelled by charcoal which required woodcutters, charcoal makers, plus the people needed to operate the furnace. It is diffi-

cult to imagine this busy scene today, with the smoke of many fires hanging in the air.

Today the valley is all but deserted, visited by the occasional hillwalker and of course myself along with my dogs and hawks.

It has been a real privilege for me to be able to hunt in this remote but very special landscape and to continually enjoy the spectacular views it has to offer. Life's trials and tribulations seem to completely disappear whenever I visit this stunning place, and my hawks have taken scores of rabbits from here over the seasons.

A pair of Peregrine falcons regularly nest high up on the rugged cliff face and I've often seen a male Hen Harrier hunting over this same terrain. I have been assured by the farmer whose sheep graze these mountains that the female is also alive and well though I have yet to see her myself.

Yours in Hawking



## Reeling in the years: The IHC Archives – 1984

Don Ryan, Co Dublin



**N**ot quite the way George Orwell portrayed in his novel of the same name; 1984 was the year that witnessed president Ronald Reagan and his wife Nancy arrive on a four-day official visit to Ireland. Like most presidents from across the Atlantic, Reagan's Irish roots had been unearthed and many distant relations waited anxiously to reacquire themselves. One of the biggest events was an address at his ancestral home of Ballyporeen in Co Tipperary from where his great-grandfather came. He told the gathered crowd: 'Of all the honours and gifts that have been afforded me as president, this is the one I will cherish dearly.'

1984 was also the year Nicky Kelly, having been jailed in 1978 for his alleged part in the Sallins train robbery, was freed on humanitarian grounds after a colourful nationwide 'Free Nicky Kelly' campaign.

When a Dunnes Stores worker in Dublin refuses to handle South African goods, she is suspended and her colleagues go on strike. The strike lasted almost three years and Nelson Mandela later told the small group of workers that their stand had helped him to keep going during his time in prison.

One of the big musical events of the year was Bob Dylan headlining at Slane Castle, Co Meath in July. He was supported by Santana, UB40 and In Tua Nua, while Van Morrison and Bono joined Dylan on stage during his set.

Inspired by a BBC television report by Michael Bleurk from Ethiopia, Bob Geldof and Midge Ure wrote *Do They Know It's Christmas?* to raise money for famine relief in Ethiopia. The track had lines sung by many of the era's biggest artists including Bono, Phil Collins, Simon Le

Bon and Sting. It became the biggest selling single in the UK charts and led to the Live Aid concert the following year.

Legendary Irish folk singer Luke Kelly passed away in January. One month later, Ireland Rugby star Tommy Bowe is born.

In politics, Garret FitzGerald was Taoiseach, and the early part of 1984 was dominated by the New Ireland Forum, a discussion group that included representatives of political parties in Ireland and Northern Ireland and the search for a way forward.

The economy was in severe recession; the reckless borrowing and spending of the 1970s and the Second Oil Crisis of 1979 led to rocketing national debt while employment and industry stagnated.

Across the water, Britain's coal industry grinds to a halt as miners under union leader Arthur Scargill fight cutbacks and pit closures imposed by the government under serving prime minister, Margaret Thatcher.

Meanwhile on the Irish falconry scene, there was good reason to rejoice as this was the first year the wild take of Peregrines was permitted in the south since the Wildlife Act in 1976. The Irish Hawking Club committee was in its second term and made up of President George Luke, Joint honorary secretaries Tom Doyle (South) and Derek Watson (North). The Hon Treasurer was Paul O'Donoghue while Hon Editor was Liam O' Broin. Other committee members were Roy Alcock and John Morris.

New amendments to the 1976 Wildlife Act had come into force that affected falconers down

south, 'WILDLIFE ACT, 1976 (BIRDS OF PREY) REGULATIONS, 1984'. These came into legislation on February 1st 1984 and had been signed off by the then minister for Tourism, Forests and Fisheries, Paddy O' Toole. It stated: 'These Regulations make the possession and use in falconry of birds of prey of the order Falconiformes subject to the granting of licences in that regard and provide for a charge for such licences. The Regulations also lay down the conditions under which a bird of the order Falconiformes may be taken from the wild or maintained.'

The new regulations provided the conditions for allowing wild take and no doubt were discussed ad libitum at the AGM held in the Country Club in Portmarnock, Co Dublin on Saturday December 1st 1984.

The annual fieldmeet was held in Spiddal, Co Galway from 14th to 16th September and was attended by 32 members, associates and supporters. There were six falcons, four Spars, a Redtail and an eagle owl present. It was commented that they were all 'perfectly trained'.

The 1984 annual Journal contained the following articles; *Desert Hawking And The Imprinted Sparrowhawk* by Paul O'Donoghue, *Haggard Winter* by Rowland Eustace, *Breeding Quail* by Roy Alcock, *The Falconer Gentle* (an interview with Ronald Stevens) by Liam O'Broin, a book review (*The Peregrine Falcon* by Derek Ratcliffe) by Michael Butler, an illustrated guide on a hood for Sparrowhawks by Liam O'Broin and the article we have chosen from the archives to feature in this journal, *Grouse '84* by John Morris.

## Grouse '84

The Hon Johnny Morris



Grouse Hawking has always been considered the best form of Game Hawking and it always has been my ambition to give it a serious try. Now that we have the falcons at our heel (or should I say 'fist'), it was time after all those years without a trained falcon to get on with it.

Ronald Stevens, the great falconer, actually moved to the West of Ireland in order to practice this high art but while the country was very suitable, the grouse were just not there. I was privi-

leged to be one of his pupils many years ago and I have been reading his brilliant book, *Observations On Modern Falconry*. It is a superb book and I recommend any serious falconer to get a copy and study it word for word. In it, he lists the essential ingredients to the successful taking of grouse in this order,

1. Suitable country
2. Plenty of game
3. A hawk that waits on
4. A setter and a spaniel
5. Suitable weather

Any falconer not having ac-

cess to the first four (number 5 needs a prayer) is wasting their time.

Ireland is full of the sort of country suitable for grouse hawking. Ideally it should consist of flattish land with no steep valleys or cover such as bracken or forestry. Sheep fencing is also used by the grouse as a means of escape, filtering the falcon and more than likely maiming her for life.

Radio telemetry is now as important a piece of falconry equipment as the lure, for the flights at grouse can

end up a mile or more away. Twice I have made the mistake of leaving the receiver in the car and have had to leave the falcon out at night. Telemetry will locate a kill quickly so you can fly the falcon again or pocket the grouse for the table.

While we have plenty of suitable Irish countryside, the same cannot be said for the Irish grouse. This mysterious bird lives for only two years and in the West of Ireland, in a very hostile environment. It crams a lot of cunning into its short life and numbers vary every year with the early spring weather. This year, I am told, is a good year but the falconer has to be willing to walk for one and a half hours before finding a covey.

Your falcon must wait on no lower than at least 100 feet but the higher she goes the more ground she can com-

mand and the more likely she will knock one down. Eyasses need a lot of footing practice to knock down an adult grouse and it has been very frustrating for me on a few occasions having walked three miles to find a grouse only to have a few feathers knocked out by an inexperienced falcon. Peregrine falcons love to chase grouse but they will have to catch a few in their first few flights or they will get disheartened and give up this difficult quarry.

Just as important as a well-trained 'waiting on' falcon is a first-class pointer or setter. I can honestly say now I am a true republican. An Irish man out hawking with an Irish peregrine on an Irish moor at Irish grouse must surely have an Irish setter! I am in debt to that great red setter man John Nash of Palace Green, Limerick, who has supplied working dogs to the top

grouse falconers in England, Stephen Frank and Geoff Pollard. The red setter we had was 'Gale'; an eight-year-old bitch. What a dog! A great nose with brilliant pace and ranging despite her years. She was also a great dog with the kids who loved her. Gale was field trial champion at eighteen months. A springer spaniel is also useful for flushing the grouse who are very reluctant to fly when a trained falcon is overhead! Both dogs will have to be trained to respect the hawk and work as a team. It is remarkable how soon an eyass gets to know what the setter is up to.

