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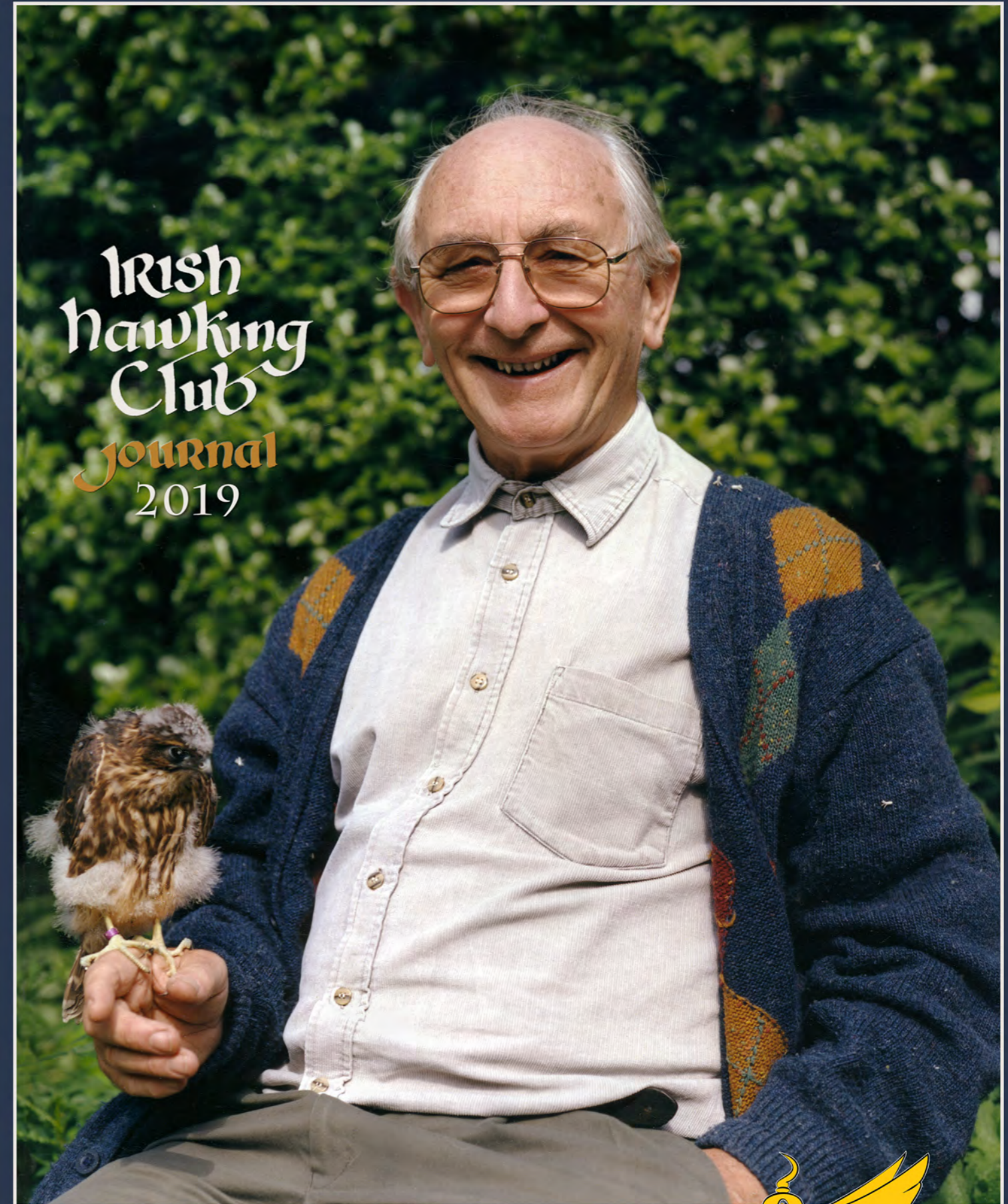
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**Irish
Hawking
Club
Journal
2019**



Executive Committee

PRESIDENT
Martin Brereton
breretonkitchens@gmail.com
086 842 7913

DIRECTOR
Vacant

HON. SECRETARY
Natasha Murphy
murphn33@tcd.ie
087 101 0891

HON. TREASURER
Anya Aseeva
aseeva.anya@gmail.com
087 384 5049

FIELDMEET CO-ORDINATOR
Kevin Logan
loggies@gmail.com
07720 827 564

EVENT ORGANISER
Gerard Grant
gergrantauto@gmail.com
086 814 3832

CONSERVATION OFFICER
Anthony Doyle
qosdoyle@gmail.com
087 990 9262

Editorial

**JOURNAL & NEWS-
LETTER EDITOR**
Ed Coulson
edward.c.coulson@gmail.com
087 384 5048

JOURNAL COVER DESIGN
Aaron Leavy
aaron@leavyphoto.ie

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Dublin

Nick Fox
Wales

June Jordan
Carrickfergus

John Morris
Dublin

Please send any article submissions and/or photographs to the Journal Editor at the address above or to irish.hawking.club@gmail.com. All material is subject to scrutiny by the committee.



Policy and Objectives

The Irish Hawking Club (IHC) 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 practise the pursuit of falconry to the highest standards and traditions.

The objectives of the Club are:

to represent falconry throughout Ireland and to foster international cooperation 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 cooperation with all national hunting organisations with like objectives;

to encourage conservation and 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; and

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



Welcome

There is a bit of a merlin theme running through this edition. As well as two archive articles giving a snapshot of the flying of merlins in earlier times, there is a contemporary guide to lark-hawking from two English friends of the club, and a round-up of this year's efforts to provide captive-bred merlins for club members to fly. Robert Hutchinson has dubbed that endeavour 'Project Rowland', in honour of the man who spearheaded the club's first such project many decades ago.

There could be no more fitting image for this year's cover than Aaron Leavy's photograph of a merlin on the fist of a laughing Rowland Eustace, and a suitably

large proportion of this *Journal* is given over to tributes to Rowland. And they all mention that wonderful smile!

There was a mistake in this year's spring *Newsletter*, and Rowland wrote shortly after publication to tell me about it. He'd been left off the list of honorary life members, but had been included (correctly) as an honorary vice president. Of course I could put him under both, but he said, "You don't need my name twice, taking up space." It seemed that, to him, being a life member of this club was the real honour, better than being a vice president. I promised to fix it in this *Journal*, and so I have.

This edition concludes with a report from Don Ryan on the historic inscription of Irish falconry as Intangible Cultural Heritage. How good it was that Rowland lived to

see Irish falconry recognised and thus protected by the government in this way, an achievement that clearly owes a lot to his dedication in keeping the IHC thriving and happy over so many years.

This is my last of three journals and two newsletters as editor. It has been a really rewarding role. Thanks for having me.

Ed Coulson
edward.c.coulson@gmail.com



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Cover Artist's Note

Aaron Leavy, Co. Offaly



This image was taken on a warm summer's day some twenty years ago in the wildlife park that was Rowland's back garden.

Having just done a portrait of Rowland's granddaughter Sophie, I suggested that if he now sat on the child's chair we could get a nice shot of his merlin. The objective of course was to get a nice shot of Rowland himself.

After a few minutes setting up the camera and tripod, Rowland - sitting on the small chair - with his trademark raised eyebrow, remarked that this all seemed like an elaborate setup to get a photo of the diminutive merlin...

I mentioned that as soon as the merlin composed itself with a less serious facial expression we'd have our photo and be done.

Rowland responded kindly with a chuckle.

President's Note

Martin Brereton, Co. Offaly

Time of the year again to start getting birds fit for the season and doing what we do best: hunting. I'm sure you all had a great summer and are looking forward to autumn and the excitement it brings.

As most of you know, a great friend, falconer, gentlemen and honorary vice president of our club passed away this summer - Rowland Eustace. I don't think I've ever known anybody who has done so much for the Irish Hawking Club and falconry in general. Where do I start? I just don't know. I knew Rowland for almost 35 years, and when I first joined the club he was so helpful, not just to myself but to every young member. I really think because of people like Rowland most of us will want to stay falconers forever. People like Rowland inspired me to be the best I possibly can at flying birds, and he inspired so many falconers in his long life in falconry.

Myself and Don had the privilege of visiting Rowland in hospital before he passed, and his wit and charm were no different than 35 years ago. I normally find it difficult to put stuff to paper but I honestly could write all night about this man, having so many memories. Rowland thank you for being the amazing person you were. Rest in peace.

As this is my last piece as your president, I would like to thank the committee for their work, and all club members for supporting the club year in, year out. I hope you all have a good season, and look forward to seeing you at some of our fieldmeets.

Ed asked me to send in a picture and I would normally send one with a bird, but this one I won't forget for a while. Ten pound, five ounces, on a mayfly and one hour, thirty-five minutes getting him in - and then I released him to get bigger a fish of a lifetime.



"To be honest, when I got him in I was in a state of shock and shaking all night. In my young life I had a lot of hard fights, but this fellow brought me to my knees."

Fieldmeet Diary 2019-20

Merlin Meet: Sneem, Co. Kerry, Friday 13 to Monday 16 September 2019.
Contact Robert Hutchinson +353 86 235 4875.

Duck, Rabbit & Snipe Meet: Edenderry, Co. Offaly, Sunday 27 & Monday 28 October. Contact Martin Brereton +353 86 842 7913.

AGM: Larkin's Bistro, Edenderry, Co. Offaly, 7 p.m., Sunday 27 October.
Contact the committee at irish.hawking.club@gmail.com.

Mayo Snipe Meet: Rock House, Ballycroy, Co. Mayo, Friday 8 to Sunday 10 November. Cap: €80 per day for falconers, €20 per day for spectators.
Contact Don Ryan +353 85 711 7863.

Sneem Meet: Sneem, Co. Kerry, Wednesday 13 to Sunday 17 November.
Snipe, rabbit and pheasant. Cap €10 per day. Contact Don Ryan +353 85 711 7863.

Galway Snipe Meet: Glencorrib, Co. Mayo, Monday 18 to Wednesday 20 November. Contact Martin Brereton +353 86 842 7913.

International Meet, Midlands: Sunday 12 to Friday 17 January 2020.
Contact Don Ryan +353 85 711 7863.

New and Returning Members of the Irish Hawking Club

Since the spring Newsletter, the IHC has welcomed the following new and returning members to our club. If anyone has any objection to their membership, please contact the committee as soon as possible.

Tommy Byrne	Co. Wicklow
Carol Fitzpatrick (Supporting Member)	Co. Wicklow
Derek Gilvray	Co. Derry
Andrius Grebliunas	Co. Kerry
Chris Guilfoyle	Dublin
Hugh Kelly	Co. Down
Cáitlín King	Co. Louth
Karl Lawlor	Co. Meath
Alessandra Oliveto	Co. Galway
Stephen Power	Co. Dublin
Liam Regan	Co. Kerry
Clifford Ryan	Co. Limerick
Shane Thornton	Co. Mayo

Galway Meet 2018
Photo: Dwight
Dreezen

Rowland Eustace

1926 – 2019

Special thanks to Hilary White for helping organise this collaborative tribute to the 'grandfather of Irish falconry' and pillar of the Irish Hawking Club, Rowland Eustace, who died on 15 August.

Eulogy, read at Rowland's funeral – Hilary White

A thorough and thundering gentleman. Understated and witty. A kind, patient teacher. Certified Master Beekeeper and the Grandfather of Irish Falconry. A wicked sense of humour and the empathy of a million men. A very, very good friend.

But to this list of descriptions of Rowland that have come in the past few days, an important one has been forgotten – market fixer.

The legend goes something like this.

Always on the lookout for a bargain, Rowland had happened upon a job-lot of mousetraps going for next to nothing in a closing-down sale, and duly snapped them up, if you'll excuse the pun.

Shortly after securing the crates of mousetraps, the big and beautiful Eustace clan was taking family vacations in the sunny south east. Nearby to the caravan park sat an unsuspecting general store that Rowland quickly set his hawk-eye on. Over the course of the next week, the store owner was visited by a series of young children, one a day in fact, all mysteriously asking for the very thing he had not thought to stock in his shop that summer. Yep, you guessed it: mousetraps.

.....
All photos courtesy
of Hilary White





.....
 Rowland accepting an IHC award in recognition of his services to Irish falconry, with (left to right) Paul Donohue, Liam O Broin, Edward Mulligan, Hilary White

What relief the storeowner must have felt when, out of the blue on the final day, a charming, well-spoken gentleman arrived through the door offering to sell him some.

There are many of us here today whose lives were shaped by our time with Rowland. We came to him seeking knowledge and experience in falconry, which is, by definition, best passed down from father to son, mother to daughter, master to apprentice. We were met with an open door, a gently persuasive tone, and a bright inquiring intellect, the kind that had never been blunted by the halls of academia.

We emerged the other side with so much more from that age-old mentor-apprentice relationship that is sadly under threat these days. In my case, besides a grounding in

falconry that money couldn't buy you today, I gained enough beekeeping experience to take on a hive of my own a few years later, as well as the basics of carpentry and woodwork, animal management and even a side order in entomology.

But there was more. One of the best things about Rowland was that he came ready packaged with Gertrude and a large and lovely family, all of whom embraced me with a warmth that I draw on to this day (even if some of them did play a role in the Great Courtown Mousetrap Swindle of 1971).

They would play cameos on the Wednesday and Saturday afternoons that I spent at the house on St Kevin's Park, as would a supporting cast of falconers who

would become dear and lifelong friends. That young and confused boy was not only finding a retreat from family discord at home, he was finding himself welcomed into a wise, wonderful and hilarious community that Rowland had no idea he was at the epicentre of.

Perhaps more than any of these things, Rowland taught me the importance of being able to laugh at the world, to find the beautiful absurdity in people and other animals, and vitally, yourself. And to focus in on the rich and magical detail that the natural world is continually getting on with, if only you took the time to notice.

Laughter bookended our time together. My first ever encounter with him was at the age of 12 on his doorstep one winter evening, as my poor mother begged him to teach her hawk-mad son about falconry.

"Good evening Mr Eustace," she began by way of introduction, "I hope we're not disturbing you."

That slight eyebrow raise, the first of millions I'd see over the next 25 years. "Well you are actually."

And then there was the last time I saw him, holding his hand by his bedside and trying to sync to his rhythm as he drifted in and out of conversation. I was set to fly the next day across Europe with my unreasonably large 15-month-old Sasha

and he couldn't help himself. "Bring a parachute," he said with one eye open. "In case they kick you off."

I spent last Thursday afternoon calling everyone who needed to know from a hotel carpark in Vilnius. When you reach 92 and you've never raised your voice and your currency in life has been humour and kindness, a very large flag must be lowered for all to stand near.

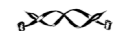
Salutes have come in from falconers across the world, all of whom fondly recall meeting that broad grin and tireless devotion to naughtiness.

And now this man of countless stories, one seemingly for every situation life could throw at you, becomes one himself. A beloved legend who will be recounted forever for the impact he quietly had on so many of us.

So tell his stories today and continue to do so. Tell whoever will listen or write them down if you prefer.

Share who and what he was and get across how privileged we all were to live in the time of that rare sparkle from Kilmacud that left us with flight and honey and brightness in our lives.

And whatever you do, tell it with a bellylaugh, and a twinkle in your eye.



Rowland Eustace: A Man for All Seasons

– Liam O Broin

On sitting down to pen something on Rowland, and having read Hilary Whites's outline on the thrust of what might be best, the task became a little easier. That's almost like saying that to write about Rowland is very difficult – but rather the dilemma is, or rather was, what to write on the *which* of Rowland.

And here is the nub of it. Rowland was a multifaceted personality and I have no doubt, but when the other people who will pen some words are finished their pieces, this variety, this spectrum of colourful aspects to the man, will become very apparent. No two will be the same and each of us will have an individual image and memories of the man.

From my personal viewpoint, probably the dominant aspect of Rowland's personality in his relationship with the IHC down the years was his availability – his open-door attitude to so many young, and indeed not-so-young, would-be falconers who needed help and/or encouragement.

The Eustace household was always open to callers and everyone was sure of an indulged welcome from the entire family, and especially from Rowland's elegant and gentle wife Gertrude. Essentially it was this open-house aspect to Rowland – his availability and eagerness to hand on advice and experience to whoever, and whenever – that is the predominant memory in my mind. And it must be said in his favour also: it never had a price. Rowland was free in his giving and he was in some respects unusual in that, as he never sought any reward in kind or favour, in return for a word of advice.

A very difficult man to quantify – chiefly because of his multifaceted personality. A touch of humour here, an anecdote retold there with a lesson built in, and there was also always his sense of loyalty to the IHC and particularly what it stood for. There are many grown men and women in the here-and-now who grew up almost on a daily basis as young falconers around the Eustace household who will always hold him dear to their hearts. And I personally feel very privileged to have known him and worked with him for so many years.

Rowland – not just one man, but the sum of his parts.



Tribute to Rowland

– Paul Donohue

Beekeeping, like falconry, has its rich traditions, and it was with a heavy heart that I made my way down the garden recently to 'tell the bees' of Rowland's passing. The ancestors of these same colonies came from Rowland as a wedding present many years before. And gifts were something that Rowland gave in abundance to so many over his lifetime.

Reading through the many tributes to Rowland, a common story emerged: 'He was a true gentleman – he gave me my first kestrel.' And so it was with me also. I can still remember the excitement when as a teenager I carefully opened a box collected off the train in Carlow to see a young kestrel look at me with beak open, a set of pristine jesses attached to its tiny yellow legs.