Our falcon 'Laragh' was taken out officially from Glenmalure on the invitation of Lord Ardee in 1st September. The weather was misty and a shooting party of ten guns was worked in a line over the moor for a morning. We saw about 40

Our first year grouse hawking in Ireland taught us a lot. There is nothing like practical experience





grouse but shot only two as they were getting up out of range. I shot one bird and Liam McGarry was anxious I complete the Irish McNabb by catching a grouse with the falcon on the same day. After lunch, a large hawking party was formed and when the weather had cleared, the hawkers said goodbye to the shooting party which went in the opposite direction. I prayed Andy Morrissey would know the shape of a peregrine if it flew over him with his gun. Gale worked very hard but some grouse got up wild at the top of Knockrath. She pointed on the leaside but the falcon found it very difficult to fly in the downdraft so when we flushed two grouse we had a downhill chase that ended in a kill in a forestry clearing. I gave her a reward and we caught another grouse on the way back to the cars. Both were young birds. We had two more classic flights at grouse but they got to the forestry. An Irish McMurphy surely!

The shooting party returned with their mouths open – they had nothing in the bag. Our first year grouse hawking in Ireland taught us a lot. There is nothing like practical experience. You must have the best dog money can buy. A dog that points larks is less than useless, for the falcon must be served once she has reached her pitch. Do not unhood the falcon until you are really sure there is something in front of the dog. In Co Galway the grouse were usually sitting on the high ground

near rocks and they would sit very tight inches in front of the dog and look as you might, you just could not see them but they were there. In Co Wicklow however, the grouse were getting up wild – probably due to constant human disturbance.

If there is little or no wind, the falcon has to work very hard to 'wait on' so the grouse should be got up quickly, flushing them away from any likely cover. On one occasion after a flight, Gale was still setting and another grouse was successfully flushed for Laragh from the same spot. If there is wind, then the grouse must be flushed downwind if possible. That means the falconer, on seeing the point, should walk away quickly and quietly around the dog, fifty yards above the point. If there is a danger of the grouse getting up before the manoeuvre is completed, the falcon can be put on the wing. This will ensure the grouse sit tight. The dog must still hold the point steady as a rock. The grouse are then flushed with the help of a spaniel ahead of the falconer and friends who are running towards the dog downwind. When the grouse get up, the falcon has the advantage of a stoop with the wind. Only a falcon waiting on hundreds of feet above the falconer will catch a grouse flying upwind. This is because the falcon has to stoop against the high winds at that height while the grouse is flying low out of the mainstream.

A dog handler is also very useful as life gets very complicated trying to keep an eye on the setter, falcon, grouse and spaniel when running in to the point. A person allotted to mark down the falcon at all times would also be very useful. In the excitement of the chase, it is very easy for the falconer to lose sight of his bird. Laragh had a bad accident when chasing a cock grouse which flew through sheep wire. She caught her wing on the top row of barbed wire. Luckily not too much damage was done and she was not put off chasing this quarry. Gale and Laragh built up a great working relationship and on the odd occasion when Gale failed to produce, Laragh would stoop in anger as if to say, 'where is my grouse'. While English falconers spend a lot of time and money grouse hawking in Scotland, we have proved it's possible to have successful grouse hawking while based in Dun Laoghaire.



## William MacDougald: A Life Less Ordinary

Don Ryan, Dublin



In 1922, as Civil war spread across Ireland, William MacDougald, only son of Mabel and Hugh was born. His mother had served on the frontline as a nurse in the Great War where no doubt the illnesses and hardships she experienced took their toll and she passed away when William was only three. This left his father, a former British army officer, to rear him.

He was educated at St Columba's college in Rathfarnham where he established the Natural History Society and kept deer, ducks and Peregrine falcons. Many a falconer that has read Liam Ó Broin's classic treatise on the sparrowhawk may recall the picture of William and Ned Bayley in front of the college in 1939 holding a number of Peregrines. It was clear he had a great passion for animals when on leaving St Columba's, he entered veterinary college.

Meanwhile in Europe, war was spreading even further into Egypt and Russia. Like many Irishmen, William joined the war because he felt it was the right thing to do. Early In 1942, at the age of 19, he left veterinary college and went to Britain to enlist in one of the most dangerous arms of the British Forces, the RAF Bomber Command.

'Mac', as he became known, was trained in the US but due to an infection on the return

troop ship, his entry into active service was delayed by at least six months. This delay may have saved his life as the draft of young pilots he trained with, passed through one of the bloodiest battles of the entire war; the Battle of Berlin. After his recuperation while he was stationed in Wales, he finally saw front-line action in the closing months of the War.

With war finally over, William was one of the lucky soldiers that got to go home. He returned to Ireland with his new English wife Alice Wheeler (or Billie as she was more commonly known) and their six-week-old daughter Suzanne. He resumed his veterinary studies and eventually opened a practice in the then quiet Dublin suburb of Dundrum. Their home, Glenville Manor, became home to five children and a menagerie of animals from horses to all types of birds including peregrine falcons. Rowland Eustace had reason to call to him one day where he had recognised the distinct falcon cry. To William's surprise, Rowland asked could he see them and William became quite alarmed that Rowland knew of their presence. It was the mid 1960's and the effects of DDT were taking their toll on falcon populations around the world and their acquisition was becoming more difficult. It was from Glenville that William revived the fortunes of the South Dublin

Hunt and started Ireland's first mink farm.

In 1965, they moved the farm to Ballymanus House, Henry Grattan's old home in Co Laois. The rare old times were changing in Dublin and Glenville House was a victim of progress, being knocked down to build the original Dundrum Shopping Centre. The mink farm at Ballymanus grew and blue foxes were added to the list. At the height of the mink farms prosperity it produced 80,000 mink and 20,000 foxes and employed 70 people.

Meanwhile, throughout all this period, falconry played a large part in Mac's life. He corresponded regularly with many falconers, including Ronald Stevens, whom on his arrival in Ireland in 1956 enquired from Mac where pigeons may be obtained. He joined the Irish Hawking Club in 1967 at the invitation of the Hon John Morris and encouragement from Ronald Stevens, who believed he may "leaven the immaturity" of the young committee. He later spent some time on the IHC committee himself.

He flew a variety of birds, including a Redtail belonging to Tony Huston, son of the legendary Hollywood film actor and director, John. Tony was living in the west of Ireland at the time. He also bought a haggard Luger



Many a falconer that has read Liam O Broin's classic treatise on the sparrowhawk may recall the picture of William and Ned Bayley in front of the college in 1939 holding Peregrines

falcon that Tony had left with Ronald. Tony had ordered a Peregrine from India and paid the princely sum of £40 so was pretty disappointed when the Lugger arrived. He sold it on to Mac for £15. Mac also flew goshawks but falcons were his preference and Ronald agreed in correspondence to him when he wrote: 'Shortwings Bah! Longwings Hah!'

In 1970, he got a call from a friend in Cork who had been shooting pigeons and unintentionally shot a white Gyr falcon that had flown in after them. It had suffered a wing injury from the shooting and was put on the train to Mac to see if he could help. Unfortunately, the injury was irreparable and the beautiful white Gyr had to be put to sleep. Mac sent the Gyr to Gerrard's in London to be mounted.

By all accounts, William MacDougald was the quintessential sportsman. He fished, hunted and engaged in falconry. He bred and trialled Labradors, helped establish a number of pheasant shoots in the country and was instrumental in forming the Laois regional game and wildlife council. He retired to Castledermot in 1987 with his wife Billie where he kept up many of his pas-

times. He still kept a Larsen trap at the end of his garden though his son Colin admitted he released all the birds he caught in his later years.

He remained in Castledermot until he passed away in December 2002 leaving his wife Billie who passed away five years later in April 2007.

In his lifetime, Mac had done his duty to freedom and civilisation. He brought enterprise and employment to a struggling economy. He left his mark on fieldsports throughout the country and raised a fine and enterprising family. He played a role in falconry, serving on the IHC committee and helped in

getting goshawks imported into the country. The life of William MacDougald truly was a life less ordinary.

*We are very grateful to his son Colin who kindly donated a number of his falconry items to the new falconry exhibit of the Irish Fly Fishing and Game Shooting Museum in Attanagh, Portlaoise, Co Laois.*



## Snipe Hawking Meet

Co Galway, January

Robert Hutchinson, Co Offaly

The West of Ireland Hawking Association, with welcome support from Irish Hawking Club, held a very successful snipe hawking fieldmeet in Co Galway in late January.

We were fortunate to have attracted 14 pure Peregrines plus a Gyrlin and their keepers to this meet, the main purpose being to generate local interest and thereby open up another county to this excellent sport. Johnny Morris, who has his roots and home in Spiddal, was especially keen for this region to be opened up. On all days, the meets were well attended by local spectators joining the visitors from England. Travelling attendees included world renowned falconry artist Andy Ellis, *H Is For Hawk* author Helen Macdonald, Steve Lea of Marshall Telemetry as well as local falconer James Knight from Ashford Castle.

Our base was Corrib View Lodge, Glencorrib, near Headford, the home of professional trout fishing ghillie Larry McCarthy. A lot of credit should go to Larry for opening up the ground to fly over as well as providing 24-hour support (pub trips, guiding, pub trips, lost hawks, pub trips, lost falconers, pub trips, that kind of thing). His wonderful wife Michelle also served up excellent food and was a great host. The race back to base after a day's hawking was evidence that the whole package didn't disap-

We worked the local bogs with English Pointers and Red and English Setters, and the quality of the dog work even on the windy days was encouraging. Snipe were in plentiful supply and we averaged two kills per day. Two highlights for me were, firstly, Eric Witkowski's high-mounting young tiercel, who having positioned himself perfectly over his Red Setter, clipped his snipe in a vertical stoop only for the snipe to recover and head upwards. Feeling cheated, he followed. Despite a widening gap, instead of breaking off (the norm) he continued in his pursuit until both quarry and falcon could only be made out with the aid of binoculars high above the clouds, tangoing bits of dust engaged in a dance of life and death. It was fitting that such a courageous snipe was eventually given best by his pursuer.

Kevin Marron's young pointer bitch was equally impressive. In the serious working pointer and setter world, falconers don't have a great reputation for their dogs, but this pointer is the perfect antidote to such views. Over the four days, to my eye, she couldn't be faulted: great manners on the lead (you will realise how important this is when you have one that is not!); disciplined to the whistle; quartered the ground perfectly and without effort; shoulders and hind quarters both in play, producing a gait that meant she could have worked all day; and not one false point. She

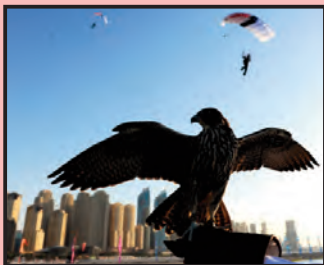
has a lot going on between her ears, and being totally dedicated to pleasing both her owner and falcon, she will only get better.

Snipe hawking continues to develop at pace, with new faces setting the bar ever higher which can only be healthy for the sport in the long run. As a result of this meet, phone calls from the area suggest it won't be long before local falconers will be taking to the bogs to test dog and hawk.

By popular demand, we plan to return to Galway next season and would encourage young and old to spend a day with us on the bog surrounded by some of the most impressive scenery Ireland has to offer. I can guarantee you will be made most welcome.







## A Day At The Races – Dubai Style

Peter McKinney, Australia

There is something about the smell of Arabic coffee. Close your eyes and you are transported to a scene of Arabian Nights with exotic carpets, curved swords and brightly attired Arabian horses ridden by untamed, bearded men in flowing garb.

The reality today is slightly different. I am in a massive canvas tent in Dubai with a large crowd of Arabs, many of whom I have known and worked with for decades.

Traditional falconry persists but this new generation have found a modern outlet for their falconry passion – falcon racing.

The traditionalists among us will be critical. 'How difficult is it to fly in a straight line?' etc. But it is not as simple as that. I may not find the racing as exciting as hunting but I have to admire the skill and tenacity of falconers using modern techniques like kites, balloons and radio-controlled aeroplanes to train falcons.

The amazing thing is that the falcons seem to love a lure attached to an aeroplane. This allows the falconer to control the speed and duration of training, allowing him to gradually increase fitness. It also means he can guide the falcon back to him at the completion of a training session.

Using lures attached to radio-controlled aeroplanes, the skilled falconer can control a falcon in amazing ways. You can be a great pilot but if you do not understand falcons you will never win. The top guys have been raised with falcons and have learnt how to perfect their airplane skills to get the best performance from

their birds. I have been with these guys for decades and still they excite me when they coax their birds to do things I never imagined possible.

When you are among these falconers, there is a palpable sense of purpose, community and camaraderie. There is a common bond where language is no barrier. When the falcon triggers the finish line timer and goes into top place, the crowd watching in the comfort of the tent erupt into a noisy frenzy of congratulations.

Of course there is rivalry but the main goal of winning is about reputation, not money. Most of the top guys have also been active hunting falconers. There is no betting on the racing and in these early days it really does seem to be a bonding exercise.

Will there ever be a world cup? Who knows, but certainly there is national pride involved, with falconers from throughout the Gulf regions coming to participate. Even the less well-off can participate in falconry again. When I first went to the Emirates as a vet decades ago, falconry was accessible to rich and poor. Hunting has since become possible only for the more affluent section of the community. Racing has brought the small guy back into the picture. For people like me who slam on brakes when driving so I can look up at a passing raptor, the races in Dubai are an event not to be missed. Yet another reason to visit the place.

## Quarries, Wildlife and Peregrine Surveys in Northern Ireland, June 2015

Dr Marc Ruddock, Co Down



Working and disused quarries in Northern Ireland are often wildlife oases in the midst of an improved pasture landscape. Mammals often abound such as rabbits and Irish hares throughout the sites and fox dens or badger setts typically in quieter corners abutting neighbouring fields. The nooks and crannies provide an abundance of roosting, wintering, breeding and feeding sites for an abundance of wildlife species and none more so than our ornithological heritage.

Jackdaws and starlings nesting in holes amongst the rocks with common sandpipers and ringed plover nesting on the ground near pools of water; wrens, willow warblers, blackcaps, chaffinches found in scrub and bushes so prevalent in the disused sites; pied wagtails, grey wagtails, house sparrows, swallows, feral pigeons and starlings nesting in operational and derelict buildings (no doubt at times making an unwelcome mess of machinery or work areas!); tufted ducks, moorhen, coots, mallard, little grebes, teal and the occasional great-crested grebes all occurring in the often extensive open water areas and pools all winter then many nesting on the periphery of these aquatic habitats in the summer. Excitingly occasional buzzards, sparrowhawks and long-eared owls also occur in remnant areas of woodland within or adjacent to many of the quarries in Northern Ireland.

Four species in particular are synonymous with quarries; the long-distant African migrant, the sand

martin, building a labyrinth of holes and nesting in the dust-piles and sand-banks of most quarries, gravel pits and sand pits; the honking and croaking and largest of our corvids, the raven, which creates stick nests on the most inhospitable of rock faces; the most familiar of our farmland birds of prey which is declining across the UK & Ireland, the kestrel; and the prince amongst birds of prey and an international conservation success story; the peregrine falcon.