Gifts of knowledge were also dispensed with equal generosity. I recall starting to train that young kestrel with *A Manual of Falconry* by M. H. Woodford as my reference. Progress was not going as per the book, unfortunately. I rang Rowland in bewilderment: "This kestrel is acting like a goshawk – on his back, hissing and feet flailing at me when I approach him. So much for the suggestion that the kestrel is the ideal beginner's bird!"

"What are you feeding him?" he asked. To which I replied, "The finest pigeon breast."

"There's your problem," said Rowland. "It's too rich." And so within a few days its personality changed and I was back on track again.

I remember the first IHC fieldmeet held in Robertstown in the 1970s, which consisted of over 20 enthusiastic members following Rowland across the fields. He was hunting his eagle owl at rabbits. He was the only one flying a bird at that meet, in fact. It was to be the first of many fieldmeets that I would fondly remember, with Rowland being an important and integral part.

The IHC's development and progress over the years was not without its ups and downs. Falconry by its nature can attract some very colourful characters, all of whom have their own passion and vision of how the club should develop. Many came and went, but Rowland's calm voice of reason and experience gave a great sense of continuity and stability to the IHC committee in its many guises in the early years.





Rowland's business background was used to the club's advantage too. I remember raised eyebrows from the tweed-clad members of the committee when Rowland suggested we put out 'begging bowls' at the early game fairs in Adare Manor and Slane, asking for donations for our captive breeding fund. It was reluctantly agreed to, and at the next committee meeting those same eyebrows were raised even higher when Rowland disclosed the generous amount that had been collected! These funds were used to supplement the Ronald Stevens Breeding Fund which Rowland administered during its entire existence, and which assisted so many members in getting started with their own captive-breeding programmes.

And so, as I make my way back up the apiary, I reflect on all the good times we had together: flying sparrowhawks and merlins in Dublin suburbs and heather-covered hills; the endless cups of tea with 'that man' and his wonderful family in St Kevin's Park; the many people he introduced me to who have become lifelong friends; the humorous conversations we had in the hospital up to a week before he passed away; and being introduced to the doctor on the ward as "a very dear friend of mine."

I will miss his hilarious Christmas cards which he created on his old computer. His image of a smiling Rowland beside a zimmer frame with a padded top which had a goshawk in full yarak glaring at you, is etched on my brain forever.

Rowland may not be with us anymore, but thanks to the trojan work done by the Irish Hawking Club recently, falconry is

now on the National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage. This was enacted just before his death. So now I am sure that he can rest in peace, in the reassuring knowledge that the tradition of this noble sport will never be lost. And the passion and love of falconry that he bestowed on so many of us will continue to be gifted to future generations.



Rowland – Tommy Byrne

I saw a hat in a shop today, a green waxed cotton hat with a narrow brim. I asked the lady at the counter what the hat was called. She scanned it and came back and said it was a "Waxed Bush Hat," but it wasn't. It was a Rowland Eustace hat.

Rowland Eustace was a gentleman. He was a gentle man.

I don't know exactly when I first met Rowland, but I do know it was more than thirty years ago, when I was in my early twenties. Rowland lived in Stillorgan in South Dublin and I grew up in Dalkey, not too far away. When I was a kid, I read every book that might mention hawks, hawking or anything to do with falconry and when a kid has a passion like I had, it was inevitable that I would meet the man that lived the life that, if I thought about it, was the type of life that I would have chosen.

The first time I entered his house I was greeted by Rowland and his wife Gertrude

At Robertstown fieldmeet, 1979, with 'Goldie', flying at 4.5 lb

and straight away the kettle was switched on and tea was offered. I like tea and it is always manners to accept, but then he reached for the handle of the back door and opened it with an offer of, "Would you like to see the birds?" That was when my day was made.

My garden at the time was home to racing pigeons, powerful birds, some of which had raced not just from England and Wales but had won races from Paris. The other side of my back garden was home to a variety of finches and canaries which filled our days with colour and song. But Rowland's garden was home to the birds that filled my dreams. He showed me his sparrowhawks and his breeding kestrels.

"Put your eye there and peep through that hole," he offered, as a taloned little foot came through the hole to grab me and I came within millimetres of losing an eye. I jumped back to save myself and discovered Rowland chuckling behind me. "He always does that," he said.

"Look in the next pen," he said, indicating the next breeding chamber. I was cautious in case something bigger was ready to pounce and drag me in – then I would never have that tea. But I was too curious, and peeped in through the spyhole and what I saw melted my heart. There, standing on a branch-type perch was a little jack merlin, plucking away at what remained of a pigeon wing and, as I watched, the slightly bigger female made herself visible and accepted some pigeon meat from the male. I was in awe. Here, only feet away from me were the birds that I had spent many hours in the Wicklow hills hoping to see. I had cycled many times from Dublin to Wicklow, walked many hills and had only ever caught a fleeting glimpse of this little falcon in the wild. But here in Rowland Eustace's small back garden, peeping through a tiny spyhole, I could see them in all their stunning beauty.

We did have that tea, the first of many, and we talked for hours about falcons, hawks and falconry. He told me tales of his adventures with the birds, stories about slipping a sparrowhawk from the fist and never knowing what would happen next. How a simple flight at a magpie or starling might end up with a woman chasing him and his "stupid bird" out of her garden before she called the police.

Rowland never seemed to move at high speed, though. He was always too busy telling someone a funny story. On Hawking Club fieldmeets he was always chatting away, the day's memory always brighter

with the fact that he was there. For every flight from a hawk, there was a story from Rowland to go with it, for every slip an anecdote. When the barley was cut and stubble was walked in the hopes of getting a flight with your sparrowhawk, bushes were beaten and just now and again an almighty roar would resound as a hawk would be successful. Usually a stone at the edge of the field would be used as a seat to allow you to sit and feed up your hawk, and it was then, as you looked back at the crowd of beaters and falconers chatting, that you would notice Rowland, obviously regaling the party with yet another one of his tales. People leaned in to listen to him as dogs sat at heel and waited, the sparrowhawk plucking away on your gloved hand. All would be quiet until Rowland, with one finger, would tip back his hat to finish his story and the crowd would erupt into laughter, with backslapping and dogs jumping, and the hunt would continue.

Those were truly halcyon days, only there because of the companionship of friends.

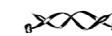
As years pass, time would move on and clouds would continue to roll over horizons. Friends would come and go, and life would fill with whatever it is that is important at that time. But then Rowland would appear, a smile, an extra strong handshake, with both his hands holding yours so you couldn't let go, as he had yet another anecdote to tell, and of course a gift of home-produced honey.

He came to see me earlier this year. He visited me in the centre that I had built to house my collection of birds of prey. His daughter and her family brought him for a day out and Rowland's grandchildren listened as he showed them the kestrels and merlins. The sun shone that day and I watched him as he walked around looking at all the different species, as he told stories to his family about the different owls and falcons he had kept and the mischief he had got up to.

And of course, we laughed.

We said goodbye to Rowland on a warm day in August. Falcons, hawks and owls lined the way as the coffin came past. The sun shone and old friends reminisced old times. A wild female sparrowhawk came overhead, circling and floating on the breeze, ringing higher and higher until she was lost to our sight.

Rowland Eustace, the gentle man, the falconer and friend, would have tipped his hat to her and wished her Godspeed.



Rowland – David Williams

It is almost 45 years ago that I first met Rowland. I had gone to stay with Eamonn McCabe at The Falconry in Robertstown and it was there that I was introduced to Rowland. First impressions were of graciousness, of humour and of being interested in what others were doing, and a gentle guiding hand. For those of us of a certain age Rowland was very much our mentor. In those days we were lucky to get a licence to take a kestrel and Rowland's talk of sparrowhawks, merlins and peregrines and owls was for me, a complete beginner, spellbinding. Other talk would be of his journeys around Ireland, of bees and dried hellebore and all manner of trading, including the mousetraps which we heard about at his funeral.

Early memories of Rowland are from the days of the drafting of the Wildlife Act, when discussions were being held with the Department concerning licences. Several IHC members were present to state the case for licensing and my memory is of a reluctance on behalf of the Department, with a somewhat overenthusiastic countering coming from a club member or two, no names being mentioned! However, ever the diplomat, Rowland would calm things down, a skill later to be used at the British Falconers' Club anniversary in Woodhall Spa. These talks were formative in the drafting of the Wildlife Act which resulted in licensing. It is fair to say that without Rowland this would have been a lot trickier. Importations were another day's work, with even movement across the border being a bit of an unknown quantity.

However, judging by a photo which I have of Rowland with me and a young cousin of mine, taken around 40 years ago, things appear to have been partially resolved at that stage as it shows a sparrow, a redtail and an eagle owl (or had the latter two come in under the radar, as it wasn't until later that importation procedures were formalised?). None of these were hooded, yet all seem relaxed in each other's company. It must have been the influence of Rowland's ever-present smile seen in the photo.

"Would you like to go to Woodhall Spa?" the voice on the phone said, "for the 50th anniversary of the British Falconers' Club?"

Well how do you refuse an invitation like that? So, towing a caravan, Rowland, Eamonn McCabe and I headed off on the ferry across the sea. The long drive across England to East Anglia was not without

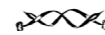


incident, as we got lost in the dark. Finally reaching the hotel, it was not until the police arrived in looking for the owner of the car with the Republic of Ireland licence plate that we understood why it was not a good idea to get lost in East Anglia at night, especially with a Republic of Ireland registered car, in the 1970s. Unknown to us, we had skirted the RAF base where the Vulcan nuclear bomber was based! Not a good idea. However Rowland's charm came to the rescue and rather than being carted off, the police wished us a pleasant stay. There is another memory of that trip which illustrated Rowland's gallantry, but perhaps that is more suitable for another occasion!

The large turnout at his funeral speaks of the esteem in which he was held, not least by his falconry companions. I have seen Ronald Stevens referred to as the Godfather of European falconry. For many of us Rowland will be remembered as the Gentleman Grandfather of Irish Falconry.

We will all have individual stories to tell, but I doubt if any will sum him up as well as the poem written by his grandson Chris Aherne. It is called *That Man* on account of his beloved Gertrude looking out the kitchen window and saying, "Would you look at what that man has done now!"

We will remember that man, and count ourselves fortunate to have known him.



That Man

Remember that man?

Remember marvelling at the wonders of steam-engine Meccano
and home-made incubators,
In the study that doubled as a honey-packing plant.
Remember feeding tiny maws with the help of a small set of tweezers,
And the horror of discovering day-old chicks where the yoghurt should be.

Remember the magical odours of wet dog and over-excited kestrel
from a yellow old jalopy,
The Hillman whose wheels spun the tracks of endless adventures.
Remember a snaggletooth smile, under a feathered hat with a sly wink,
As you are told: "the best time to eat the Christmas pudding is before it's cooked!"

That Man! You won't believe what he's done now!
He's gone and taped the I don't know what, to the God only knows where...
And now he's recreating scenes from the Ark in the backyard!
Amassing an army of furry gold-and-black troopers,
just to guard the spread for his toast.

That Man!

Now that he's gone, our lives will be quieter and we will miss him so,
Remember that man.

Christopher Aherne

Recollections of Rowland – Eoghan Ryan

After a childhood awareness of falconry and then several years reading up on it while living in the US (and meeting a few falconers along the way), I finally got my first hawk back in Ireland in 1997 – a wild-take sparrowhawk taken under licence. I trained the bird myself following Liam O Broin’s book and entered the bird on its first free flight in enclosed scrubland in Portmarnock under the guidance of John Curley – thanks to an introduction from Liam McGarry. As I was living on the Southside of the city, and John on the Northside, it wasn’t a convenient mentoring relationship and a lot of my falconry was practised solo. But then I met Rowland.

It was, from recollection, towards the end of that first season or perhaps into the second, that I somehow got introduced to Rowland or was pointed in his direction. I was living in Windy Arbour and he in Kilmacud, so he was living relatively close to me. From the very beginning he was encouraging, supportive and welcoming. I recall the welcoming smile on his face, that almost consistent welcoming smile that he always had on all my visits and encounters with him over the past 22 years.

I wandered through his house – a bit of an Aladdin’s cave, it always appeared jam packed with stuff – and out the back door, into what appeared to be a relatively small garden framed by some sheds or mews at the opposite end. It was like no other garden in the city, and as I entered the ‘shed’ I found myself walking into an enclosed maze that hid a network of daylight seclusion pens for various projects he had down through the years – breeding kestrels, sparrowhawks and merlins. *This complex is bigger than the garden!* I recall thinking.

From memory, he had a sparrowhawk and three kestrels at that time, a breeding pair and a single female that was used to incubate the eggs from other breeding projects. Of course, he always had some bantam hens as well, and these would free-range his neat and ornate garden among the water pond and an array of bird feeders, and provide his tethered hawk with visual entertainment.

On one of the first visits to him before we went hawking together, I recall both our hawks tethered on their respective bow-



perches and my hawk frantically bating at every sparrow that came into or crossed over the garden, while Rowland’s bird sat with impeccable manners, feather perfect, relaxed on one foot, staying perfectly calm and patient. Rowland explained how the previous day, the hawk had bided his time and when the sparrows were calm and settled, within leash length, he darted and snatched one from his perch while still tethered!

It was an interesting place, enriched by Rowland’s stories, humour, observations and other activities. I recall him stopping one day as we walked down the enclosed passageway to an aviary at the end. He pointed to a large cobweb tucked in between two boards, and tapped the edge of it ever so gently as he told me in his soft voice to watch for the female to emerge to see what she had caught in her web, and explained how she would kill the male after mating – ‘a side order of entomology,’ as Hilary described it at Rowland’s funeral.

It was on these visits to Rowland’s house that I got to know and meet other young falconers – at least they were at the time! – the likes of Hilary, Darry Reid, Edward Mulligan and others. We hunted on lands up around Leopardstown Racecourse and on lands that would eventually be paved over by the M50 motorway and the sprawling Southside suburbs, lands that at the time held pheasant, woodcock and rabbits.

On one of my very first outings, I recall being a bit nervous and cautious, thinking that my hawk might be a bit on the high side, and I had no telemetry at the time (they were an expensive luxury for the beginner).

Rowland said, “Don’t ever feel pressurised to fly your hawk; you know

your hawk best and there is no need to risk losing it.” He was a calm and thoughtful mentor. Through Rowland’s guidance and leadership we learned the art of the sparviter – how to position beaters along the hedgerows and position the austringer with unleashed spar at the gap or gateway. I recall beating for Rowland one day, and had stepped out from the ditch to beckon the LBJs (Little Brown Jobs) back in towards the

hedge, when I sadly and inadvertently killed a sparrow that collided with my waving stick.

“Just as well it wasn’t my hawk,” cried Rowland!

After some years engaged with falconry, I discovered that quite a few falconers, including Rowland, were beekeepers too and it stirred an interest within me. Rowland supported me in this too and was



.....
Blarney, 1985

full of advice and encouragement and I recall some trips up to St Columba's College in the foothills of the Dublin Mountains, assisting him moving hives, providing feed for winter or extracting supers full of honey. Years later when he was down to just one bird, he brought me down to the very end daylight seclusion pen in his back garden, and there in the centre was a beehive with two or three supers on top, the bees arriving and descending through the netting and completely out of sight of the neighbours!

Drinking tea at his house or chatting at fieldmeets, he would recall events and highlights of his falconry days. I recall him telling me how he lost a European eagle owl in heavy cover that led on to the back of the British Embassy. He heard the bells from the trees and decided to climb up and, I think, over the wall. It was around the time of the Troubles in Northern Ireland and he suddenly found himself looking down the barrel of a firearm as security forces came to see who this intruder was!

On another occasion, he headed off on a family holiday in a caravan with Gertrude and the eight children. It was agreed there would be no animals on the holiday. But when they arrived at their destination Gertrude opened a closet to find two bright orange eyes staring her in the face! The European eagle owl was brought along by 'that man'!

In all the years I knew Rowland I don't think I ever heard him say a bad word or negative thing about anyone. He always had a light-hearted manner, humorous, with a twinkle in his eye. He was very supportive of the club and when I served on the committee through some rough times, it was the words and support from respected people like Rowland that helped the committee members persevere. I know he took great pleasure in seeing the club maintained and then develop and indeed flourish in recent years.

I recall Rowland arriving up to a fieldmeet I had organised up at Kiltel one winter's day about ten years ago. He sat in the car for a while at a vantage point overlooking proceedings. His legs couldn't manage the walking over the rough ground. He spent a bit of time down the road at some gatepost viewing proceedings. He wasn't properly able to observe the flights, but he knew from shouts of excitement what was going on, and from messages being relayed back from the field and in his own way was engaging in the fieldmeet. I headed back to look after him and knowing that he wasn't able to see much else as

the hunting party drifted down the fields, I took him back to the dry and warmth of the Kiltel Community Centre for the St Brigid's weekend festival of events, where there was tea, food and an arts and crafts display. I was going to head back out and told him I'd rejoin him later. I recall taking him into the community centre and



introducing him to one of the organisers, whom I'd arranged to look after him. Rowland eyed up this attractive middle-aged woman, and with that distinctive twinkle in his eye and unique charm said, "Oh, I see we are going to get on fabulously!" It was a wonderful ice-breaker and the lady warmed to him instantly. He told me that his family thought he was absolutely mad, coming out to the hills on that cold winter day (I think they thought it would be the death of him!), but it was clear that Rowland needed to be there, among his friends, fellow falconers, hawks and dogs, action and excitement, stories and yarns.

Probably around that same time or a little after, I got my second sparrowhawk. My kids were in baby seats and boosters and getting out to engage in falconry was becoming more challenging, but I had great fun car-hawking with the kids in the back. That particular spar would go to the ends of the earth to take down a magpie – that flicker of black and white set her heart pumping with excitement. Knowing how much Rowland loved spars, I took him out and we ventured past our old unrecognisable haunts and up to the foothills of the Dublin Mountains, driving along with hawk on fist. I recall we only got one slip, a magpie was caught, and Rowland was in his element.

About two years ago, I got a call from Rowland and he asked if I was intending going to the longwing fieldmeet in Monaghan. I said I was.

He then asked, "Is anyone sharing a room with you?"

I said, "No, not yet."

He then politely asked, "Would you mind sharing with a 90-year-old that loves to snore and has to get up to go to the toilet every few hours throughout the night?"

I said, "Of course, why not!" He wasn't any bother at all as it was always a pleasure to be in his company.

Last November, as his health was waning a bit, he posted a message on Facebook looking for a home for his two Welssummer bantam hens. Gertrude, his wife, had taken a bad fall; the weather was colder and his family were afraid that he might have a fall or catch a bad cold heading down each day to his aviaries, to feed and take care of these hens. I had space and had thought of keeping hens in the past, so I thought these two neat birds might be a good way to start and so I took him up on the offer.

"You are not going to feed them to the hawk now are you?" he asked. I reassured him I wouldn't. As spring came around,

Rowland said that I could keep the two birds but he mentioned that Hilary would take him on their annual trip to a poultry market in Kilcock in May. There Rowland bought four new chicks that were supposed to be smallish birds having been crossed with a silkie bantam. I brought my four boys along and they fell in love with some small Pekin hens. We took four, one for each of them: three hens and a cock – practical pets that would lay eggs! I spotted a nice Welssummer cock, and bought two bigger Black Rock hens. Thanks to Rowland I was now a poultry keeper. The Pekins were brilliant pets for the boys – neat compact birds that could be picked up easily. They lived in the house for the first week or so where it was warmer and until I built them their own portable hen run, so they got used to being handled and perched falcon-like on fists!

As his health faded about two months later, I received a call from Rowland in the hospital: "I'm wondering can you help me Eoghan?" he said.

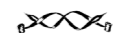
"Of course Rowland, what can I do for you?"

He explained that he was in St Vincent's hospital and would be going to St Luke's for a while and needed someone to look after the four 'hens' he bought at Kilcock. He also mentioned that one of the birds was a cock and his family members were in a frenzy because it was now crowing at the crack of dawn in the rear garden of the terraces and semi-detached gardens in Kilmacud, waking Gertrude and all the neighbours.

"You can wring the cock's neck," he said, "but the others should start laying soon."

I called around to the house, boxed up the birds and took them home. As the weeks went by, I realised that there wasn't just one cock in Rowland's flock, but actually all four were cocks! That's on top of the two I had. You can imagine the early morning symphony I've had over the past few months. Rowland, I think about you every day! What started with two hens last November ended with 13 members of my poultry clan – all thanks to Rowland.

Since the writing of this, I had a chat with my neighbour with manicured lawn, who didn't appreciate the finer quintessential sounds of traditional Irish country living, and he offered to kill the cocks from Kilcock. In the interests of maintaining a positive relationship with the neighbours, I've had a few hearty meals of *coq au vin* in Rowland's honour. May he rest in peace!



Rowland – Don Ryan

As a latecomer to falconry, I only got to know Rowland in his twilight years. His practising falconry career was over by the time I joined the club. His presence, however, was still an influential force that was both inspirational and invigorating. He had become a godfather figure. I won't say a father figure because a father can often be too imposing. Rowland was far from imposing. He was always delighted to chat and welcomed the opportunity to impart his wisdom, which he generously offered from a deep well of hindsight that was liberally seasoned with colourful humour.

Like everything in life, there are a variety of great folk involved. Some have no hesitation to let you know how great they are. Some just want to be left alone to get on with it. And then there are others that inspire and help others to be great. Rowland fell into the latter category. He encouraged the practice of falconry and sought to protect and promote it for the greater good. His passion for the sport was illuminating, and his pride in the club that he nurtured for many decades burned brightly, which in turn encouraged others to keep that flame alive.

There are so many current and past members that speak highly of Rowland with fond tales of how he helped begin their falconry apprenticeships. He also supplied many young apprentices with their first hawk to begin that journey. I didn't get my first hawk from Rowland but I learned a great deal from his quiet determination and resolve to stay the course. The easy road of walking away when things get difficult was not the road chosen by Rowland. We spoke often about the club and its history, where he reasoned that it is far better to fix things from within than from the outside. He was right, of course. If Rowland had chosen the easier path years ago, there would have been no Irish Hawking Club for me to join.

I last seen Rowland two weeks before he passed away, when myself and Martin Brereton visited him in St Vincent's. He was frail but his spirit was buoyant. Even then, he displayed concern for the club when he urged us to not let it fall into decline.

Rowland has been described by all that knew him as 'a true gentleman', which is exactly what he was. He was one of life's gentle souls that make the world a brighter and more hopeful place by the sheer thought of knowing that there are good and honest people like Rowland in it.

Sadly, he has left now, and his passing will be felt by many – and especially the gentle souls and creatures he leaves behind.

His passing moved me to write a few verses. I hope he'd approve.

A Falconer's Lament

High in the hills, a merlin stirs
On a stone by the chuckling brook,
And kestrels cry in a cold sky
Above the world where sorrow struck.

The hawk stares from a lonely wood
Over meadows turned grim and grey,
And little brown birds will not sing,
For they know you have flown away.

Don Ryan



Rowland Eustace: a true friend, mentor, teacher and all-round good guy – Eddie Mulligan

I first met Rowland in the early 80s. I had attended an Irish Hawking Club AGM in Portmarnock and was introduced to Rowland, who took time to talk to a hawk-mad teenager and his parents.

The following Saturday my dad and myself found our way to St Kevin's Park and knocked on the door like so many before us and after as well. We were welcomed in by Rowland and Gertrude and introduced to the variety of birds: a beautiful snowy owl, a pair of barred owls, pairs of kestrels and merlins, his hunting spar and of course Kim, his springer spaniel.

Little was I to know from that first visit what a wonderful friendship lay ahead, that spanned about 35 years.

Back in those days, before everything could be bought online so readily, equipment had to be made and it was Rowland's view – and one I would share – that if you can't make the basics yourself, you shouldn't have a bird in the first place. Over the years I had the pleasure of helping jess many kestrels, merlins and even a few sparrowhawks that he had bred, before they went to their new owners to be flown.

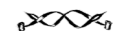
I spent so many weekend mornings practising urban falconry with Rowland, flying spars at magpie in the local industrial estate, allotments and racecourse – before it got overly developed – often in the company of Hilary White. We also spent a lot of September, October and November afternoons on the Featherbed Mountain and Liffey Bog flying merlins that he had bred, and enjoying mother nature around us. On one such occasion under Kippure mast we watched a wild kestrel hover, a wild merlin hunting and a wild peregrine all within a half mile of us at the same time – a memory that I will never forget, all three of Ireland's falcons together at the one time. His contributions to the Irish Hawking Club over decades was enormous, and I'm sure others will give a better account of this, but I do think that on one occasion the club would not have survived had he and a few others not intervened by inviting the members to a meeting in Slane. It had a huge turnout, and it seemed after this that the club got a fresh start. I fully believe that had he not done so, the club might not have

survived. But after this the club grew to be a stronger club.

But throughout our friendship I was taught so much more than falconry, suddenly being stopped and all the different insects, spiders and butterflies being pointed out; which bush the robin was nesting in in the garden; or the blackbirds are back again in the bird box in the cotoneaster.

He was a man who was always willing to help anyone that asked for his help and guidance, who was very generous with his time and patience.

With his passing we have lost a true friend, who left Irish falconry in a much better place than when he started out, and wherever he is now I know one thing: the magpies better watch out.



Time with Rowland – Darryl Reed

I first met Rowland in 1996, when I was 12 years old. When I think of it now it was just a little twist of fate that led me into falconry. A miserable, dysfunctional childhood had led to me living with my grandmother for a time. I was absolutely nature mad, and kept a menagerie of small animals. I read and watched anything animal or bird related, and was particularly keen on nature documentaries depicting predators hunting.

One evening, my grandmother paused from reading the paper, took out a page and handed it to me saying, "I think you'd be interested in this." I still remember the title of the article, as it was stuck in my scrapbook for many years after: *The Lure of the Falcon*. It described the art of falconry. I was fascinated, and said to her that I really wanted to learn falconry. So duly she contacted the IHC and phoned Rowland, who said she could bring me round to meet him. We arrived on the appointed day and time at a very unassuming suburban house. Rowland answered the door, with a kind welcoming manner and softly spoken voice. We were shown into what some families might call the 'good room' or 'parlour', a room for hosting visitors, adorned with many falconry-related paintings, ornaments, books and photo albums. Tea was served on a tray with china teacups and slices of cake. What ensued was something akin to a job interview. Rowland fixed me with a serious gaze and asked me a series of questions.



teaching of classical methods of falconry, with an emphasis on finesse and safety in handling the hawks. He was never angry if I made a mistake, instead kind and patient, with the wisdom to know that most people are their own worst critics, and will learn from and not repeat mistakes.

Having completed the designated tasks, learning to handle his haggard spar was my reward. I was shown how to hold her and told to sit still and man her, until she'd feed on my fist. Once she was used to me, it was off for some car-hawking around the locality. He'd drive, a rambling ambush of 20 mph; I'd slip her out the passenger window. Such was my introduction to falconry, the wild-eyed banshee out the window after a magpie, a couple of quick turns, and onto the ground with it quicker than I could blink! On other days we'd walk and I'd be set to work as a beater. Rowland's number one disciple, Hilary, had come a few years before me and was by then also flying a spar, and some days we would all go out together. Days concluded in Rowland's with tea and biscuits in the little kitchen.

After a year in his wake, I started with my first hawk, a male kestrel Rowland bred. Rowland spent several days at my house, helping me build my mews and teaching me some woodworking skills, which enabled me to later improve and extend the mews myself. Oh, the excitement of that first day I got the hawk, when I was sent in to catch him, and we jessed him up. Then, when I was all set with glove and food, Rowland whipped the towel off the hawk and beat a hasty retreat, leaving me sat in his workshop with just a crack of light, to sit still and practise the little tricks that persuade a fresh hawk to eat. Rowland had tipped the balance in my favour by giving small rations the day previous. The big fearful black eyes fixed on me, the panting gape as the hawk recoiled at its newfound situation. I watched from the edge of my field of vision, the hawk eventually becoming accustomed to my profile and taking an interest in the slightly moving food I'd squeeze beneath his feet. Then him daring to look down, and fear giving way to hunger.

Three quarters of an hour later, Rowland peered around the door and I gave tiny nod and a little smile. Satisfied that the hawk would eat in my care, we were packed off home. I furthered his training each day. Progress was guided during continued visits where Rowland would give advice and generally nudge me to crack on and not hold the hawk back. Soon he was chasing the

lure, and before I knew it, flying free. I can still picture Rowland's beaming proud smile that day. Such a gift he'd given me, teaching me to fly a hawk, and I flew him every day that weather allowed, and falconry became my escape and salvation.

Days on the Featherbeds with some others flying kestrels and merlins followed that season, and fieldmeets up and down the country. Rowland always encouraged me to attend and gladly took me along with him in the years before I drove. I hadn't two pennies in the first couple of years, until I left school early to get a job. But Rowland was very generous, and was always giving me bits of falconry equipment I needed.

I dabbled in sparrowhawking in the coming years, but despite Rowland's best efforts to instil the spar love in me, my interests lay elsewhere. By that time I also kept working lurchers and ferrets, and all I wanted to hunt for many years was rabbits, so I forfeited my spar to fly a Harris' hawk, much to Rowland's disappointment, as he wasn't a fan of Harris' hawks. A few years later I turned to flying falcons at corvids. I saw less of Rowland during those years but still met him at fieldmeets and AGMs, and visited occasionally. Then circumstances in my life during my early twenties led me to give up falconry, at which point we lost touch.

During my first few years in falconry, such was its importance in my life that my mood was driven by how well the hawk was flying. If things didn't go well, it felt like the end of the world. I remember Rowland saying to me one day, "You know, there's more to life than falconry." I looked at him like he'd ten heads, firstly because I certainly didn't feel that way, and secondly, I couldn't believe the great Rowland Eustace would say such a thing! But yes, in my years away from falconry, I've experienced so much. I left the veterinary nurse assistant job I'd had since I was 16, went back to education and earned a place in Trinity College where I graduated with an Honours BSc in Midwifery. I had three children, then finally got round to topping it all off with getting married. I've a great life/work balance since I qualified, and felt space opening up in my life to return to my old interests.

In 2017, some 13 years after I gave up falconry, I rejoined the IHC. This was partly due to my then nine-year-old son Tyler, also nature- and bird-of-prey mad. One day in response to him chattering on about peregrine falcons, I told him I'd been a falconer before he was born, and

"So you want to learn falconry?"

"Yes."

"And you realise that involves birds of prey killing other birds and animals?"

"Yes," says I, thrilled at the thought of witnessing such a spectacle.

"And you don't mind cutting up the birds for them to eat?"

"No, that's fine."

Having met the criteria, I was told I could come over once or twice a week and that he would teach me.

The view from Rowland's back door gave away nothing of the extensive mews built there. A little path led down to a mesh door, passing a tiny lawn where his spar weathered, and a tiny pond. On passing through the mesh door, straight in front was the door to the weighing room/food prep room/workshop, and to the right was a

door leading to a winding corridor, covered on top, off which led a series of doors, hatches and peepholes leading into breeding chambers, and a couple of pens for hunting or rehab hawks. I think the mews extended so far back that he had annexed part of the disused lane behind his house!

Most visits started with being set to work, which varied greatly as the seasons changed. Cleaning breeding pens, putting quail through the hand mincer to feed to newly hatched chicks, packing fresh day-old chicks for the freezer, packing honey from his hives, feeding and ringing the young kestrels, merlins and spars, feeding the adult hawks. Rowland had initially sent me off with a copy of Phillip Glasier's book *Falconry and Hawking*, which I read and reread and I stopped just short of actually eating. This book echoed Rowland's



took out some old photos. I'd gone from mama to near celebrity status in the space of a few minutes. I looked at the pictures, and turned my mind to the wild thrill of hawks, dogs and hunting, for which there had been no space in my mind for years due to parenting, study and work. Tyler started asking could he learn falconry, and I thought, *Well yes, if I start flying hawks again.* It felt like things were starting to come full circle. I thought of Rowland, and wondered how he was. Calculations of ages and years whizzed through my mind, and I was afraid to know. I renewed my membership online, found the Facebook members' group and, lo and behold, the first post I saw was a Happy Birthday post to Rowland, who I could see was still actively involved in the club, and even active on Facebook!

Rowland was delighted to hear from me, and it wasn't long before I found myself back in his unchanged good front room with tea and biscuits on a tray. I'm really grateful that I came back to falconry in time to get back in touch with Rowland again and have those catch-up chats, and look through photos and his new favourite falconry books. It especially pleased Rowland to hear that my son is an aspiring falconer, to see

photos of us attending fieldmeets and know that I plan to fly a hawk again once my youngest starts preschool.

When I heard news of Rowland's passing, my heart ached. I attended his funeral, and seeing the falconers and hawks lined up for his guard of honour was very moving. The plaintive cry of Neal's imprint gos was the only sound to be heard. Hilary's eulogy brought laughter and tears and captured perfectly the feelings of so many falconers present. I was struck by how, in a way, it was the least sad funeral I'd ever been at. Although I was crying, I thought, *What more could anyone want, or hope for? To live a long, rich life, to have a strong family, so many friends, to be extremely successful and a recognised master at one's passions in life, and to die a good death.*

Rowland lived to see falconry inscribed as Irish Intangible Cultural Heritage, and to see younger generations coming through to carry the torch. He was a legend in his own lifetime, and can rest in peace, assured that he'll never be forgotten.



Rowland and Darry



Alec Finn 1944 – 2018

Richard Ward, Co. Galway

“It does not need a naturalist or an artist to appreciate the beauty of wild birds, their free joyous spirit gives heart to everyone.”

I wrote these words as a forword to Ronald Stevens’ book, *A Life with Birds*. It seems fitting that I should use them as an introduction for this obituary of my dear friend Alec. Our shared love of birds, falconry in particular, was the start of a life-long friendship. At art college in Rotherham we discovered the music of Robert Johnson

and Lightning Hopkins and started playing blues sessions at local folk clubs. Along with the music we also went to game fairs and met people like Phillip Glasier and the wonderful bird artist David Reed Henry, whom Ronald Stevens commissioned to paint a set of stunning bird portraits for Fermoye Lodge.

Like many would-be falconers, Alec was flying a kestrel at that time, and I remember Barry Hines, the author of *A Kestrel for a Knave*, coming to visit us and being enthralled as Alec flew the bird to the lure on the open playing fields nearby.

Moving to Ireland, music and falconry all came together for Alec. Along with Johnny Morris and a few other like-minded people including myself, the Irish Hawking Club was founded. Johnny’s father, Lord Killanin, had a house and a gate lodge in Spiddal, Connemara, and the gate lodge was rented to Alec for a shilling a year. It was from there that Alec’s passion for falconry really flourished in the wild open environment.

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Below and opposite: Richard Ward with Alec Finn



.....
Right: A painting by Richard Ward for Alec Finn, which hangs in Oranmore Castle



Magpie-hawking with a cast of peregrines was a far cry from the early days of flying a kestrel in Rotherham.

Alec had many talents, as a painter, sculptor and musician, the latter being the one he will probably be most remembered for – De Dannan, of course.