The peregrine population in Northern Ireland has been studied since before the Second World War and historical records indicate that prior to 1939 there were approximately 50 traditional sites regularly occupied by nesting pairs (28 inland and 22 coastal) in five of the six counties in Northern Ireland. In addition, there were up to eight small cliffs which were occupied occasionally. There were 33 traditional territories in County Antrim, six regularly occupied sites in the Mourne Mountains (County Down), five in Fermanagh, four in the Sperrin Mountains (Tyrone/Londonderry) and two in north Londonderry. There is limited historical information available for Armagh but the cliffs in that county are very low and it is likely that until the advent of quarry nesting the species bred there only occasionally. The population remained stable until 1939 when war time persecution reduced the number of pairs in some areas, notably on the north Antrim Coast which declined from nine to four pairs by 1945.

Lethal control of falcons was carried out to protect homing pigeons carrying messages during the war from peregrine attacks.

Although survey coverage was incomplete, during 1947–1948 there were a confirmed 25–28 pairs and there was an observed decrease in occupancy considered to be caused by agricultural contaminants such as DDT. This was an insecticide which bio-accumulated through the food chain and caused thinning of the eggshells in many raptor species causing them to crush their own eggs during incubation. At this time there were one third of surveyed peregrine territories which were vacant with only one third of these confirmed to be breeding. However, the use of DDT, DDE and other chemicals remained at low levels in Northern Ireland in the post-war period and it would appear that there was only a moderate decline in the peregrine population and nesting success.

In 1961 there began the first of the UK national peregrine surveys, conducted at 10 year intervals. It has been suggested the turning point for Northern Ireland peregrines was in 1965–1966 with occupancy at 91% of the 32 eyries surveyed in the period 1965–1968. There were nine pairs recorded to have bred successfully rearing twenty young in these years. It was calculated that occupancy was 63–89% for territories checked between 1964 and 1968, with 19–35% of pairs successfully rearing young annually. Surveys in the 1970s increased the number of territories

checked to 48 and found occupancy to range from 70–88% during 1970–1973, with young reared by 21–33% of pairs.

In 1971 during the second of the UK national peregrine surveys 35 of 48 sites which were checked were occupied by Peregrines and 21% of these produced flying young. Prior to 1977, survey effort was considered to under-represent the available and/or potential territories. The annual surveys begun strategically since 1977 by Jim Wells, Cliff Dawson and other members of the raptor study group has increased numbers of surveyed territories to 187 cliff, quarries and urban sites checked each year. Occupancy of surveyed territories varies annually and with an average of 75% occupied territories each year with the number of pairs ranging between 40 and 92 pairs per annum over the last 37 years.

The UK national surveys were again conducted in 1981 and 1991 which confirmed an increasing population and the occupancy by pairs of peregrines peaked in 1991 but has now apparently declined steadily since this time. The last UK national survey in 2002 found a decrease in Northern Ireland, particularly at inland sites, and it is suspected that illegal persecution may be limiting the population in some areas. The population has declined to approximately 80 occupied territories in recent years with an average of 40 to 50 of these successfully producing young each year.

Quarry nesting in Northern Ireland was first recorded in 1978, at Ballycastle, Co. Antrim and at the end of 2014 there have been a total of no fewer than 71 different quarries have been used for nesting at least once from 1978 until 2014. Whilst not all of these have been used every year quarries are now very important for Northern Ireland's Peregrines and the species does not seem to care whether or not a particular site is used for rock extraction or not. This habitat usage has allowed considerable range expansion

across the country and into many lowland areas. Occasionally during the annual surveys new sites are recorded and two new quarries were recorded to become occupied by breeding peregrines in 2014 so expansion is still occurring in some areas.

The peregrine falcon population in Britain & Ireland has largely recovered from declines caused by organo-chlorine pollutants. Despite this, in some regional areas the population, including in Northern Ireland, are declining. Persecution and to a lesser extent perhaps chemical contamination are seen as the main threats to peregrine population stability. Whilst the peregrine falcon is not a species of immediate conservation concern, it has historically undergone considerable declines and some threats clearly still remain it is listed on Annex I of the EU Birds Directive which provides a legislative framework for assessing and ensuring the conservation of the species. This framework includes monitoring, research and the designation and monitoring of Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for the species.

The Birds Directive also provides a statutory and legislative basis for national surveys by creating a requirement to monitor the peregrine falcon population. In addition, survey and monitoring data collected both during national and annual regional surveys are vitally important as these data are used by the government and other agencies to inform management and conservation decisions. Each year in all counties of Northern Ireland the majority of peregrine territories nests are surveyed by individuals and/or members of the Raptor Study Group and/or members and staff of quarries or other partner environmental NGOs or statutory organisations.

Last year, 2014, was a hugely important year for peregrines, as there was a national UK-wide survey being undertaken. For this we urged the continued support of the raptor workers, falconers,

landowners, bird watchers and quarrying industry for the peregrine falcon and everybody was asked to keep an eye out on their local peregrines. At the end of that survey there were more than 213 potential territories which were surveyed with 83 pairs identified with a further 29 sites with single peregrines or fresh signs of occupation. There were 57 successful pairs which fledged 151 young although this is a good level of productivity there were still three recorded crimes against the species with peregrines being shot or poisoned.

All your sightings and support are invaluable to raptor surveys and in the monitoring of the status of this iconic species in Northern Ireland and across Ireland which conservation and population recovery is symbolic of the importance wildlife and biodiversity although it is still necessary to work hard to minimise raptor persecution. As always the Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group appreciate the long-term and on-going support of all the landowners and the quarry owners who facilitate surveys and monitoring each year. For more information get in touch with us at [www.nirsg.com](http://www.nirsg.com)

*Email: [nirsg@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:nirsg@hotmail.co.uk) or [raptorofficerni@gmail.com](mailto:raptorofficerni@gmail.com) for more information or to report your raptor sightings*

*Note: Peregrines are protected regionally from disturbance (intentional and/or reckless) and/or killing in Northern Ireland under The Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 as amended by the Wildlife & Natural Environment (WANE) Act 2011. Peregrines are given all-year round protection on Schedule A1 of the Act. Licences are therefore required (from NIEA) for monitoring this species.*



## Return of the Sussex Peregrines – where have they come from?

Mike Nicholls & Jon Franklin \*, UK

(\* Director: Sussex Peregrine Study – [www.sussexperegrines.co.uk](http://www.sussexperegrines.co.uk))

### Introduction

Ten-thousand years ago, when the glaciers of the last Ice Age began to retreat from their southerly limit just north of the River Thames, Sussex would have been a region of arctic tundra. As the ice retreated further, Peregrines must have colonised the region and remained breeding there up until the pesticide induced extinctions of the middle of the 20th century.

By 1960, Peregrines were extinct in the whole of southern and eastern England, the Channel Islands, Isle of Mann, and the Scottish Borders. Following this post-war pesticide-induced decline and near total extinction in the UK, Peregrines made a dramatic recovery in the last decade of the 20th century. The population of Peregrines of the East Sussex coast mirror this na-

tional trend: extinct by 1960, the first post pesticide-era breeding was in 1990, and since then the population has made such a spectacular recovery to nearly four times the pre-World War II numbers. Professional egg collector John Walpole-Bond recorded that along the 20 miles of coast from Eastbourne to Brighton there were between 7-12 active nests each year between 1905 and 1945, compared to now in 2014 the Sussex Peregrine Study are monitoring 40 nest sites in the same area!