In 1977 he married Leonie King and moved to Oranmore Castle. He carried on touring with De Dannan but he still retained his love of falconry, and took time out to meet up with fellow falconers, whether in Japan or America. At heart he was a real family man and when the band split up he was content to potter around the garden, and my last abiding memory of Alec was sitting out on a balmy summer’s evening celebrating his birthday with family and friends watching the swifts hawking above the castle as the sun went down on Galway Bay.



Tom J. Cade

1928 – 2019

Thomas J. Cade, PhD, ornithologist, conservationist and falconer, died 6 February 2019 in Boise, Idaho. Many club members will remember with fondness his visit to Ireland in November 2016 with his friend and colleague, Kent Carnie, when they both spoke at the Conference on the Stewardship of Biodiversity and Sustainable Use.

At our 2017 AGM, both Tom Cade and Kent Carnie were proposed - and received unanimous approval - for honorary membership of the IHC for their contributions to worldwide falconry and their support of our wild take programme.

Many thanks to Kent for providing the material for this tribute. It is an amalgamation of two obituaries: one written by Tom Cade's family, the other by the Peregrine Fund; many thanks to them both. It is followed by 'a falconer's appreciation' of Tom Cade's life, by Kent. The piece has appeared in British and German falconry journals, but has been adjusted here to reflect connections with our Irish club.

On a spring day in 1980, Dr Tom Cade climbed into a peregrine falcon nest box on top of a release tower in Brigantine National Wildlife Refuge in New Jersey. Just a couple of years earlier, Tom's team of biologists and falconers had bred, raised, and released the falcon pair that now raised their own family on this tower. These two birds were part of a nationwide recovery program for the species.

Peregrine falcon populations had declined drastically in the 1950s and 60s due to the widespread use of DDT - a pesticide that interfered with calcium metabolism and caused birds to lay very thin-shelled eggs that would crack during incubation. By 1970, peregrine falcons were extinct in the eastern United States and fewer than 40 pairs were estimated to remain in the west. Dr Cade, an ornithologist and lifelong falconer, was acutely aware of this decline and worked with others across the nation to ban the use of DDT and develop a recovery plan for our nation's fastest animal.

Tom marked one of the proudest moments of his career atop that tower in the spring of 1980. That's when he discovered three young nestlings - some of the first peregrine chicks produced in the wild in eastern North America since the 1950s. Looking back on the day, Tom recalled, "I then understood that recovery of the peregrine would be an accomplished fact in a few more years."

He was right. In August of 1999, Tom stood on stage with then-Secretary of the

Interior Bruce Babbitt to officially declare that the peregrine falcon was recovered in North America and had been removed from the Endangered Species List. To this day, it's considered among the greatest conservation success stories of all time - Tom would refer to it as an effort of "teamwork and tenacity."

Tom was born in San Angelo, Texas, to Ernest G. Cade and Ethel Bomar Cade. He spent his childhood in New Mexico and Texas before moving to California. As a teenager he became interested in birds and the sport of falconry, which became the driving forces in his life and career. He served in the US army at the end of WWII.

He received a BA from the University of Alaska, an MA and PhD from the University of California, Los Angeles, and was a National Science Foundation postdoctoral fellow at the University of California, Berkeley. Tom was a professor at Syracuse University, Cornell University, and Boise State University in Boise, ID.

While at Cornell University he also served as research director of the prestigious Laboratory of Ornithology. It was at Cornell that Tom developed the captive breeding and release program for the peregrine.

In saving the peregrine, Tom co-founded a non-profit conservation organization - the Peregrine Fund - to effectively manage the financial support being offered by the public. Of equal importance was the opportunity it provided for citizens to participate in the recovery effort, with thousands of enthusiastic volunteers serving stints as falcon hack site attendants.



Prof. Cade at the Conference on the Stewardship of Biodiversity and Sustainable Use, Moyvalley Hotel, November 2016

The organization grew to become much more than originally envisioned, and over the past five decades has worked with more than 100 species in 65 countries worldwide. Many species such as the Mauritius kestrel, northern aplomado falcon, several species of Asian vultures, the California condor and more, are thriving today because of work The Peregrine Fund and its many partners have undertaken.

After retiring from Cornell, Tom moved to Boise, where he was affiliated with Boise State University. He helped create The World Center for Birds of Prey in Boise as a facility to promote the study and conservation of all species of birds of prey. The WCBP remains an important tourist attraction in Boise, providing educational and viewing opportunities for the public. It is also home to the Archives of Falconry. Tom authored and coauthored many articles and books, including *The Falcons of the World* and *Return of the Peregrine*. He was the recipient of numerous conservation and falconry awards. Tom travelled the world, just like his beloved peregrine falcons. His research on falcons and other raptors took him from the arctic in Alaska, across the North American continent, Greenland, Europe and the deserts of the Middle East, to Southern Africa and Australia. Anywhere people loved and endeavored to conserve birds of prey, Tom Cade was there to share his experience and enthusiasm.

Dr Tom Cade passed away at the age of 91. He is survived by his wife Renetta, who

provided love, support, and companionship for all his adventures and misadventures involving falcons and other raptors. The presence of falcons in her living room and chickens thawing in the bathtub were common occurrences that never fazed Renetta. He is also survived by five children, eight grandchildren, and five great grandchildren. He will be missed by family, former students, colleagues, and fellow falconers around the world.

"The world of wildlife conservation has lost a pioneer and champion," said The Peregrine Fund's president and CEO, Dr Rick Watson. "Tom fought for peregrines and practical conservation solutions, and mentored generations of passionate individuals. His reach extended around the globe to inspire raptor research and conservation on virtually every continent and on behalf of hundreds of species... His advice, conviction, and gentle presence will be sorely missed."

IHC members fondly remember Tom, not only for his immeasurable contribution to raptor conservation, but also as a gentleman and as a renowned falconer. May he rest in peace, knowing that he will continue to inspire many generations of conservationists and falconers alike.

Tom Cade: A Falconer's Appreciation - Kent Carnie

With the passing of Tom Cade in February 2019, the IHC lost an honorary life member, American falconers lost a staunch supporter, and the world of conservation lost an iconic leader. While perhaps better known for his formation of The Peregrine Fund and its role in stemming the decline of the peregrine falcon, Tom's life-long devotion to our sport was reflected in his efforts to save our flagship species. With the results of the 1965 Madison peregrine conference confirming the dire straits facing the species, Tom gathered a group of like-minded falconer-biologists who, simply stated, refused to accept the extinction of a bird to which all had first been drawn as it stood on their fists. Their goal went beyond affirming birds with which to practice their sport. All recognized and were moved by the iconic place of the species in nature - nature that would be hollow without them.

In ensuring the peregrine's place in the

wild, those actions exemplified by Cade's efforts were significant in ensuring a future for American, and indeed world, falconry. Concurrent with that 1965 conservation conference was a sharpening criticism of falconry within the 'preservation' community. Peregrines were in decline, falconers took falcons from the wild, therefore falconers were a (the?) causative factor in that decline. The continued practice of falconry in North America hung by a thread as preservationists sought a scapegoat for the then-unrecognized, pesticide-caused decimation extending far beyond the peregrine. The seminal, proactive role of falconers, as exemplified by Peregrine Fund actions, slowly helped create a more positive appreciation in conservation circles for the sport's practitioners, no longer just users but 'do-ers', actively helping serve the best interests of the birds they utilized.

Through those tenuous days in the 1960s there were those who had enjoyed the sport but, with falconry under a cloud of suspicion, seemed to forget their earlier alliances. Not so Tom Cade! Clearly, and with no apology, Tom proclaimed his participation in and devotion to the sport and stood up for a better understanding of its attributes before our accusers. The place falconry now enjoys in North America

among both management officials and the general conservation community reflects the place earned for it by the efforts of Tom and his like. It was no coincidence that when the peregrine was to be removed from the official US Endangered Species List, the US Secretary of the Interior flew 2000 miles from the nation's capital to announce that removal in the Interpretative Center of The Peregrine Fund's World Center for Birds of Prey.

Going beyond the peregrine, the techniques developed by Tom and his associates opened new doors in what now has come to be known as 'conservation biology.' Not only have other precarious populations of raptors, exemplified by the Mauritius kestrel, aplomado falcon and even the California condor, been positively affected, but the concepts of captive breeding and reintroduction have been widely adopted in dealing with a variety of vertebrate species. Even if the falconry association in such efforts is obscured, falconers know and can take pride in what one of our number has given to the world of nature. Thank you Tom!



Older Than We Thought

Don Ryan, Dublin

For over 40 years, members of the Irish Hawking Club (the 1967 edition) were under the impression that a club bearing the same name was established in 1870. Apparently this information was discovered in a note found in a diary or book belonging to Lieutenant Colonel Emilius Charles Delme Radcliffe (1833-1907). Radcliffe was a falconer and member of the 88th Connaught Rangers. He also wrote a short book on falconry, entitled *Falconry: Notes on the Falconidae Used in India in Falconry*, first published in 1871. The information on the note came from John Morris, who in turn had heard it from a British falconer who had found the note.

The details of the note gave the information that many of us are all too familiar with. (In fact, some of us are sick of hearing it!) It mentioned the inaugural meeting at 212 Great Brunswick Street (now Pearse St) and that it was chaired by

.....
Emilius Charles
Delme Radcliffe



Lord Talbot de Malahide. There was also a mention that the Maharajah Duleep Singh donated £50 toward the club's foundation.

The discovery of this note was a watershed moment for members of the current club, as it gave us a pedigree. It confirmed there was an active community of falconers in Ireland in the 19th century. It gave us a sense of pride that we belonged to something older, something richer. It provided a status of trust that newly founded clubs simply don't have. And it was definitely something that needed to be promoted, which we did, and made the most of it. The club went on to include the date in official material: 'Established in 1870' started to appear on our history leaflets as well as club stationery. It also became amalgamated into a version of the club logo. Badges and banners were made with this ancient date engraved upon them. Of course we knew our own club wasn't that old. Technically, a club is required to be in continuous existence before it can make that claim, but this was not the time for pedantry. We were offered a gift horse, and who were we to look it in the mouth and say nay?!

As the 50th anniversary of the 1967 Irish Hawking Club came and went with great fanfare in 2017, with several fieldmeets and late evenings to mark the event, we looked forward to the 150th anniversary of our elder club in 2020. Being three times as old, we expected three times the celebration!

Just two years away from this momentous event, while salivating over the prospects of such a historic occasion, out of nowhere came another discovery. This one, however, was like a cold sobering Monday morning after a fantastic weekend. It completely deflated the enthusiastic plans of another anniversary celebration. Thanks to the new technology of word recognition that allows you to search for words in scanned newspapers, I was able to browse the *Irish Times* archives dating as far back as 1857. Out of curiosity, I put in 'Irish Hawking Club', and discovered a notification from Thursday 26 April 1862, that a meeting of the Irish Hawking Club was to be held two days later on Saturday 28 April 1862. The meeting was to be held at the same address

we are all familiar with from the original discovery, 212 Great Brunswick Street. This out-of-the-blue find meant the club was at least eight years older than 1870. When I searched deeper, using key words 'hawking' and 'falconry', I found further evidence confirming that an active Irish Hawking Club existed at least as far back as 1862. There was also mention of a gathering of falconers in the Phoenix Park in 1860, but no mention of any meeting held to establish a club.

Although there were elements from each discovery that had a similar ring – like the fact that the meetings were held at the same venue, which had to be more than coincidence – could we ever expect to find the exact date of that first meeting? It appeared highly likely that, for the foreseeable future at least, this date would remain lost in history. This revelation effectively debunked the notion that an Irish Hawking Club was established in 1870. It

Club House, 24th June, 1862.
IRISH HAWKING CLUB.
 A Meeting of the above Club will be held at No. 212 GREAT BRUNSWICK-STREET, on SATURDAY, the 28th Inst., at Three o'Clock.
 R. J. MONTGOMERY, Hon. Sec.
 Gentlemen interested in the furtherance of this ancient and interesting pastime are invited to attend.

was an inconvenient truth that meant any plans for a 150th anniversary event had to be put on hold.

Coincidentally, in 2017, a year before this discovery, I read an article in the journal of the British Falconers' Club that was reproduced from a 1942 article in *The Field*. It was entitled 'Hawking Clubs, Past, Present and Future' and was written by Robert Heberden Barber (1916-1944). Along with being a major in the British Army, Robert was also a falconer. His mother came from Co. Galway and the family spent many summer holidays there.

Irish Times find from June 1862



Robert Barber.
 Photo courtesy of Paul Beecroft, British Archives of Falconry

It was in Ireland in 1932 that he got his first hawk – a kestrel – at the age of 16, and it began his lifelong devotion to the sport. In his article discussing various hawking clubs, Robert Barber reported that “an Irish club was raised in the [18]60s.” When I read the article, I immediately thought *He's mistaken,*

AUGUST 21, 1860.
 IRISH HAWKING CLUB.
 A meeting of persons interested in the revival of this noble and ancient sport was held yesterday, in the rooms of the Dublin Natural History Society, 212, Great Brunswick-street, for the purpose of establishing a hawking club in Ireland. On the motion of Major Power, seconded by Dr. Leach, the chair was taken by
 LORD TALBOT DE MALAHIDE.
 Mr. Montgomery explained the meeting was only a preliminary one for the purpose of establishing a club for the revival of the sport. The immediate object was to appoint a secretary and committee to carry out the necessary arrangements, receive subscriptions and the names of members. His Highness Prince Duleep Singh had promised, if the society were established, to subscribe £50 towards the purchase of hawks. One of his falconers offered to supply the club with six hawks for £60. To establish the club it would require £120 towards the purchase and feeding of the hawks, and the subscription proposed for each member of the club was £2 a year. Already several gentlemen of position and distinction had given their names, and it was to be hoped, when the club was established, the number of members would be increased.
 The following committee was elected for the purpose of carrying out the necessary arrangements for the establishing of the club:—Lord Talbot de Malahide, the Earl of Howth, E. P. Casey, Esq., J. H. Loftie, Esq., C. O'Keefe, Esq., J. Leach, Esq., and R. J. Montgomery, Esq. were elected honorary secretary and treasurer. Some subscriptions were handed in, and the proceedings terminated.
 The meeting then separated.

A. Munch, concluded the ceremony, and the procession returned to the Palace amid the cheers of the people."
 THE IRISH HAWKING CLUB.
 A meeting for the purpose of establishing a hawking club in Dublin was held at one o'clock yesterday, at 212, Great Brunswick-street—Lord TALBOT DE MALAHIDE in the chair. Mr. R. J. Montgomery stated that the present meeting was of a preliminary nature, and had originated in an offer made by Prince Duleep Singh to Mr. Corballis, to give 50l. towards the establishment of a hawking club in this city. One of his highness's falconers had also offered to supply the club, if established, with six falcons for 60l. a year. All that they could do at present would be to nominate a working committee, and to appoint a secretary and a treasurer to receive subscriptions, on the understanding that if the effort to establish the club did not succeed the subscriptions would be returned. Including the sum promised by the Maharajah, it would require at least 120l. to establish a hawking club. The following noblemen and gentlemen were then appointed a committee:—The Earl of Howth, Lord Talbot de Malahide, J. P. Casey, J. H. Loftie, C. O'Keefe, J. Leach, and R. J. Montgomery. The last-named gentleman was nominated honorary secretary and treasurer. Some subscriptions were handed in, and the proceedings terminated.
 The Lord Chancellor has, on the recommenda-

partiality whatever.
 THE IRISH HAWKING CLUB.
 A meeting for the purpose of establishing a hawking club in Dublin was held at one o'clock on Monday, at 212, Great Brunswick-street—Lord Talbot de Malahide in the chair. Mr. R. J. Montgomery stated that the present meeting was of a preliminary nature, and had originated in an offer made by Prince Duleep Singh to Mr. Corballis, to give £50 towards the establishment of a hawking club in this city. One of his highness's falconers had also offered to supply the club, if established, with six falcons for £60 a year. All that they could do at present would be to nominate a working committee, and to appoint a secretary and a treasurer to receive subscriptions, on the understanding that if the effort to establish the club did not succeed the subscriptions would be returned. Including the sum promised by the Maharajah, it would require at least £120 to establish a hawking club. The following noblemen and gentlemen were then appointed a committee:—The Earl of Howth, Lord Talbot de Malahide, J. P. Casey, J. H. Loftie, C. O'Keefe, J. Leach, and R. J. Montgomery. The last-named gentleman was nominated honorary secretary and treasurer. Some subscriptions were handed in, and the proceedings terminated.

as he's out by a decade. An easy thing to do considering Robert wasn't born till nearly 50 years later, in 1916.

In a chance conversation on social media in June 2019, when I discussed this matter with Paul Beecroft from the British Archives of Falconry, Paul was able to provide evidence that perhaps Robert Barber knew more than I thought he did.

Paul very kindly sent me clippings from three different newspapers: the *Irish Times*, the *Evening Freeman* and the *Dublin Evening Mail*. All three carried the same report that a meeting had taken place to establish an Irish Hawking Club. All the articles confirmed the details from the first discovery in Radcliffe's diary/book, including the address at Great Brunswick Street, Lord Talbot de Malahide chairing the meeting, and the Maharajah Duleep Singh promising £50. The articles also gave more details on who was present.

The only difference was the date. The date on the three articles was explicit: the meeting took place at one p.m. on Monday 20 August, 1860. Why my search never picked this up when browsing through the *Irish Times* archives, I'll never know. There was clearly an error in the information from the first note claiming the 1870 date. Perhaps the note was smudged or creased and the date was incorrectly guessed. Who knows? But that's not important. What is important is that loose ends are tied up and the uncertainty of the date of our elder club's foundation is brought to a satisfactory conclusion.

This final revelation confirmed we missed our 150th anniversary, which would have been in 2010. However, every cloud has a silver lining, and we now have unquestionable proof that our elder club will be 160 years old in August 2020. If we had remained continuous since that date, we would be the oldest falconry club in the world. Now that's a good reason for a celebration, and we're certainly not going to let minor details stop us claiming that title anyway. With such a long history of falconry in Ireland, it's quite probable there were other Irish Hawking Clubs throughout the ages, but that's for other students to explore. We've enough to be getting on with in preparing for our 160th anniversary.



Archive: 1966

Henry Swain was an American who used to visit Ronald Stevens in Fermoy. Don Ryan sent this article from *The Cadge*, Vol. 4, No.1 (February 1966).

THE MERLIN

Henry T. Swain
(California)

I do not claim to be an expert on the merlin. My experiences are limited and I refer the reader to "The Art and Practice of Hawking" by E.B. Mitchell and other contemporaries, whose experiences lead them to speak with authority on the subject. Therefore, I shall endeavor to limit my comments to a jack and merlin falcon that were acquired in Eire (Ireland) during July 1965 while visiting that most noted falconer-author, and my very good friend, Ronald Stevens.

Thomas Spellman, Ronald's falconer and I took five almost fully feathered eyass merlin from an old abandoned crow's nest which was situated on an island in a lake about 12 miles from Fermoye Lodge, Ronald's home. Three jacks and two falcons comprised the lot.

Upon weighing the young merlins, we found that the jacks weighed almost seven ounces and the falcons almost eight ounces. It is my understanding that the Icelandic Merlin is

slightly larger. However, these merlins, (*Falco Columbarius Resalon*) were larger than species of our Eastern Merlin (*Falco Columbarius Columbarius*) that I have flown.

Both jack and merlin falcon readily distinguish themselves from our American Kestrel by the rapidity and power of their wing beats - which make the Kestrel appear rather sluggish by comparison. I have been quite amazed at the actual speed displayed by both sexes, but especially the female. She has left my fist in a dash at a mourning dove that put up in fright right before us, and while she could not actually close with the dove, neither could the dove rally sufficient speed to widen the gap between them. The merlin would finally break off the chase after a hundred yards or so. After a week of such unsuccessful flights, she discontinued her attempts to catch doves. The meadow lark appears to be a rather slow-flying bird. When frightened, however, it has the ability to fly with considerable speed. Both the jack and merlin falcon have the speed and power to overtake a meadow lark, flying upwind, within 100 yards - if the meadow lark has a 20 - 30 yard start. I have noticed, though that going downwind, the chase is much more difficult for the merlin. * The "lark" will usually be forced by the little hawk to drop into any suitable cover, and for a meadow lark, a six inch stubble is "suitable" enough to confuse the merlin, which will not follow into heavy brush as readily or effectively as an accipiter. The merlin shows a high degree of intelligence in its pursuit of quarry. My merlin falcon will at times, fly alongside a meadow lark to flank it and turn it away from heavy cover. She will then turn, increase her speed, and catch the hapless "lark". Our Horned Lark, a true classical ringing flight, formerly characterized in Europe and Great Britain with the skylark before that bird was put on the protection list.

As of this writing, the Horned Lark, which winters in Southern California had not arrived in sufficient numbers to enable me to fully exploit the merlin's natural abilities at

* This is completely in reverse when compared with the peregrine flying grouse, which it takes much more readily in an upwind stoop-or chase.

this quarry. In Europe, the merlin is very proficient at taking moulting larks; however, it takes a good merlin to beat a fully moulted lark. The female merlin is capable of taking small (9-12 ounce) pigeons which she kills by grasping its neck in the talons and strangling it. My merlin falcon has taken only two small young pigeons and these I released, unhandicapped for her to catch. This she did after hard rising chases of 100-200 yards, where both birds would reach heights of 200-300 feet. She would bind to the pigeon and both birds would come to earth. Though the pigeon would struggle intensively, throwing the 8 ounce merlin about badly, the merlin would never release her strangle hold until the pigeon was dead.

I can truthfully say that I have never flown any raptore that has given me as much pleasure and sport as the merlin despite the fact that I am extremely partial to races of the peregrine.

In training the eyass merlin, I used a padded lure just heavy enough to discourage both merlins from carrying. Merlins seem to have an instinctive urge to carry, and I wanted to curb this desire as early as possible. As the merlin will not wait-on, I stooped both jack and falcon to the lure daily during the first two weeks of flying them free. They do this beautifully and seem to get an exhilarating joy out of the exercise. As I didn't want the merlins to become so fond of the lure that they would ignore game, I discontinued the daily stooping to the lure as soon as the little "hawks" became proficient at it. Thereafter, I only use the lure to attract the attention of the merlin after it has made an unsuccessful flight and has perched a great distance from me. The merlins have no hesitation in returning as soon as the lure is swung and regardless of how far away from me that they may be. The falcon has appeared as only a dot in my 12 X 50 binoculars, yet she will respond immediately.

The characteristic flying style is a low darting flight only several feet above the ground with an almost vertical throw up to perch.

If the terrain were similar, I believe that the female merlin could be as successful at taking quail as the peregrine is at taking grouse. The basic manner of flight would be different, with the peregrine executing its kill from the classical stoop, while the merlin would fly the quarry down by brute force and take it in a shallow but hard stoop. It has been said that the merlin is in every respect a miniature gyr, and it would seem that this comparison is a just one.

The merlin is quite easily discouraged and will quit flying a quarry at which it has a low degree of success in capture. I found this to be so in respect to meadow larks.

We have been flying in a large open alfalfa field with practically no stubble high enough for the meadow larks to conceal themselves. The merlin caught several larks and then the rains hit Southern California. Two weeks passed before we returned to fly this area, and we found that the alfalfa had grown several inches. The meadow larks would put into this short green growth and completely befuddle the merlin. After a dozen or so fruitless flights, the merlin began to ignore the meadow larks and concentrate more on the smaller brush sparrows, which gave her even more problems by abruptly diving into the alfalfa and reappearing many yards away.

I hope to keep the merlin through the moult and fly her as much and as long as it is possible.



Fieldmeets and Fairs

Stories and images from the 2018-19 season



Photos by David Doyle



Downings Meet

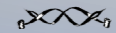
Kevin Logan, Co. Antrim

Our annual trip to Donegal took place in October 2018 with a great turnout.

Staying in two houses in Downings, our group of nine members and three visitors wasted no time in working a range of Harris' hawks, goshawks and sparrowhawks.

Gerard O'Neill took the first rabbit of the day, working the fields with his female gos, closely followed by Kevin Logan and his young gos for the second, while Anthony Doyle took the third with a Harris' hawk. As the day progressed the hunt split, with the goshawkers going to the high ground and the Harris' hawk men taking to the low.

Overall the day was a great success with plenty of slips for all birds. It was then time to down tools and have a fantastic feed of cooked rabbit prepared by Anya, and venison donated by Neal Carroll. A perfect day, finished off in the Singing Pub – great craic overall.



Deutscher Falkenorden Hosts International Meet and IAF AGM in Bamberg, Germany

Bruce A. Haak, USA



When I was a teenager I read about NAFA members attending foreign falconry meets that seemed rich in pomp and circumstance. At the time, NAFA was only a few years old and lacked both the traditions and formality established by previous generations of falconers in other countries. In the 1960s, American falconry meets were more like campouts, attended by a rather motley assortment of characters. Army field jackets and blue jeans were the norm, not the tweedy sport coats, neckties, and plus fours associated with stylish British falconers of the day. Although they were a scruffy bunch, American falconers were dedicating themselves to the pursuit of wild quarry with trained hawks, and their enthusiasm was infectious.

Attending a traditional European falconry meet has been on my 'bucket list' for decades. However, those of us who like trapping and hawking in fine autumn weather find it difficult to travel overseas in October. Three years ago I learned of a promising event in Germany that would be attended by falconers from around the world. It would combine the annual autumn fieldmeet of the Deutscher Falkenorden (DFO), the German falconry association established in 1921, with the 50th anniversary of the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey (IAF).

Friends at home and abroad encouraged my wife Evelyn and I to attend this meeting, so we booked a hotel room a full 16 months in advance. In hindsight, it was a wise move.

The first thing to grab our attention was that the venue for the event was in the ancient city of Bamberg. Established as early as 902 AD, the city was, for a short time, the centre of the Holy Roman Empire. These days, wandering the narrow streets gives one a glimpse into the Medieval era. Situated along a major river, the city served as a centre of commerce and at one point boasted 250 breweries. These days, Bamberg is a vibrant university town with glorious hotels, comfortable river walks, and a reputation for unique smoked beer. In many respects, it is living history and an

Photos courtesy of Bruce Haak



ideal destination for international visitors.

Bavaria is alive during autumn. The colourful countryside is a mix of crops, pastures, managed forests, villages, and towns. A big surprise was that the roads through forests and farming areas are paved. That seemed both civilised and unfamiliar. As in other developed countries, mechanised agriculture and heavy applications of fertilisers and pesticides have destroyed habitat diversity and reduced or eliminated the formerly abundant populations of pheasants and partridge. However, this does not dampen the enthusiasm of German falconers.

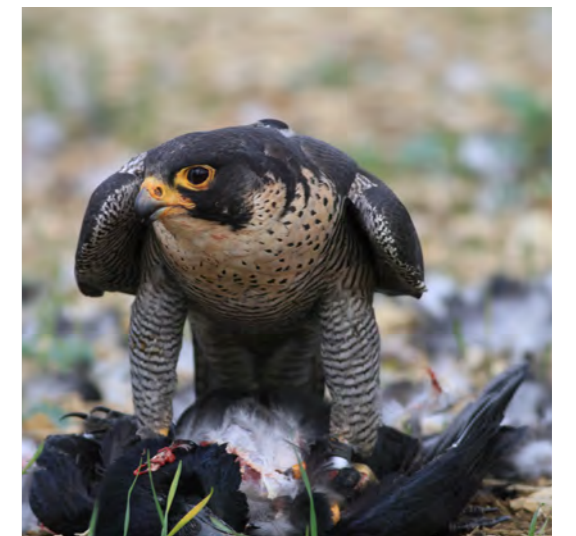
In Germany, hunting rights are leased from private landowners. Mostly, this is done for shooting deer, wild boar, and foxes. In a well-orchestrated and impressive move, the DFO and shooting groups arranged for over 100 hunting areas to be open for the week of the meet.

There is a long history of falconry in the region. A former ruler of the region, called the Wild Margrave, was especially keen on hawking and is said to have apportioned half of the national income for his hunting pursuits. One can only imagine the amazing hunting and fishing opportunities in the United States if half of the gross national product was apportioned to fund quality wildlife habitats and outdoor recreational pursuits for all.

One must experience the skills of the DFO officers and volunteer staff to appreciate the forethought and planning invested into organising a fieldmeet for over 440 people. A particular challenge was that visitors came from a great number of countries, bringing with them their own languages, customs, religions. All of these variations were taken into account in advance of this gathering.

I learned that preparation for these meetings started three years ago, when the DFO was first asked to host an historic event with the IAF. Planning a falconry meet isn't easy, and planning two simultaneous events for hundreds of visitors was, from my perspective, a massive undertaking.

The international flavour of the event was provided by representatives from distant places like Japan, Korea, Russia, South America, South Africa, and the Middle East. I was particularly pleased to see my old friend Zayed al Ali Al-Maadeed from Qatar, whom I have known for over 30 years. I was also fortunate to meet his companions Ali bi Khatem Al Mahshadi, president of the Qatari Society of Al Gannas, as well as Mohammed bin Abdullatif



Al-Missned who is a vice chairman of Al Gannas. Housed in a landmark building in Doha that's shaped like a falcon hood, Al Gannas promotes falconry and hunting with salukis in Qatar. It strives to educate its citizens about the legacy and practice of traditional Arabic hunting sports. It also participates in raptor conservation projects, and has partnered with both the DFO and IAF.

The first thing to impress me about the meet was the shuttle service that was provided from both the Frankfurt and Munich airports, and which whisked airline passengers to the meet's venue in Bamberg, a two-hour drive from either airport. The shuttle driver was armed with a printout of the flight number and arrival time of each person or group. Each meet attendee received an email copy of the schedule. While the driver did his best to accommodate some inevitable confusion as passengers arrived, he stuck closely to the schedule. Anyone who has experienced the jet lag, culture shock, and language barriers associated with international travel can

attest to the value of this service.

I am unused to such customised transportation options being offered for a falconry meet. It should be noted that Europe has excellent public transportation, most notably a highly efficient train service, an amenity sorely lacking in the United States. NAFA meets are seldom held near a major airport, which forces people to book rental cars and drive long distances, or stumble around a seedy bus station, in an effort to reach events in remote locations.

Frankfurt Airport, where we arrived, is a large maze. Finding the assigned meeting place was like a treasure hunt as several people we approached for information didn't know where it was located. As with any type of international travel, patience and perseverance are required. Once we found the meeting spot, we passed the time with fellow attendees waiting for the assigned departure time. In the shuttle, we made new friends and chatted amicably during our journey through lovely country landscapes awash in autumn colours.

Programmes describing the week's agendas and field trip options were distributed in advance of the meeting and provided at registration. In addition, there were materials on the many options and opportunities available for tourists in the Franconia region of northern Bavaria. The prices of tours and contact information for guides were included. This was a great help for us in planning our week in Bamberg.

Foremost among the amenities for attendees was the opportunity to travel in hunting parties with specific raptors. These included goshawks, Harris' hawks, eagles, peregrines and gyrfalcons. The sign-up sheets, posted in the main hallway, specified the quarry to be pursued by each category of raptor that day. Quarry included rabbits, hares, crows, pheasants, partridge and deer. For me, this highlighted the meet planners' attention to detail, and their goal to provide specific hunting experiences that made everyone feel welcome and included in a wide variety of field activities. This practice should serve as a template for any club intent on hosting an international gathering of falconers.

There were formal programmes in the evenings, along with an exhibition hall crowded with vendors selling all kinds of falconry paraphernalia. However, most of the serious discussions and frivolous camaraderie took place in the expansive hotel restaurant and bar, which provided excellent food, beverages and service.

For me, the most poignant part of the

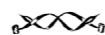
week was the closing ceremony. It was a brisk autumn evening and the crowd was bundled up against the chill. Outside the front of the hotel, game was laid out in specific order on pine boughs. Candle lights around the perimeter of the display illuminated the ceremony. A uniformed horn band, wearing jaunty caps and flowing coats, provided musical interludes and accented the moments honouring the game, adding pageantry to the event.

The soon-to-be-past DFO president conducted the ceremony. While I didn't catch the subtleties of the presentation, which was in German, he apparently thanked club members for their participation, recognised hunting groups for providing places to fly the raptors, and said farewell to foreign visitors. Specific notes were played by the band in honour of the respective game species. I later learned that this is a time-honoured ritual.

Despite our differences, there are many underlying threads that bind falconers from different cultures together. While denim jeans may be iconic American clothing, their creator, Levi Strauss, immigrated to America from the Franconia region near Bamberg in 1847. He changed the way the world dresses.

For me, my time in Germany, where they pave the farm roads and where beer is cheaper than bottled water, was a delight. Exploring the countryside in search of game, witnessing fine hunting flights, and making strong, personal connections with falconers from other cultures were added benefits of this meet. I made wonderful friends, many of whom I expect to see at the joint NAFA-IAF meet in Kearney, Nebraska, in the fall of 2020.

And finally, we must recognise the incredible efforts of the DFO's planning committee to accommodate falconers from around the world and ensure that they had a memorable experience. These people include Elisabeth, Klaus and Laura Leix, Anja Früh, Katharina Weinberger, Johannes Brehm, Michael Mickisch and their many assistants. Thank you for your warm hospitality. Prost!



Ballycroy Snipe-hawking Meet 25-27 October 2018

Eoghan Ryan, Co. Wicklow

.....
Rock House, Co.
Mayo. All photos by
Eoghan Ryan

I was sitting in Kehoe's pub having a pint with Bruce Haak, Hilary White and Don Ryan, when Don reminded me of the Ballycroy meet one week later. I hadn't intended going – too much going on, annual leave days reducing dramatically (and there was the cost, a bit more than the usual IHC meet). But hey, while work was busy, I felt like I needed a break and I had just taken a deposit for the sale of my old car. The Wild West started to call... as did other things.

"The call of autumn is, to me at least, the call of wild things in the bogs. For it means snipe, and snipe mean everything the soul of sporting man desires. Though should you ask me why, I do not say I can tell you in so many words."

So wrote Captain J. B. Drought in his book *A Sportsman Looks at Eire*, a man that spent a great deal of his time travelling the country, fishing and hunting in every corner of it, including County Mayo. Falconry has taken me many places too... this time to Mayo.

A four-hour drive to Newport, and then I followed the N59 along the coast to Mallaranny and up north towards Ballycroy National Park. We were heading to the estate of Rock House, a fine three-storey house that once belonged to the Clive family – but I wasn't heading there just now. I was on my way to the Blue Cottage, and so I followed the Google pin Don had sent me, and headed down a rough road through a large and expansive bog on the western side of the Slieve Nephin Mountains. As I headed down this track, there was not a house to be seen – just miles of broad and expansive peatlands stretching as far as the eye could see and simply framed by the distant mountains. As I continued down this track for more than a mile or so, there was a grove of trees and shrubs visible in the middle distance, predominantly rhododendron protruded by Scots pines. Well hidden from view within the centre of this thicket sits the Blue Cottage, a fishing and hunting cottage that lies on the edge of the Ballycroy National Park in the area of Srahduggaun, adjacent to the Owenduff



River. It was at the Blue Cottage that I met Don Ryan, Andy Savage and our hosts, Guy and Sibylle, in addition to the poet and writer Sean Lysaght (author of *Eagle Country*) and a neighbour, Pat.