### So where have they come from?

Where has the current, spectacular English Peregrine population come from? A casual and logical assumption is that this re-colonisation has been the result a 'rolling front' of breeding birds, originating from survivors in the nearest refuges

in the south west of England, especially Devon and Cornwall, from Wales and Cumbria. If this were true however, the new and very vigorous UK population would have its origins in a very few surviving UK breeding pairs which remained after the pesticide induced crash. Thus, in 1960 only three pairs remained in Devon and Cornwall, three in Cumbria and the Pennines and between three and 10 pairs were successful in Wales. With a possible trickle from Scotland, as few as six English and a similar number of Welsh pairs would be the only progenitors of the current population of Peregrines in England and Wales. This current UK population is thought now to exceed 1200 pairs – nearly a hundredfold increase in 50 years.

Given the low number of original survivors, the current population would be said to originate from a



'genetic bottleneck' of very few ancestral pairs and thus be inbred with much reduced genetic variation. Uniform appearance, small size, poor viability and low productivity are all hallmarks of an inbred population. Certainly the current, extremely viable UK population appears to exhibit none of these symptoms of inbreeding. Further, with a mortality of juvenile Peregrines at about 70%, it would be unlikely that the current English population had its origins from a mere dozen surviving pairs!

### Re-colonisation from France?

If they didn't solely come from the remnant post-pesticide population, what then are the origins of the new and fecund English Peregrine population? Our own theory is that at least part of the re-colonisation has been from the east as well as from the west. Certainly in the vicinity of chalk cliffs above Dover in Kent, not only are there two occupied breeding sites within a few kilometres, but also within view are breeding locations at Cap de Gris Nez and Cap de Blanc Nez in Pays de Calais.

Simply put, it is much nearer 'as the peregrine flies' to Calais from Dover than it is from the Kent/Sussex coast to Cornwall and Wales!

We have observed Peregrine eyries at a density of 1 per kilometre along the Seine-maritime region of Normandy, and an occupied territory on the French coast within 70 km (across the English Channel) of an ancestral site on Beachy Head in East Sussex. Of course this theory assumes that the re-colonisation of this part of France, where Peregrines were also exterminated by pesticides, pre-dates the colonisation of England. Colonisation of France from England is also a pos-

sibility, as is a reciprocal exchange of breeding birds.

### 'Wild-domestic equilibrium' theory

Another, perhaps more intriguing theory comes from a publication in 2011 by Vincent Flemming, Andrew Douse and Nick Williams – all from UK Government Departments – who suggest that the dramatic recovery of wild Peregrine populations since the 1980s to the present day mirrors during the same period a similar exponential rise in the domestic/captive Peregrine falcon population. Over the period from 1983 to 2008 more than 7800 Peregrines (including hybrids) were registered with Department of Environment/Department of Food & Rural Affairs. This domestic population is derived not only from the indigenous *Falco peregrinus peregrinus*, but also from imported birds of other subspecies. Of Peregrines imported between 1976-2005 Flemming and his co-workers report:

'the majority of these (51%) were of *Falco p. pealei* but..... also included *F. p. anatum* and *F. p. peregrinator*.'

Further, Flemming and his colleagues' theory suggests that the parallel nature of these increases is not a coincidence, but that the two populations (wild and domestic) are linked: the domestic Peregrine population being in part recruited from wild UK Peregrines (e.g. wild disabled and those taken previously under licence); and the wild population numbers being bolstered by escaped domestic birds.

Thus, the two Peregrine populations – wild and domestic – are in equilibrium with each other and

birds over time move from one to the other.

### Early records

There are few records of the appearance of Sussex Peregrines from before the 1950s. In his book *A History of the Birds of Sussex* (1938), John Walpole-Bond commented on the appearance of Sussex Peregrines:

'..... most being quite dingy beneath, although occasional examples there are rich salmon-buff.'

He further remarked on their uniformity by asking:

'Do our county Peregrines by any possible chance constitute a subspecies?'

Searches for museum specimens known to be from the Sussex region yielded a solitary specimen collected from Beachy Head around 1895, now in the Natural History Museum at Tring (figure 1). Although rather faded, the colour seems concordant with Walpole-Bond's observations. An illustration by George Lodge of Peregrines at an eyrie in East Sussex, painted in 1933 (figure 2) seems also to agree with Walpole-Bond's description of adult birds with salmon-buff chest.

### Recent Observations

Observations of wild Peregrines breeding on the Sussex coast since 1990 show a much greater range of colour, pattern and size than is implied by Walpole-Bond and Lodge. Many 'types' of adult Peregrines have been recorded from dark birds with full black hoods, and heavily marked salmon coloured breasts, to very pale birds with light blue backs, white breast, large pale check patches, grey

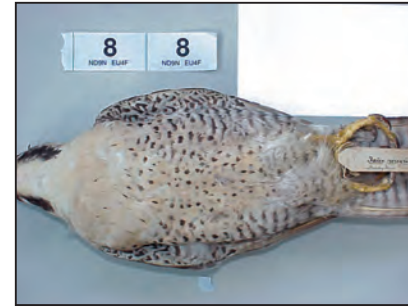


Figure 1: Male Peregrine - Sussex Coast ca. 1895 © courtesy of the Natural History Museum, Tring.



Figure 4: Siblings born in successive years – both are the offspring of a dark Sussex female. Does the bird on the right exhibit Peale's peregrine ancestry? Does the one on the right exhibit *calidus* genes?



Figure 3: Left: Pale adult breeding Sussex male, with grey head and thin malar stripe, traits of arctic (*F.p.calidus*) and northern Scandinavian peregrines, Right: Offspring of the male shown on the left showing head patterns typical of juvenile arctic peregrines.

crowns to the head and narrow malar stripes. Some birds have distinctly russet napes and interestingly a few have white foreheads, rather like tundra birds.

Combinations of these colour/patterns are evident and juveniles perhaps show an even greater range of colour and pattern. Figures 3-5 show photographs of birds breeding and/or born on the Sussex coast since 1990, and illustrate some of the range of colour and patterns beyond those of the original birds inhabiting the county. Not

only is there a large range of Peregrine 'types' present in Sussex, but also individual breeding birds seem to produce offspring of variable and contrasting appearance (Figure 4) suggesting a genetic base to this variation.

To confirm or otherwise the supposition that visible variation of colour, pattern and also size and shape has an underlying genetic basis, Sussex Peregrine Study is now partnering a university study into the DNA basis of genetic variation in Peregrines. The current observa-



Figure 2: Peregrines and Young by G.E. Lodge, 15 June 1933 © Copyright George Edward Lodge Trust



Figure 6: French eyass from coastal Normandy showing juvenile *F.p.brookei* colouration and pattern.



Figure 5: Left: French, Seine-maritime adult and offspring. Right: Sussex eyass showing similar colouration and pattern to French eyasses.

Photos © Jon Franklin / Sussex Peregrine Study

tions nevertheless provide circumstantial evidence of genetic variation greater than would be expected from inbred population following a genetic bottleneck.

This new variation must have come from somewhere!

### A French connection?

There are certainly similarities between Sussex Peregrines and those breeding in Seine-maritime region (Figure 5) and this also provides circumstantial evidence of a link be-

tween French and UK birds. Evidence for a French invasion theory would be best substantiated if birds born and ringed in France turn up breeding in the UK. Unfortunately ringing and migration studies in France are not as comprehensive as in the UK. There is however one record of a bird hatched and ringed in Sussex breeding in Normandy, indicating that there is at least the potential for cross Channel exchange.

The French population itself has returned from pesticide-induced near extinction and as well as recolonisation from eastern Alpine and inland mountain refugia, there is considerable evidence of a gradual influx of birds from the Pyrenees in the south. It is documented that a natural hybrid zone between *F.p.peregrinus* and *F.p.brookei* exists in the Pyrenees (and also in the Alps between France and Italy) and so there is the strong possibility of gene flow between these races in France. Certainly we have seen very dark, brookei-like birds (Figure 6) breeding in Normandy, just 70 km from Sussex.