Guy, a Frenchman, had run a successful hunting and fishing holiday tour business, taking his customers to far-flung reaches of the world such as Alaska and Malaysia. He had been on the lookout for a hunting estate in Ireland approximately 30 years ago and bought Rock House together with the hunting rights of over 30,000 hectares of land surrounding it. Interestingly, the National Parks and Wildlife Service bought a huge tract of land to create the Ballycroy National Park, but apparently only later discovered that it did not include the hunting rights that were associated with the ownership of Rock House. In effect, therefore, hunting is permissible in some parts of this National Park!

Guy and Sibylle were relaxed and easy-going hosts and had a very fine lunch prepared and laid out ready for our consumption (the home-made vegetable soup with chicken stock was second to none!). Eric Witkowski arrived a short while later. We had time to weather the birds, and introduce our hosts to the world of falconry, with discussions on peregrines, birds of prey, hoods and falconry furniture in general, gun dogs, snipe and wild game – this was the first time they had had falconers on their land. Their hunting and fishing days are targeted to the French, with hunting predominantly focused on

woodcock, deer-stalking and occasionally snipe.

We headed out across the bog, three falconers with one falcon and four tiercels. It was an interesting bog, relatively flat and open, but with occasional humps and hills and well dotted with small ponds and lakes. The walking was relatively easy – not as hummocky as some of the raised bogs in the Midlands and the heather not too deep.

There was a steady and brisk breeze and all tiercels handled it with effortless ease pumping up to a reasonable height and working their way over the dogs. Two strong flights with great stoops are recalled, the first by Don's tiercel over Libby, his red and white setter. It looked like he got pretty close to the snipe in the stoop, but on closer examination of the slow-motion video evidence that evening, it became apparent that as the tiercel was stooping and plummeting downwards, a second snipe broke cover within three to five metres of the first, and it would appear that this was an unfortunate distraction which allowed the target bird to make a steady escape up, up and away in that classic of snipe departures!

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Opposite: the Blue Cottage

I'm restricted to weekend flying with my falcon, which hardly does her any real justice. She can fly well on the mountains and hillsides of Wicklow where she can naturally avail of uplift, mounting to respectable heights and pursuing snipe and grouse, but on the flats she lacks the fitness of those falcons being flown daily or indeed four or five times a week. There were a good number of ponds scattered around the bog, and I was hoping that they might provide an opportunity at duck, which she has taken before. I was informed that during harsher and stormier periods duck move from their coastal haunts to these ponds, but their peaty and acidic character suggested to me that I was unlikely to find them. I scouted some of the ponds from the larger mounds in the bog, then had a mediocre flight following a snipe that broke cover when the bird was out of position. As I made my way back to the others, Ollie, my Brittany spaniel, was set on something and before I had a chance to draw the attention of Eric and Don, a brace of grouse broke cover – the second one of the afternoon!

Eric was running his two red setters when the first and then the second locked in on the scent of a snipe. The older tiercel mounted quickly and worked his way back and forth into position. When he was over or indeed slightly in front of Eric, the command was given to the dogs and the snipe was flushed. The tiercel was in hot pursuit, and tore through the air with such confidence and speed, snatched the snipe from the air and then headed off towards

the cottage, where it was later retrieved.

Day two, and a very strong northerly wind pulled cold Arctic air over the country. We decided to work the land on the northern side of the track, having worked a good portion of the southern side the day before. It was squally and cold with blustery showers of rain and hail. We occasionally huddled close together protecting our birds from getting too damp, and we huddled our dogs to ease the impact of the 40 kmph arctic winds. Even the fittest of falcons found it hardy weather and Don remarked that there appeared to be a downward drag as the birds found it difficult to elevate themselves to any great height. Eric's red setters were set on a point but the tiercel had a hard time with the wind, and then a brace of grouse broke cover and went up and over the horizon.

When my turn came round and I found my way onto another mound, it was clear that that part of the broad bogland in front of me was much lower than that portion we had hunted on, and that it seemed very probable that the air mass had been pulled up and over this mound, creating a downward draught on the lee side and confirming Don's assertion. Eric's brown bird (first-year tiercel) worked his way across the bog in a sideways fashion, but ended up some distance away (perhaps two kilometres or so) before being retrieved. Tired and damp, we waited for Eric and headed back to the cottage for a late afternoon lunch.

A bunch of bog-trotters, we trod our

way back, through this sublime landscape which could appear almost simultaneously both bleak yet beautiful. Dark grey clouds raced across the sky, grey vertical masses indicating the advancing wall of hail, in front of which was a flock of greylag geese or a lonely cormorant. But the ever changing and contrasting landscape revealed sun-soaked hills, brightening features on the horizon, reddish-brown and azure pools, rainbows, and a tapestry of colours underfoot from the rich combination of mosses, lichens, grasses and heather. I can't say that the snipe were plentiful – they weren't – but there was enough to make it interesting and enough for those of us present.

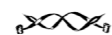
After lunch, late in the afternoon, we drove back out the track leading to civilisation and stopped near a lonely stack of turf, parked up and hawked some more. As the day advanced and time was more important, we spread out across the bog, working our dogs into the wind and keeping in touch by phone when a dog was set or on point and selecting our flights accordingly. Myself and Eric got one more flight in. But while the dogs picked up scent, the snipe didn't hold, dogs crept in and moved on and flights were ruined. Just after feeding my falcon up for the day, Oscar, my red setter, froze solid. His tail and entire body were rigid, with the usual gentle wag of the tail – indicating a snipe – missing. Perhaps another plover? I slowly moved in towards the path of the scent and as I got closer another brace of grouse broke – the fourth brace we saw in two days.

Later that evening, in the comfortable living room of Rock House (and following a hearty meal), we got to view the old game books that still remain in the house. They record the total number of game taken, by species, in each month of every year from 1830 to 1919. Interestingly, there is a gap after 1919, perhaps most likely

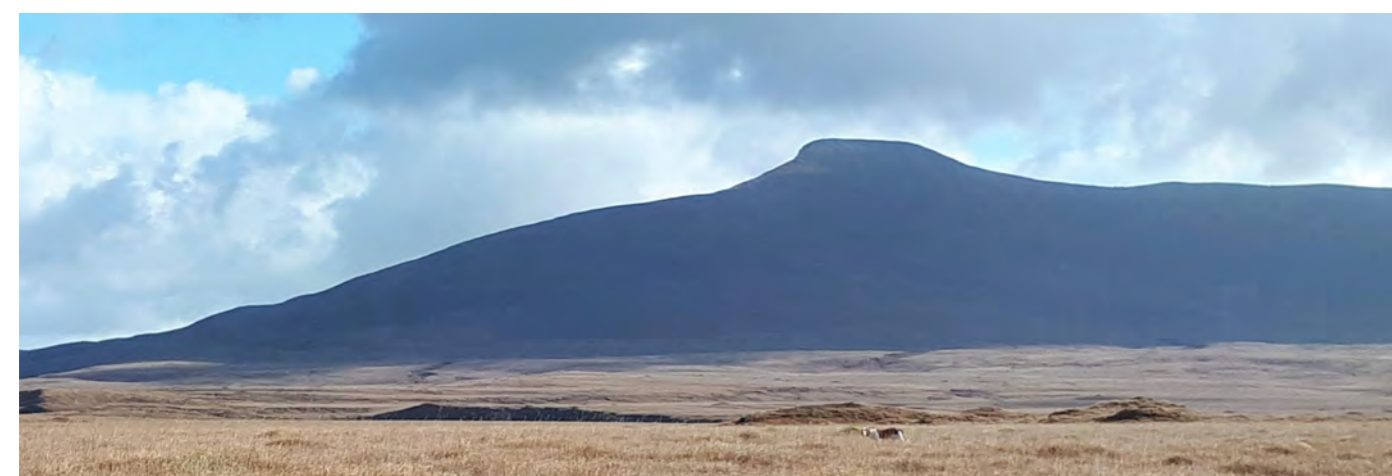
due to the First World War, or indeed the War of Independence, and the game books were reconvened in the 1950s for a short period. It was clear that the hunting lands had at one time been a bountiful source of food, with up to and over 600 grouse taken in a season, in addition to hare, rabbit, plover, snipe and pheasant. Snipe numbers shot were not significant, but this was presumably due to the fact that so many grouse were to be had. Who shot what, and the quantity of same, was recorded too. Some of the game books also recorded the number of 'vermin' taken too, and these included foxes, badgers, otters, hawks, grey crows and magpies. In one year, there is also the record of an 'eagle' having been shot.

So what now of the future of Ballycroy? With the creation of the National Park, sheep numbers have dramatically declined and so grouse numbers appear to be on the rise. We were informed that the NPWS wanted to create a new access route into the National Park through Srahduggaun, which would in turn increase both vehicular and pedestrian traffic through this remote area. This was resisted and alternative routes from the south and east have been developed, but there is still the intention to create a western access route and this is also where the main visitor centre in Ballycroy is located.

Our thanks to the hosts Guy and Sibylle. The accommodation is perfect for the falconer. They have a dry room for gear and a tack room for setting up equipment. The rooms were comfortable, the meals were fantastic (thanks to Anna, the chef), there is a lawn to weather the falcons – and I was even able to avail of their dog run and kennels for my dogs at night. To cap it all, the views across the bay from the house are second to none. Thanks to the other falconers, mentioned above, who provided good company. It's a place worth visiting again.



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Libby on point



Sneem Snipe-hawking Meet 2018

Keith Barker, Co. Waterford



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Keith Barker

Twenty-eighteen saw a new chapter in my passion for falconry. I managed to breed a few peregrines this year, after a few years having fertile eggs but failing with the incubation process. I imprinted two tiercels and decided to give one of them a go at the discipline in the sport that is causing much interest, not only in Ireland but across the globe: snipe-hawking. If the snipe-hawking was not my cup of tea, I could always take up a goshawk and keep the peregrines back for my future breeding programme.

Having only flown shortwings with any level of success in the past, my knowledge of the longwing in the hunting field was limited. Also, the training of a specialist to chase one quarry species seemed to be a daunting task when one lives in a check-rich area. My hunting ground is surrounded by tillage and dairy, and the place is alive with rooks, crows, and pigeon. For advice I turned to one or two members of the club who have had some level of success in the field.

My pointer was a relative beginner. I was told to flush as much wild quarry as I could for my hawk over the pointer, and

he would do the rest. At first this was a little frustrating: the imprint was very much dependent on me, and in the early days of his training the hawk made little height, flying with cuckoo-style flight and landing on the ground and around my feet. Perseverance and as much pigeon as he could eat helped him lose that magnetism from me, and eventually he started to venture out exploring. Sometimes I would feed him as soon as the hood came off, then after he had had some bit of a reward let him go and fly. There was no set routine. If he landed near me, I picked him up, hooded him without food for a while, then flew him again later.

I said to myself that if I felt confident enough for him to attend the Sneem snipe-hawking meet in November, I would go. The hawk was pretty loyal, and just like all the goshawks I have imprinted he was silent in the field but a bit annoying at home. Come October, when the snipe started to arrive, he was already having a go at pipits and larks put up by the dog. When we started to find snipe, the ball-game changed with this fit, agile, larger target species that went up high into the clouds, dragging him up there with

them. When he came back over I reinforced the recall with a well-garnished lure as well as a reward for height. He was getting fitter and stronger every day, and I was beginning to see the attraction of the peregrine.

However, I was struggling with my dog. She is inexperienced with snipe. She bumped more than she pointed, but the hawk watched her intensely and soon learned that it was her that was going to provide him with the fun. Sometimes I would run the dog, she would occasionally go on point, I would unhood the hawk then flush the snipe for the peregrine off the fist. Like any young hawk, the drive to chase is strong. I thought this showed the hawk that the dog is finding the quarry – and that he wasn't going to catch one four feet off the ground. Usually the hawk chased the snipe up high. Once up there, the dog was cast off again, hopefully to find, point and flush more snipe for him in a more commanding position. Once the snipe fell in larger numbers he was stooping and chasing them up high into the sky and out of sight. By mid-October I was confident my hawk would not embarrass me in the field, and with experienced pointing dogs he might just catch a snipe in Sneem.

My son Harry and I loaded up the truck and set off for Kerry, with my wife Lisa to follow on later from her workplace to meet us at the hotel. We stopped off for some lunch in Kenmare and were informed by one of the staff of the annual Kenmare Halloween parade that evening in the town.



Don Ryan

Later we arrived at the Sneem Hotel, where we were met by Xavier Morel, Xavier's daughter, and Kelly Van Looy. Don Ryan joined us later, and suggested we went to the estuary bog locally for a few slips. It was a beautiful sun-shiny afternoon with little breeze, the scenery of the Kerry mountain backdrop was simply breathtaking. Snipe were hard to find, but by the time the sun was starting to set behind that huge backdrop we all had taken a flight each.

Kelly flew her saker first, putting in a magnificent stoop. Xavier's *minor* and tiercel

Left to right: Xavier Morel, Xavier's daughter Inès, Kelly Van Looy, Wayne Davis, Don, Eric Witkowski

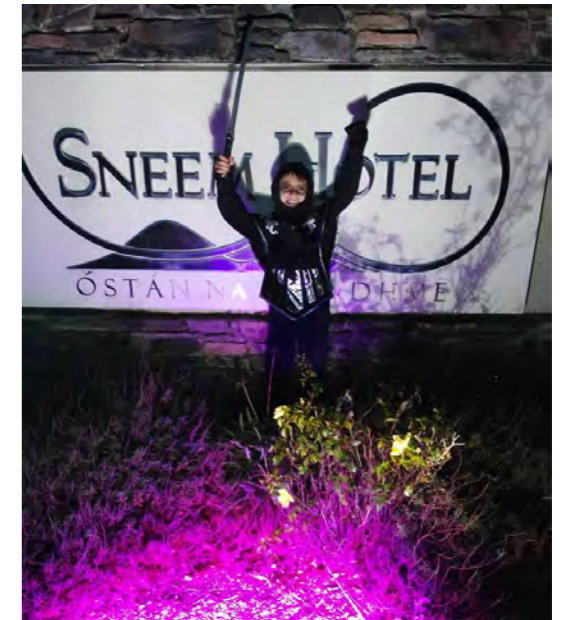


Halloween Harry

waited on and stooped perfectly high in the blue. His new bird, who he was just getting to know, was a little wayward and took some time to be called in, but after a 24-hour drive from Belgium maybe she was entitled to have a look around at the scenery. Don's first flight was spoiled by either a false point or the snipe flushing unsighted, his second and older tiercel first taking stand before waiting on at a reasonable pitch for a flush.

My turn came when Don's red and white setter Libby came on point. Up he went, and waited on at a reasonable pitch but slightly out of position from the dog. I was trying to wave him over when the snipe decided it was time to make a move. My hawk came down at an angle, then up behind him for a tail-chase, pumping all the way. He just kept going, locked on to his target, climbing until the pair went out of sight. I waited a while; we could not see him. I took the lure out, threw it to the ground, and with a whooshing sound he appeared for the recall.

Later in the evening we decided to give the parade at Kenmare a miss, as Sneem was holding their own trick-or-treat night. We walked into town trick-or-treating on the way, the village packed with tourists and locals, the stone bridge over the river decked out with illuminated pumpkins, and all the shops and businesses offering treats to visitors. We called into O'Shea's bar for dinner, Xavier donning his makeshift Dracula cape with his daughter in impressive zombie make up. Later we were joined by head chef Andy Savage and his wife, and later still by Don Ryan, who had



picked up Wayne Davis, who had flown into Kerry airport from the UK to spectate.

Day two we had a frosty start, high pressure with little breeze and brilliant blue skies. We headed for Glencar in convoy to meet Eric Witkowski. We drew the east side of the bog – snipe were a bit more plentiful here. All birds flew well, except the *brookei*, who went sightseeing again but not out of sight. To be fair, Xavier was just getting to know her after her owner moved to South America and could not take her with him. Some sizzling stoops from the *minor* and the older tiercel. Eric's birds were outstanding and so were Don's, but still no snipe were added to the bag.

I was offered a point to fly from Don's excellent red and white girl. This time the snipe held for what seemed to be an age as we waited for my hawk to come over. When he did, I looked up to see him in the correct position slightly upwind of the dog, so I called the flush. Libby spun around in circles where she thought the snipe was until her nose dug into the turf and she performed a forward roll as the snipe took flight.

He missed his footing but locked onto the target again, chasing him up and down back towards the road, where the snipe bailed into long grass with the hawk winging over a split second after him. I was encouraged when Eric, who was in a better position than I, said he was 80 per cent sure he had caught him, but disappointed when approaching he took flight for his feed up on the lure.

I am sure those who were there that day will agree that the sport shown was outstanding, not just from the birds' perspective but the dog work and the snipe



Inès and Xavier

themselves. A truly formidable quarry, possibly the most difficult quarry in the world to catch, they never stop beating their wings climbing up into the heavens, unlike any other gamebird.

We had all been enjoying the weather, the scenery and the good company. It has been said since of some of the images posted on social media that Glencar was like a mini Wyoming: big sky, big country, a beautiful place. But at the back of our minds we had a visitor arriving who was not really welcome: we had a storm brewing out in the Atlantic that was forecast to hit land the following day.

We woke to relative calm. Our weather apps said we would be okay until three p.m., then we would be hit with the tail end of the hurricane. What could go wrong? We decided to hawk the west side of Glencar, get there early, and be out of there hopefully before it got too rough. Driving through the Ballaghbeama Gap, a rugged and unforgiving place, the weather started to get a little nasty, trees waving in the wind, rain lashing against the windscreen. I had my doubts about putting my little fella up in those conditions. We arrived with rain sweeping across the bog. The day before, the An Post-man had stopped to say hello and enquire what we were up to. Not today: he waved and drove right by.

Eric was keen to go, I guess to get his hawks flown before the really bad weather set in. Kelly asked to get her saker flown first, so we agreed 'ladies before gentlemen.'

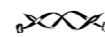
Up went the saker. It rang around for a short while, then out of nowhere came a pair of wild merlins who obviously took umbrage at her being in their airspace. The wind was strong. They taunted each other downwind. We tried to watch with binoculars until the trio had gone out of sight. Luckily Kelly had the new Microsensory Mini with solar panel fitted, and Xavier monitored the progress on his mobile phone – height and distance. When he said the hawk was on her way back to us at 1000 feet I couldn't believe it. I kept looking up into the grey sky, clouds drifting by, then she just folded up and fell to earth for her lure.

This made up my mind. There was no way I was going to loft my hawk with his 216-MHz TX and digital receiver in those conditions – I just did not know him well enough! Xavier offered me a transmitter to borrow: "If things go wrong, we pick him up later," he said, smiling with convincing confidence.

I said I would think about it, as Eric

prepared his first hawk. The conditions were deteriorating. We walked out onto the turf and Eric's hawk went off. To be fair it was a little early for his two birds to fly, and the first one did not perform to his usual high standard and was called in to fly later. We walked back to the meeting point, where we hummed and hawed about the conditions. Eric decided to fly his second bird. We crossed the road and crossed the river and set foot on the west side of the bog, both red setters quartering the ground until one came on point. Off with the hood, hawk held aloft, at which point the falcon left the fist only for the snipe to flush in unison, resulting in a tail-chase down wind and out of sight. If there was a day when everything was going to go wrong, today was certainly working out that way.

We waited huddled in a group, wind and rain all around us. The signal was not getting any better, so Eric decided to go off and retrieve his hawk. We walked back and waited at the cars. Eric called to say that the hawk had gone quite a distance and we were safe to carry on hawking if we wished. I decided to take up Xavier's kind offer of the GPS transmitter. We braved the brutal conditions with four peregrines, Xavier leaving the *brookei* in the car, and one by one the hawks were flown in deteriorating conditions, a bit like the movie *Caddyshack*, but falconry instead of golf.



Xavier - selfie with Keith, Don and Wayne. All photos courtesy of Keith Barker



Sneem Shortwing Meet 2018

Kevin Logan, Co. Antrim

Photos courtesy of Andy Savage and Ger O'Neill

The Irish Hawking Club's annual hunt in Sneem is probably the highlight of the year for falconers. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances, I was unable to attend this year's meet. Not one to miss an opportunity for a hunt, alternative arrangements were quickly made and we set about recreating the day a week later thanks to Andy Savage, who offered to host us, while Gerard O'Neill kindly offered an overnight stay in his Limerick home for the Belfast lads to break up the long journey.

Day 1 – The road trip

With plans made and the van loaded, myself and Liam McGibbon found the prime spots for two goshawks while my spaniel raced for its space anticipating the hunt in store. Joining us on the journey was Paddy McAuley, a shooting friend of mine for over 30 years who treasures any opportunity to walk the hills and work his dog.

Leaving Belfast at one p.m., the expectation was we would arrive in Limerick around six, ready for a bite to eat. However,

Liam decided to take the scenic route via Enniscorthy (a.k.a., lost). A quick call to Mick Quinn got us back on track and we arrived at Gerard's around nine p.m., primed for the great dinner he had ready for us.

Day 2

Next morning we were set up for the day with a hearty breakfast and headed for Sneem with a another recruit ready to follow – our host Gerard. Arriving at our digs we dropped our gear, got ready where we could as the rooms weren't ready, and got down to business. We were here for a hunt, after all.

First up was Liam with his male gos, flanked either side of a ditch by Paddy and I with our spaniels. Out burst a hen pheasant with Liam's gos off after it down a valley at full speed and Liam in hot pursuit. Fifteen minutes later came the radio call we all wanted to hear: "Bird back on fist and pheasant in bag."

Working my spaniel though heavy cover I was up next, anticipating the release,



then swoosh another hen emerged like an explosion and my first-year female gos was away like a shot only to be found 20 minutes later on the hen, deep in the forest plantation.

A good solid day's hunt working tough terrain had earned us a perch at the bar and a good feed while we analysed the day's events.

Day 3

The next day we went back to the same area, depending on our dogs to work the very hard cover. The dogs earned their coin as they covered every inch and we were primed for any movement. Late in the day my spaniel came on footings which at first I thought was a bird, but it turned out to be a hare which I slipped the young gos on.

With minimum experience on hares and rabbits, she bent the hare four times – which any coursing man would have been proud of – and which proved to be the highlight of my day.

Day 4

Determined to see all that Sneem has to offer, we moved on to new ground with myself up first, working the spaniel through a rushy field. He flushed a lovely cock bird and the gos was off after it at full pelt.

Nine hundred yards away I found her up against sheep wire, but with no pheasant in sight – the one that got away!

Then Liam stepped up with myself and Paddy working our spaniels through heavy cover. Paddy's dog bumped a hen pheasant out and Liam's gos went flying hard and fast after it, out of sight. Then the radio sound: "Back on fist, but no pheasant."

Gerard O'Neill had joined us at this stage, hoping to fly his female gos on a hare, but unfortunately none were forthcoming.

The sun was starting to go down over the mountain. We had decided to head back when my spaniel moved up a gear and bumped a hen out of her cover, which my female gos took as her well deserved prize 300 yards downhill.

It was now time to head back to the watering hole to talk about the hunt.

Day 5

On our final day we decided to have a try on rabbits, so headed to new ground with Andy, our host, leading the way.

First up was Gerard O'Neill with his female gos, with ferrets working through

the set. Out burst a rabbit which Gerard's gos took with ease.

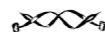
Rabbits were very scarce on the ground but walking back to the car a cock bird burst out of cover and Liam's male took off after it, flying hard, but lost it in a plantation.

A good day's hunt and time for a well deserved drink and rest.

Day 6

The last day was a bit of a washout with a storm incoming, and we decided to bring an end to our trip.

All in all a great trip. We may have missed the annual meet but at least a week later we got to see all that Sneem had to offer and weren't disappointed. Thanks again to our fantastic hosts, Gerard and Andy.

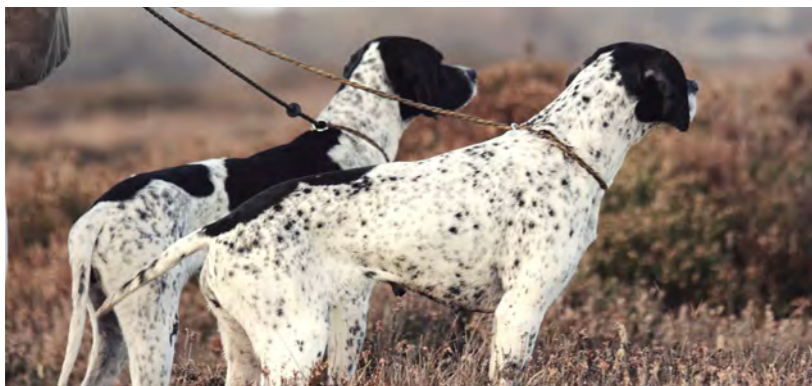


Galway Meet, November 2018

Kevin Marron, Co. Kildare

Photos by Dwight Dreezen, Belgium





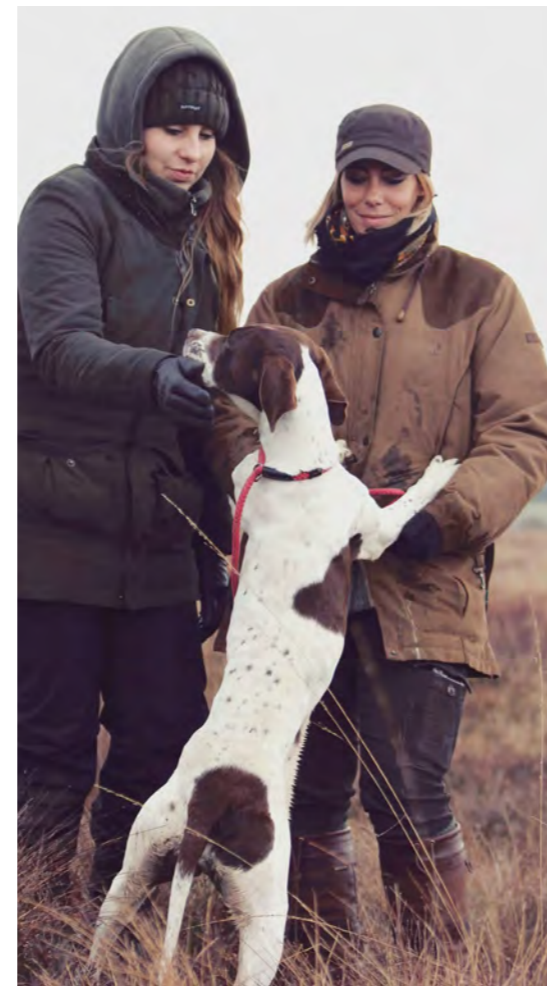
21 November

Woke up to perfect flying conditions. Light breeze from the east. It was decided to have one large group today and departure was 11 a.m.

At the first bog we found the snipe very jumpy until we got a tiercel on the wing. The dogs seemed to be struggling with bad scenting conditions. Ignacio Figaredo Ongil and his father had travelled from Spain and his tiercel was coming back high towards the point when something caught his eye over the town of Tuam.

We had some really good flying from Eric Witkowski, Xavier Morel, Trevor Roche and myself. On the way back Xavier put his *minor* up over a splash we'd seen teal drop into earlier. She had other ideas and went off after a flock of rooks.

We got to the next bog with about an hour of daylight left. Don Ryan and Jason Deasy joined us there. All birds flew good and high, but the bog was very narrow and the snipe either ran off the bog on the cutaway side or made cover before the tiercel could get down. Larry McCarthy flushed a mallard on his way back to the cars (out of sight of us) and Xavier's UFO nearly brought it to bag.



22 November

Another fine day with a slight breeze still coming from the east. Robert Hutchinson gathered everyone on the front lawn of Corrib View Guest House and held a minute's silence for Alec Finn.

Two groups today. One was made up of Robert, Maurice Nicholson, Serge Prevost, Jason, Trevor, Xavier, Kelly Van Looy, myself and half a dozen spectators, mainly from Belgium. We arrived at the first bog at 11.30 a.m., way too early for the first birds flown, resulting in a track-down and a sit-down.

Trevor's bird flew well and came close. My tiercel, Sonny, then brought a snipe to bag. We then moved to a small bog nearby.

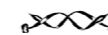
A good stoop from Spooky right in front of the spectators here, then we moved on again. Way more snipe in the cutaway (gardens) than up on the raised bog. Robert's tiercel flew well but a bit wayward today. We got a great stoop from Xavier's UFO before a wild falcon lured him away, resulting in a track-down. At last light the wild pair came in at one of mine, but he made his way back. The other group also took one snipe. No surprise when I heard it was Eric's.

23 November

Last day of the meet. We woke up to a good frost this morning, which caused concern about finding game. Again two groups. Today we had Martin Brereton, Mike Nicholls, Maurice, Serge, Carine Troudart, Nacho and his father, Johan Kolman and Birgit Schneemann, Ed Coulson and Anya Aseeva, and Larry McCarthy as guide.

We needn't have worried as there were plenty of snipe. The first one dumped into high heather as the tiercel stooped. That was a sign the game bag was going to be light that evening. The breeze picked up and affected some of the birds' performance. Lunch was provided by Ed, Anya and Carine, and went down a treat.

My wild-take smacked a snipe hard into the ground and to our surprise it jumped up and flew off resulting in a tail-chase across a large bog drain. Just as I was thinking I'd have to strip off he came back looking for the lure. Maurice took a soaking earlier while jumping a drain and was glad of the change of clothes back at the car. I heard later that the other group struggled to find snipe and none were taken.



Kilruddery Pheasant Meet, 20 January 2019

Neal Carroll, Dublin

As usual, as some of you regular contributors may be aware, I have been chased down and coerced into putting pen to paper – or more so, finger to keyboard – to run through the events of the day at Kilruddery Estate, Co. Wicklow.

I'm not one for sitting still, and this takes a bit of doing, so I've finally taken a bit of a break in between the March spring showers which are now turning into flurries of snow. Maybe we will be in for another Beast from the East.

Wicklow is home to the largest pheasant estates in the country and truly breathtaking scenery. Not only is there an abundance of pheasant, but it is also home to the sika deer, whose population is now exploding throughout the Wicklow area. The majority of the land in the Wicklow hills is owned by the National Parks, and is home to plenty of

wildlife including the red grouse, which is off-limits to hunting; only on some private estates is it allowed.

Kilruddery Estate is located at the beginning of the Wicklow Mountains bordering Dublin, and stands on 900 acres of mountainside, with views of the Irish sea.

Anyways, onto the Kilruddery gos fieldmeet. We had a total of four goshawks on the day, flown by Kevin Logan, Liam Mc Kibbon, Jason Deasy and Damien Maloney. This was the first time Jason and Damien had visited the picturesque Wicklow estate, and it is a bit different from their usual hunting grounds on the flat open land of the Midlands and the west coast, where the snipe-hawkers hold sway. Now we are in the land of the pheasant.

These were no easy pheasants, cunning and as fit as a fiddle after a full season being hunted by guns.

.....
Photos: Ela Obirek



out over gorse bushes high up on the hill, then banking to the left and flying over the heads of the group, they both continued on across the hill, powering along as they went – a joy to watch. The pheasant was going like the clappers and keeping the distance between itself and the gos, and eventually the pheasant did get away by diving into a gorse bush.

This gos also later in the day made contact with a hen flushed from cover, pointed by my own GSP and Brendan Ward's Llewelin setter – perfect setup, but she was so unlucky. She pulled a plume of feathers and continued a chase across an open rape-seed field where we thought she would have her prize, but no cigar.

All birds flew well on the day and some were unlucky. We had new member Damien Maloney out for the first time at a fieldmeet with his gos, which was unfamiliar with other birds and dogs and was a little put off at the beginning, but began to chase and fly hard as the day went on. One slip seen the pheasant and gos rise vertically up over conifer trees at least 50 feet tall and continue down over the plantation. Some great fitness in both birds.

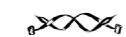
Liamy and Kev as always travel to all the meets and put in some great mileage every season to attend them. Their birds fly hard and have caught plenty of quarry, and I would like to thank them for their support once again. Hopefully you can attend next season with Brexit looming. Get that Green Card sorted!

It is great meeting new and old members at these events and we had a number of new members spectating: Andrew Sarratt, our new in-house photographer; Atif Hameed; and Darry Reed, an old member who has only just returned from child-rearing duties and looking at getting back into the art.

Also not to forget the dogs on the day which are vital to making a great day. We had springer spaniel, Hungarian vizsla, German shorthaired pointer and Llewelin setter. The GSP and Llewelin worked great together, covering a lot of ground and backing each other, which was great to watch.

I would like to thank all that attended the day, and hopefully the club can keep these fieldmeets running. The only way these meets can keep going is if members support these events.

Hopefully next season we will see the new members with their new charges and they will join us all in the field for another great day.



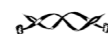
Enniskerry Fair, 8 September 2019

Photos from Ger Grant



Gerard Grant
Admin · 8 September

Thanks to everyone that helped out at our stand and put on a great display of birds at the Enniskerry fair today. Great weather for it, and it was nice to catch up with everyone. Thanks to all those that helped out over the summer travelling far and wide to man the stand. This years summer events are now finished so I'll see you all in the field in the coming weeks and months. Happy Hawking!



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Discovering Ronald Stevens

Bruce A. Haak, USA



On a sunny Shropshire day in May 2017, my wife Evelyn and I visited Walcot Hall, the former home of falconry icon Ronald Stevens. Our friend John Jones had arranged for us to tour the grounds, and later we drove the winding track up the nearby Long Mynd to see where Stevens had pursued hawking red grouse with such passion. Our day of accidental tourism captured my imagination for a bygone era, prompting me to learn more about the man who had been one of the most creative falconers of the 20th century.

Ronald Stevens was born into a privileged British family. His father Ernest made a fortune selling enamel ware (pots, pans, and kitchenware) that gained worldwide recognition. Uninterested in manufacturing, and pining for an outdoor life, Ronald nominally managed his father's cattle operation in Worcestershire.

In their youth, Ronald and his younger brother Noel became fascinated with birds, especially waterfowl and cranes. They gained considerable expertise in raising ducks, geese and swans, including the more problematic sea ducks. In time, their obsession led them to develop a considerable collection of exotic waterfowl. Private collections of waterfowl were in vogue on country estates, and ultimately the successes of the Stevens brothers' breeding efforts demanded that they begin selling their annual surplus.

Walcot Hall, near the Welsh border, was for sale in the late 1920s. As neither brother had demonstrated aptitude for, nor interest in, the family business, their father purchased the property from the Earl of Powys to expand their waterfowl production scheme into a commercial venture. The manor house was in a state of disrepair, and it took two years to renovate it with modern conveniences. By the early 1930s, the Stevens family occupied the property.

The estate, imposing to this day, would have been an opulent landscape feature including the Georgian manor house, stables, multiple cottages, a 20-acre arboretum, and 1,500 acres of sprawling pastures filled with livestock. Built in the Elizabethan period, Walcot Hall was remodeled between 1763 and 1767 by Major-General Robert Clive (a.k.a. Clive of India). Clive is the man credited with solidifying the East India Company through the takeover of the wealthy region of Bengal, instituting the British Raj, and amassing a huge fortune by questionable means.