## Reintroductions

Joseph Brown and his co-workers in Canada compared DNA evidence from living and museum specimens and failed to find evidence that the genetic diversity of living North American Peregrines was impoverished in the post-DDT-era population. In Canada and the United States Peregrines were re-introduced by the controlled release of captive-bred individuals, the founder stock of which included a range of sub-species other than those normally found in North America. Presumably, part of the genetic variation of current free-living Canadian Peregrines

came from this captive stock and hence from other geographic races.

Walter Bednarek (pers.com.) reports that the reintroduction releases in Germany during the 1970s were of captive birds derived from several sources, including Spanish brookei and Scottish peregrinus. A similar controlled release project in Sweden and Denmark used brookei, North American anatum and pealei as well as northern Fenno-Scandinavian peregrinus as founder breeding stock.

Evidence suggests that the wild free-living UK Peregrines are genetically more diverse than would be expected if they stemmed from the very few breeding pairs which survived the pesticide crash. If the post-pesticide Peregrine population is the result of recruitment through a genetic bottleneck it would be expected to have low genetic variation, resulting in uniform appearance and signs of inbreeding depression such as low fertility. Observation of the Sussex population suggests that this is not the case: this population is very productive and phenotypically extremely diverse.

According to the theory presented by Fleming et al, the Peregrines now occupying ancestral eyries and 'new-age' urban sites are partly derived from or at least augmented by escaped domestic birds. These domestic birds in turn are derived from several sub-species other than native *F.p.peregrinus*. To their originally reported Indian black shaheens (peregrinator) and North America (pealei, anatum) imports, can now be added Spanish (*F.p.brookei*), arctic (*F.p.calidus*) and African (*F.p.minor*) Peregrines and allied species, especially barbary falcons

(*F. pelegrinoides*) and red-naped shaheens (*F.p.peregrinoides baby-lonicus*). The domestic UK population is thus genetically potentially much richer than the original wild UK Peregrine.

There is also some circumstantial evidence that through a French connection, genes from mainland European peregrines, possibly brookei have also crept into the wild UK population. Furthermore, ringing returns of captive-bred Peregrines released in Germany which included birds bred from Scottish peregrinus and also brookei, showed movements into France and elsewhere (Bednarek, pers.com).

## The Great British Peregrine?

Populations reduced to very low numbers often suffer a deleterious loss of genetic variation leading to severe inbreeding, inevitably leading to reduced fertility and eventual extinction. It seems that in the UK, the Peregrine population has not only managed to survive the effects of such a genetic bottleneck, but has done this in a spectacular way and is probably now genetically more diverse than ever before. Monitoring data by the Sussex Peregrine Study has recorded the recovery of the local Peregrine population, providing evidence of this increase in diversity.

Release programmes of captive bred Peregrines in North America, Germany and Sweden utilised sub-species and races from geographic areas other than the release areas resulting in genetically diverse restored populations. Although there have been no controlled release schemes of peregrines in the UK, it is likely that at least part of the genetic enhancement of its wild stock has come from

other races of Peregrines, possibly by migration from the near continent and also leakage from the domestic Peregrine population.

The fecundity and future of the British Peregrine therefore seems certain. For the purist though, perhaps with a vision of a wild taken falcon as a representative of a 10,000 year lineage, sadly it seems that the 'true wild' Sussex Peregrine is now a thing of the past.

## Peregrines in Irish Falconry

Probably due to different agricultural regimes, it seems that the Peregrine in Ireland didn't suffer the ravages of pesticide induced decimation as they did on the UK mainland. This seems especially true in the west where predominantly stock rearing agriculture had little need for organochloride pesticides compared to cereal growing. Thus Ireland has had healthy Peregrine populations throughout the 20th century.

Furthermore, enlightened bird protection legislation has meant that in Ireland a wild-take of Peregrines enables Irish falconers to be privileged and able to fly – and possibly loose – birds of local origins. The situation was different in the UK where the population crash and draconian protectionist legislation has meant that UK falconers had to use their ingenuity to obtain Peregrines from other countries and other sub-species. Evidence from the Sussex population seems to suggest that introgression ('genetic pollution') of other sub-species into UK Peregrine population has been the result of falconry losses.

The message for Irish falconry seems therefore clear. An annual wild-take coupled with captive

breeding could ensure that only the local Peregrine ecotype are flown and occasionally lost in Ireland, and the need for exotic sub-species minimised.

## Acknowledgments

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- Brian Bird, Chairman of the George Lodge Trust for permission to reproduce the illustration in Figure 2.
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- Ornithology Department, Natural History Museum, Tring for access to museum specimens.
- Bart Atfield (1958-2004) falconer and founder of the Sussex Peregrine Study who in 1990 discovered the first post-pesticide pair of peregrines breeding in Sussex.
- An earlier version of this article appeared in *The Falconer* (2014) journal of the British Falconers' Club.

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## Can you Help?

We are keen to compare DNA of Sussex Peregrines with that from wild Peregrines from Ireland.

As Ireland was never so severely contaminated with pesticides, Peregrines were never as badly affected compared to southern England. We don't therefore expect that Irish peregrines suffered from a 'genetic bottleneck' as we suspect the English population has.

If you have wild take or wild disabled peregrines, or F1 birds which are bred from wild birds and are willing to send us moulted feathers for DNA extraction, we would like to hear from you.

Please contact Dr Mike Nicholls (drhawk@hotmail.co.uk)





Photo: Scott Patton

## Stephen Wildman Frank

### Game Hawker with a Golden Lure

Words: Robert Hutchinson, Offaly and Mark Upton, UK

He is gone. But mention his name to those who knew him and the instant response will be a smile followed by colourful words that warmly profile the man. 'Generous gentleman' is the favourite. 'Stew pot' is another, referencing his 30-year habit of simply topping up his cook pot daily – some say the contents bubbled even when cold! One fading hawking group was greeted at breakfast with the totally unnecessary confirmation from Steve 'I'm really sorry – I think I've poisoned you last night'. So 'generous gentleman poisoner' seems to be the consensus. Also likely to be mentioned will be 'Birichin' (his remote, extreme northern grouse hawking haunt), 'chess playing humanist', 'cultured and well-read' and my personal favourite, 'whiskey-flavoured evenings around the fire'.

In my tribute, I would like to simply focus on two aspects of his character – his lifelong commitment and deep love of game hawking,

and English Pointers.

#### On commitment

Augustus Caesar, the Roman Emperor was of the view that wars should only be undertaken in the confident expectation of large rewards. To go to war for small or uncertain returns is, Augustus said: 'like fishing with a golden hook: nothing one could catch is worth the risk of the hook's loss'. Caesar was correct, indeed for an individual to decide to go to war is not to be taken at all lightly but in truth it is small pitch compared to the towering courage it takes to dedicate your whole life without compromise to your passion. You would have to be certain that, looking back, the rewards in comparison to the significant sacrifices represented 'a life well lived'. In truth, yoked by life's pressures to conform, few in the long history of falconry have taken up the challenge of 'game hawking with a golden lure' and none in modern

times have been prepared to take up this challenge. Stephen Frank did, from his early teens until his passing in his mid eighties, and only death could stop him. 'Death,' DH Lawrence wrote, 'the only pure, beautiful conclusion of a great passion'.

Stephen was made of a different type of wood to the rest of us. His grain ran true. He understood the sport he served and why he served it, and he touched and excited us all because we responded to his authenticity. And it was this authenticity that made him unique and without equal in our community, which in turn gave him great influence and authority. An authenticity that meant he didn't need to waste energy into self-promotion or politicking to exert influence. An authenticity which gave him an integrity to win arguments by not even having to argue: on being asked about hybrids, his response was four words 'I don't fly exotics'. On flying Gyrs at grouse, he had five words: 'I follow the

Queensbury rules'.

Although universally admired, perhaps because his love for falconry was too serious a matter to be trifled with, he refused steadfastly to don the mantle of 'greatest grouse hawker ever', which he was.

#### On his love for English pointers

He often held back naming his dogs until something in the dog's character emerged that he could capture in a name. At the time of his death, his English Pointer team consisted of 'Honest Archie', 'Wonky', 'Gim-

trained and run in trials for Stephen. Snuff was just a pup but Wizzer had already learnt the joys of hares and had been used for a season's hawking. The following year, Snuff won four puppy stakes and was made up in 1990, coming 3rd in the Champion stake which was won by Wizzer who, now a field trial champion, returned to Birichen. Stephen had promised Wizzer that if she could hold it together to win she would never have to return to boarding school and field trials.

Peter then took charge of Gero Von Honstaufen, recently out of quarantine, and although owned

game finder, who stood out.

Embercombe pointers were a huge part of our lives at that time, but Peter's fondest memories were sharing days with Stephen flying his falcons followed by a dram and chocolate overlooking the North Sea, and in the evening, playing chess and sharing the stock Pot and the contents of the cook pot...'

Stephen, as well as working his pointers hard, also enjoyed them. Crying with laughter, he told me of how he had recently entered the highly experienced Honest Archie with eight seasons under his collar in a field trial only for him to disgrace himself. On being slipped, he ran 20ft then proceeded to 'empty himself' at leisure, groaning loudly with pleasure. He then peed like a sow for another five minutes, y taking enjoyment out of every last squirt. The Judge pulled Honest Archie's embarrassed handler to one side and whispered 'I think the problem with Mr Frank's dog is... he has not seen many grouse!'



mie' and 'Sally'. Whenever I spoke to Stephen about his dogs, he was at pains to point out that he owed his success to his dearest friends, the late John Nash (a great English Pointer and Red Setter man), and Peter O'Driscoll. I am indebted to Geraldine O'Driscoll, wife of Peter, for the following commentary:

'...kennel club records show that Stephen bred 129 Embercombe puppies but of course there were many more prior to their keeping electronic records. Peter's history with Stephen started in 1986 when he purchased Embercombe Dinky, a product of Mac and Spiv... Snuff of E (bred by Martin Jones, Lucky X Becky ) and Wizzer (Lucky x Ada) joined us in summer '88 to be

by Dr Christian Saar was registered in Stephen's name. He too became a field trial champion and together with Snuff became a top shooting and trialling team.

Gero and Wizzer produced a pretty formidable litter, as did our own Ft Ch Ferglen factor of Fowington with Wizzer, and our Fowington Buzz son of Dinky x Wizzer. Sadly, Snuff did not reproduce but her litter sister Abbess of Huntley, owned by Martin Jones and trained and handled by Peter to her field trial title, did and produced Ft Ch progeny.

Many other Embercombes came to us but it was Wizzer, the wild, free spirit, and Snuff, the meticulous

On the basis that a picture is worth a thousand words, I now encourage you to take a few minutes out and savour the recent pictures of Stephen relaxing with his charges – I think you'd agree that on the topic of Stephen's love for pointers, further commentary is meaningless.

As for me, you may ask how I'll remember him. Two events stain my memory. The first relates to my first trip over to meet him, the second, my last telephone conversation. On my first trip to Birichin, I had loaded my giant suitcase with gifts including Irish Whisky, Irish Pointer Club magazines, books and two huge Follow Deer haunches. At the airport check-in, I was told I had grossly exceeded the allowable weight limit. Reluctantly, I removed the



haunches and tried to dispose of them in the men's toilets by hiding them behind a filthy toilet pan. I looked back at my handy work: the plastic bag had split and what looked like the dismembered parts of a child's body were on full view. I panicked, picking them up and ran for the exit only to be stopped by a suspicious security officer. I tried to explain my predicament but he wasn't in the mood for listening, and with a stern face took custody of the now hairy, urine stained legs. 'Give 'em to your dogs,' I said. 'You must be joking,' was his reply. 'There's six guards in the station - I will make sure everyone gets a slice!' Stephen laughed and laughed when I told him what had happened.

During our last telephone call, Stephen calmly informed me: 'I won't be alive in six months time.' I told him not to be silly. He responded by telling me he was serious and that he would take a bet 'not allowed, under the time-honoured rules of betting'. I said: 'What rule is that?' 'The rule that states you can't place a bet on an outcome where no one wins?' For once, he was lost for words, the painful silence coming to an end with him murmuring 'umm, you have lived in Ireland too long'. He died soon afterwards. No one wins.

A formal obituary would no doubt close off on Stephen, a lifelong bachelor, with the cold line: 'He leaves no dependants'. This is a lie. It is not true. Even in death, he remained loyal to his calling. It was his wish that his beloved Birichin be maintained intact for flying peregrines at grouse over his beloved pointers.

Stephen's lifelong devotion to grouse hawking meant he used his every gift but he should not be remembered simply as a great practitioner. We live in the age of 'global commercialisation' of falconry and with the many positives come the threats and downsides. For those who truly care about our sport, these are anxious times, and for us Stephen will for all time remain an Icon, a beacon of hope for all who follow and are proud to be called 'traditionalists'. No dependants indeed.

Slainte  
RH

Not many falconers would have been aware of Steve's second name, 'Wildman'. His parents must have had some sort of intuition when they chose this name. I don't mean wild, as in out of control. Although occasionally this quiet man's noise levels rose very high while flushing grouse for a waiting-on peregrine. Steve was a wild man, as in being close to nature. Steve led a life much more in tune with the environment than anyone else I have known. He hunted and lived off the land, he noticed the signs of nature and its changing seasons, because he was an integral part of it.

Steve was brought up in a truly sporting family. His father, a great horseman, bred racehorses and greyhounds and was a hunting man. His mother, a renowned horsewoman in her own right, bred hunters of the highest class. Stephen and his younger brother and sister were brought up to riding and hunting and when Steve

showed early interest in falconry his family supported him. Few of you will know that Steve was a talented horseman himself and was a champion child rider.

It was at this time that our families first met. My grandfather, Bob, worked for the Franks for a while and Steve often told me how grandfather allowed Steve, as a small boy, to drive, in first gear, the first tractor on the farm, and walked beside him to stop it if there was a problem. As the racehorse trainer, Bob Turnell, he trained many winners for the Franks including a horse called 'Pas Seul', which won the Gold Cup. As a little girl, my mother was often taken to Quelfurlong, Steve's family home, to play with the older Frank children and so she was probably Steve's longest surviving friend.

A few years later my father, keen to take up falconry, noticed adverts in his local paper from a Mr Frank asking for sightings of a lost hawk. (This was 'Screamer', a beautiful eyass falcon that Stephen had hacked on the farm). Roger contacted him and they became great friends for the rest of Steve's life, with Roger becoming one of the first out of a vast number of budding falconers who were helped by Steve. My father spent a great deal of his time at the Franks', hawking with Steve and riding and hunting with Steve's brother and sister, Andy and Judy. And later it was Steve who introduced him to my mother. Steve had a lot to answer for. As did his father who had introduced my grandparents.

Steve and my father continued to

hawk together, both improving with experience and, as success increased, their thoughts turned to grouse-hawking. They tried in Derbyshire without much success and then Steve was given the chance to hawk at Loch Dhu, in Caithness, with Geoffrey Pollard. Geoffrey had been there the year before and realised he didn't have enough hawks to do justice to the numbers of grouse they had in those days. The two of them drove north in Steve's Volkswagen Beetle with two dogs, eight hawks and falconry gear. It was the first of many cars to have the unique Frank aroma. Steve had a good dog by this time, 'Flash', part of the reason for Geoffrey's kind invitation. Between them they had some great hawks, Steve had 'Bitch' and a spectacularly high Spanish brookei falcon called 'lbbby', after Iberia Airlines that had brought her to England. They had tremendous sport.

He had met James Roberson-Justice through the British Falconers' Club. Philip Glasier, James's falconer, had departed and James was struggling with the hawks and his filming schedule. Steve was invited to join him in Scotland for the grouse hawking and this led to his first hawking on Birichin - the moor he was to fall in love with and make such a part of his life. The following year Steve kindly asked if my father could join him there. They understood each other well and hawked well together. The grouse numbers were good and increasing and between them they had a great team of peregrines, Steve's eyasses and Roger's passagers and haggards from Arabia. In 1967, with a team of four hawks, they killed 314 grouse, getting close to Blaine's record and the majority of the score was to the feet of Steve's famous falcon, 'Bitch' who killed 177 grouse. A record never likely to be bettered. The other part of this great team was a pointer bitch Steve had imported from John Nash in Ireland. 'Queenie' was extraordinary in her skill and was the founder of the great Embercombe line. Most falconers' pointers go back to 'Queenie' and the Embercombe line, which is probably the greatest

legacy Stephen has left to falconers of today.

Steve had also taken up gliding and became a much admired pilot. Many have told me how he had a natural intuition of where to find lift and could often fly in conditions others found difficult. I can remember when, later in life, his eyesight had worsened, he told me he could no longer see the dials. Frightening for me, but it didn't affect his ability to fly. I always wondered if falconry improved his gliding skills or gliding his falconry. Steve bought a derelict croft on the moor to be his hawking lodge. Londornaich was just stone walls and a roof. It had a mud floor through which a stream would run on wet days. My father sketched some rough plans to make it into a more suitable house for Steve and a local builder turned it into the comfortable, if basic, croft that many of us have had the pleasure to stay in.

When James Robertson-Justice became ill, Steve took over the lease on Birichin and later when it became available he purchased it and after a few years decided to move up there permanently, letting out his Devon home, Embercombe.

He was a lucky man. He was able to hawk the whole season, go gliding when he wanted and live with his beloved pointers. Steve was a part of Birichin and Birichin a part of him. He lived off the land, with hawked grouse, venison and fish caught in the loch. Steve had a unique way of getting a trout for

supper. He would watch the osprey fish his loch and when it had landed with a fish on the shore. Steve would run out and frighten it off its catch, taking it home for dinner.

Londornaich became a haven to falconers and many of us will live with memories of fantastic meals, great company, and sitting by the fire, with lights out, listening to classical music.

Steve wasn't just a skilful falconer, pointer-breeder and glider pilot. What has made Steve so loved by so many, was his kindness, hospitality and helpfulness. All this without any boastfulness or want for recognition. He was a quiet man who took little and gave lots. He gave more help to want-to-be falconers than anyone else I know. He generously gave hawks, dogs and opportunities to fly grouse. Steve will justly be remembered as a great falconer and the falconer who, along with Geoffrey Pollard and Roger Upton, brought falconry out of the quiet period following the wars, and through their example and skill they encouraged a resurgence in the sport which spread far and wide and has brought us to the incredibly high standard we see today.

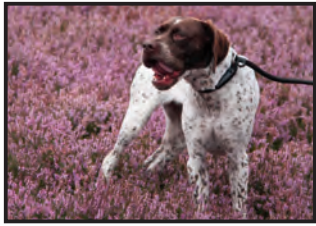
We will all miss him terribly and, when on the hill watching a peregrine stooping at grouse, will remember him

MU



Photo by Alan Butcher





## Seduced By A French Maid

Steve Smith, UK

Nicole! 'Pa-Pa?' conjures up the vision of a wee French girl speaking to her father on a famous TV advertisement.

Ahh... alas, back to reality.

This story begins in early August 2013. We were setting out to count grouse on a local moor, pre-season.

There was a mixed huddle of interested parties; beaters and guns, dogs at heel wanting a walk, all out to see what the prospects were like for the impending season.

I was strolling out with a colleague, each of us with a brace of pointers (English, for the uninitiated). Close behind was a tall chap closing in at a fast pace. 'Excuse me chaps, can I walk with you and watch your dogs work?'

This was Simon Bell, a keen sportsman and up to then a coursing man.

He watched our dogs do their bit finding and producing grouse for the count with interest. Unbeknownst to us, he had an agenda! He had been looking to get into pointers or HPR's and had done his research, coming up with what he thought was a perfect dog to suit his needs.

He revealed the results of this research and enquired if either of us had heard of the breed Braque Francais type Pyrenees. Of course we had not! Our first thoughts were that if they had been worthy then surely we would have heard of them.

Simon had found one or two breeders in France who had kept this very old minority breed alive but they were less than forthcoming. An *entente cordiale* was 'non-evident'. After many months of trying and almost giving up and settling for a more conventional breed, he was fortunate to come across a gentleman from Suffolk who had managed to prise three young bitches from a custodian of this breed in France.

These were to be the only three Braques in the UK and Simon had managed to acquire one of them. The pups came over at around four months and after a further month the pups were sent off to a well-reputed HPR trainer and handler. Although two of the pups thrived at 'boarding school', Simon's dog did not and she reverted into herself. The professional trainer rightly called Simon and asked him to collect her as it was not working out.

The young bitch named Iness arrived home and she was a bit of a sorry sight.

We took her for a run out with my two pointers but she was not for joining in. All the scent in all the world and allowed to run free, but she would have none of it.

Although diminutive in size, Iness was a pleasant young dog and Simon brought her out often to run with my dogs during January and February. We kept off the moor from March until the end of July during the nesting season. We do have about 50 acres of rank heather by the house that has semi-frequent dog walkers on it. There are a few pairs of grouse on it so it is useful for keeping dogs fit out of season. After a while, Iness enjoyed her walks out and I did quite enjoy seeing her come out of her shell a little.

I had told Simon that by the end of July through to the 12th of August, there was an opportunity to grouse count on many shooting estates and that would be the time to develop his little dog.

As things worked out Simon and family were already booking to go on an annual holiday on these exact dates, the timing for 'Ness' as her name had been condensed to, could not have been worse.

Simon had his best smiley expression on and persuaded me to take Ness whilst he was away and run her with my pointers during our many counting excursions. To be fair, I don't recall taking much persuasion as I felt for poor Ness and her mixed introduction to a working life.

My bitch pointers, 11 years old and two years old, accepted little Ness without any trouble and working them individually and as a brace allowed me to evaluate the scenting abilities of each dog on a given day.

When Ness arrived, to be fair, I was not expecting a great deal in stamina and durability. Simon had done his best to prepare her and get her fit which helped a great deal. The dogs ran most days for three weeks and pointed around 850 grouse, all carefully orchestrated to encourage and steady the one-year-old French dog and my two-year-old English.

Because of the densities, I could run them on from point to point and develop them, dependent on their behaviour and progress.

I have to say that that little dog showed amazing heart. She ranged up to 100m to left and right, hunted for me, not herself and had a perfectly sensitive nose. She also showed adequate caution when amongst game. She was remarkable, particularly for one so young.

Although I am a dyed-in-the-wool pointer man, this little dog has a place in my affections. For a one-dog-fits-all, this breed ticks more boxes than most other breeds. They would be a low-ground sportsman's dream, with visits to the high country easily taken in their stride.

Although French, the Braque is not just a shorthaired Brittany. She showed no disobedient or hard-headed tendencies and is very biddable and keen to please. There is a lot of dog in this little package, gentle around the house, keen to please and bold in the field.

Nicole? Pa Pa! Maybe one day...



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