The likely attraction of the grounds for Ronald and Noel would have been the 40-acre lake at the entrance to the property. Years before, French prisoners of the Napoleonic War were tasked with expanding the length and breadth of the lake, a laborious undertaking, to say the least.

A fence seven miles long encircled the lake. It was built six feet high (and probably buried several feet deep) to exclude foxes

On Long Mynd, 1948. Photo courtesy of Bruce Haak / the Archives of Falconry, USA

Top to bottom: the lake at Walcot, three views of Walcot Hall today (photos courtesy of Bruce Haak), Pole Cottage in 1948 (photo courtesy of Bruce Haak / the Archives of Falconry, USA)



and other mammalian predators. The sheer magnitude of this structure shows the value and significance of such an extensive private collection of avian species. Today, the lake is a bucolic setting of lush pasture and overflowing forest, home to swans, geese, ducks and all manner of shorebirds and wading birds, along with a myriad of aquatic life forms.

Sadly, the fate of the Walcot Hall waterfowl collection took an ill turn during World War II, when Ronald went to war and the British Army requisitioned the property. Contradictory information exists regarding the disposition of this extensive ornithological collection. One reference claims that some of the birds were sent to Slimbridge, Gloucestershire, which is now a waterfowl refuge. However, others state that the collection was destroyed on site. One imagines that finding quantities of food for this number of waterfowl during wartime would be impossible. The most plausible outcome is that the more palatable species contributed to the war effort by adorning the dinner table of the army officers.

In 1937, Stevens began renting ground atop the Long Mynd to pursue grouse-hawking. The moor was owned by William



Stevens at Walcot. Photo courtesy of Bruce Haak / British Archives of Falconry





Humphrey, the man who perpetuated Llewellyn setters (Laverack descendants and Dashing Bondhu lines) as working gun dogs. Humphrey was himself a falconer who flew peregrines, goshawks, and golden eagles, and he is credited with bringing trained falcons to the US in the 1920s to teach Americans about the sport.

In the years following World War II, and prior to his relocation to Connemara in 1956, Steven's attention was focused on hawking atop the Long Mynd. Rising steeply from the cultivated Shropshire lowlands, the mountain forms a rolling, windswept moor on top. Today, it's a surprisingly busy place for day-trippers braving a track with minimal turnouts that leads to a launch-and-retrieve airport for gliders.

In Stevens' day, the moorland would have been populated by sheep and the odd pony. Given that access was up a narrow lane, he would have expended some effort to reach the former Pole Cottage and provision it for weeks of occupancy. From this modest dwelling, he ventured forth, hiking through the heather with Humphrey's setters in search of game and hooded falcons at the ready. This location, renovated by Stevens and renamed Frogs' Gutter, was made famous in Stevens' classic book *Observations On Modern Falconry*.

The increasing disruption of motorists and hikers on the Long Mynd, a desire for solitude, and the deterioration of the moor due to bracken invasion, would eventually take their toll on Stevens' psyche. Those conditions, lamented in his writings, undoubtedly motivated him to search for alternative hawking options.

Stevens purchased Fermoye Lodge, County Galway, and relocated to isolated Connemara in 1956. He longed for wilderness, a safe place to fly falcons far



from indiscriminate shooters, and easy access to grouse hawking through his golden years. Prior to his arrival, both good fishing and grouse-hunting opportunities had been documented at the lodge.

Sadly, these goals would not be met. His worldwide reputation among the falconry community, and the fame spawned by his insightful books, meant that, too often, his privacy was shattered by uninvited people showing up at his remote home. He was reportedly shy and retiring by nature, and his gentlemanly patience was surely tested by such unwanted attention.

Then too were the disappointing numbers of red grouse to be found in the west of Ireland in subsequent years; only now are they undergoing restoration efforts. This must have been evident soon after his arrival, yet Stevens never found the will nor energy to move to Scotland, with its highly productive grouse moors. For a man of considerable means, this was a lost opportunity indeed.

As he aged, his eyesight failed him,

The first hybrids, between Stevens' peregrine tiercel and John Morris' saker falcon. The mother, 'Farah', and some of the young are stuffed and on display in the Natural History Museum in Dublin. Photos courtesy of Bruce Haak / the Archives of Falconry, USA

Stevens with 'Gibbun'. Photo courtesy of Bruce Haak / British Archives of Falconry



and falconry became impractical. Stevens downsized his residence in a move to nearby Bunnagipaun, near Oughterard. Here, he died in 1994 at the age of 91.

Other highlights of Stevens' life

—During World War II, Stevens was ordered to destroy peregrines that might intercept homing pigeons used for communicating English military messages. However, he deftly reversed his job description by convincing his superiors to allow him to develop a cadre of falconers to use trained peregrines to capture the homing pigeons being sent by German submarines to communicate intelligence information to the mainland. This effort only netted the capture of two pigeons with information capsules, and neither message was significant to the war effort. However, Stevens likely saved the lives of countless peregrines in the process.

—After the war, his experiences were directed toward reducing conflicts between wild birds and aircraft north of Shrewsbury. Thus we must add the introduction of bird abatement techniques on military bases and airports to his list of accomplishments.

—The male peregrine owned by Stevens and the female saker belonging to John Morris were the first known natural breeding pair belonging to two falcon species. This pair produced the first hybrid falcon offspring known in captivity.

—Stevens hand-raised falcons and was the first to write about nurturing a bonding relationship between man and predatory bird. These experiments laid the groundwork for the future imprinting of falcons that would aid the restoration of the peregrine falcon and other raptors

throughout the world.

—In addition, his experiments with tame-hacking falcons around his lodge showed that the homing instinct of falcons could be developed to avoid their loss while hawking. By releasing hand-reared eyasses sequentially farther and farther from home, he documented the return of his trained peregrines from over 100 miles distance. Truth be told, some of his experiments were accidents, but they worked.

—Many notable falconers cut their teeth hawking red grouse on the Long Mynd with Ronald Stevens. The list includes Geoffrey Pollard, Jack Mavrogordato, Jacques Godard, and the Belgian Therese a Goes. The latter was reportedly also a talented dog trainer.

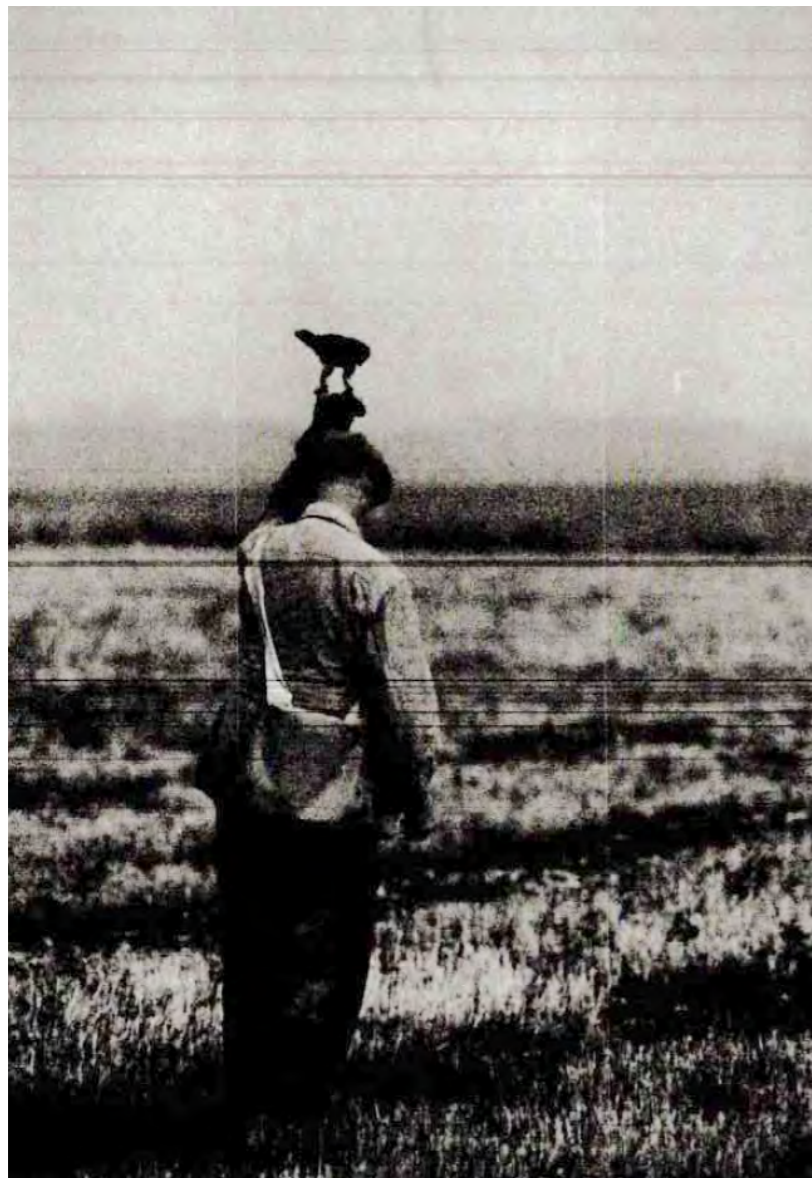
—It is a little-known fact that Stevens was an innovative hood designer who experimented with multiple patterns. He tried but failed to design a braceless hood that would slide easily onto a hawk's head but be difficult for the bird to dislodge.

—Lead was a known poison to both people and falconry birds long before Stevens' time. A perceptive man, he was bothered by the notion that trained hawks swallowed the lead shot often used for acquiring their food. To study the effects of lead on raptors, he experimentally fed pellets to a subject bird to observe the effects with and without castings. He counted the number of pellets fed to the hawk, as well as the number collected when the subject passed a casting. In this manner, he confirmed that lead housed in the gizzard was removed when hawks were fed casting material, but that they remained in place if no castings were included in the meal. We now know that many wild raptors die after ingesting minute portions of lead present in carcasses of scavenged and disabled game birds, as well as large and small mammals.

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Merlins in the Years Between

William Ruttledge

Don Ryan writes: "With the recent interest in merlins, I came across an article by William Ruttledge from the British Falconers' Club journal from 1979. William (or Bill) was originally born in Mayo but moved to the UK. He apparently had good success with merlins and visited Ireland a lot."

Many thanks to the British Falconers' Club for permission to republish this article. The photos reproduced here were taken by Ruttledge, but were not part of the 1979 article. They are printed here courtesy of Dr Neil Forbes.

Under the Protection of Birds Act 1954, the skylark became a protected bird in Great Britain, and was therefore no longer legal quarry for the trained merlin.

About 13 years later, thanks to much tactful work during the preceding years by Major-General O'Carroll-Scott as President, by Michael Woodford as the Honorary Secretary, of the BFC, and by the late Miss P. Barclay-Smith (Hon. Secretary of the International Council for Bird Preservation and an Honorary Member of the BFC), the Protection of Birds Act 1967 made provision for the granting of licences to take limited numbers of the natural and traditional quarries with trained hawks. This is embodied in Section 8(1)(c) which reads as follows: "A licence may be granted under section 10 of the Principal Act to kill, in the course of falconry, within an area specified in the licence, wild birds of any description so specified by flying birds of prey of any

description so specified." (Section 10 of the 1954 Act is that under which licences may be granted, for the purposes of falconry, to take – or to sell or import alive – birds of prey.)

It is my intention to give an account of my attempts during these intervening years to make use of autumn migrant merlins salvaged from the continental birdcatchers. I had been greatly impressed by the style of flying of the two wild-caught merlins that I had flown at jack snipe in Ireland (*The Falconer* I No. 2, pp.13-14, 1949; II No. 4, pp.30-32, 1951). Through the kindness of a Dutch falconer, I was put in touch with falconers in Belgium and received from them one passage merlin (Alma) and one haggard (Viva) in November 1960. I was then living in what has been described as 'the beautiful wooded Surrey Hills' and commuting to London on five days in the week. My aim and practice was to get the merlins flying to the lure as soon as



♂ Merlin 'Peppin' flown in Corlow
1932

possible, but until the days lengthened and I had sufficient daylight after my return from London, such activity had to be restricted to the weekends. I decided that I would ignore the moult, and I explored the possibility of flying the merlins at starlings on the Wiltshire Downs as soon as possible after the young starlings were on the wing.

I took part of my holiday in mid-June and worked up Alma for a slip at starlings. I had a ten-yard slip at about six, feeding around a sheep, on down-land. She flew one very hard in a straight-away climbing flight, in the direction of a shelter-belt of hawthorn trees about 400 yards away. I had her well in the binoculars until a large flock of lapwings got up in alarm, and I immediately lost sight of her against the milling mob of lapwings. I thought that she should have put the starling down in the hawthorns, but there was no sign of her there, nor sound of her bell (being deaf, I had the aid of someone not so handicapped). Nor was there any sign of her from five a.m. onwards on the following day. Months later I had evidence that she became established in the area.

The haggard, Viva, took no notice of starlings and was returned to the wild in September.

In mid-November I went over to Belgium and had an opportunity to see the setup of one or two of the birdcatchers, who were using clap-nets, ten yards long, with 'brace-birds' (fieldfare and redwing) to attract these passerines. The netter was concealed in a very obvious small portable wooden hut. The merlins and other raptors would also be attracted by the decoy birds 'in difficulties' and would be taken in the nets. Some, at least, of the netters would bring in such birds for an offered reward, but the

majority were destroyed.

I brought back two female merlins, a passager and a haggard. The former was lost at exercise in May, on ground that was too restricted to allow for emergencies. The haggard was taken to Wiltshire in mid-July for a few days. Thrown off at about ten yards at three young starlings amongst cattle, she put one down under one of the cattle and stooped back and forth. I failed to assist her and the starling slipped away to adjacent standing corn. In a similar slip, she checked at a skylark, which put in, and I did not try to re-flush. In other opportunities offered, she flew a single (and therefore possibly sick) starling, which quickly put in under our vehicle and was not seen again. She took no notice of a large flock of starlings, feeding in short grass, that would not let me get nearer than about 50 yards, and she quickly gave up starlings getting up in ones and twos out of longer grass at shorter distances. Seeing a party of starlings settle in this longer grass, she took off and flew really hard in that direction as though to surprise them, but gave up as soon as the starlings made off at speed.

It was concluded that this haggard was too wise in the ways of starlings, and she was returned to the wild in due course.

My all-too-brief experiences suggested that very special conditions would be needed for any serious attempt to fly a merlin at starlings. And the danger of loss attending a prolonged straight-away flight is obvious, particularly with a passage merlin.

The 1962 consignment from Belgium comprised a passage jack, a passage female, a haggard jack and a male hobby that bore worn short-cut jesses.

Fortunately, I retained the passage jack

for myself, because this led me in a more rewarding direction. Thinking that the jack, which, following my earlier choice of a Mozartian name, I called Cherubino, would be unlikely to take readily to starlings, I laid plans to visit Eire. I had to find a county in which there were large areas of 'blanket bog' on which the vegetation was likely to be fairly short and where there should be skylarks and meadow-pipits. Further, in such a country, there would have to be no Order under the Wild Birds Protection Act, 1930, that extended the close season for the skylark beyond the end of July (the standard date of its ending for common species at that time). This is all changed now under the Wildlife Act of 1976, in which, although provision is made for the issue of licences to take birds of prey from the wild for falconry, none is made for licences to take the traditional quarries.

Having chosen the county, in the far west, I set out with the jack hooded beside me, on 7 August 1963. After arrival at Dublin, I drove due west to County Galway and stayed briefly not far from Ronald Stevens, whom I visited at Fermoy Lodge. There I saw the magnificent building that he had put up to house probably one of the first pairs of peregrines in the current era of attempts at, and successes in, captive breeding (see *The Falconer* IV, No. 4, pp.151-157, 1964). I also saw the splendid Reid-Henry murals of birds of prey in the Lodge.

Motoring northwards through my native Co. Mayo, I reached Co. Sligo, where I enlisted a local boy to assist me for the afternoon in hearing the hawk-bell, and I had our first slip on the flat bog of my choice. The lark was a strong mounter, and the jack climbed in a direct line, but far wide of the lark. With binoculars I saw him put in two stoops. Then a wild female merlin joined in from below and followed the lark down. The jack began to circle, I lured and whistled, and to my great relief he plummeted down. Even I could hear the scream of the wind in his bell.

This seemed a very promising start. I consulted some men, who were stacking their turf (Anglice, 'peat') on one of the tracks into the bog, about where I might get accommodation locally, and as a result was gratified to find what became my base for that, and two further seasons. The enlisted boy, Matty Clark, was also prepared to come out whenever required. This unfortunately depended very largely on the weather; unsuitably strong wind and/or showers or rain restricted or prevented flying on about half of the following ten days.

However, my experiences encouraged me to think that it would be worthwhile to go there again. Moreover, we did take one lark, on 21 August, a groundling with front primaries just coming down. In due course the jack was returned to the wild.

One conclusion that I had reached was that the ground cover was just sufficiently long for a lark to put in quickly and safely if it realised that a merlin was in pursuit. With wild merlins present, the larks were adept at this, and we had found that it was almost impossible to re-flush such larks. This was particularly so when, in the prevailing windy weather, it seemed necessary to aim for longish slips in order to avoid the lark turning away downwind immediately. Furthermore, the larks were not plentiful. This led to the major conclusion that the assistance of a dog was necessary. I had already benefitted greatly in 1949 from the use of a biddable working terrier to find larks under similar conditions for an eyass merlin, and I determined that I must take a dog on any future occasion.

In 1964, Michael Woodford very kindly lent to me his GSP Carla, of whom he said that he did not mind if she was encouraged to point larks. I had a passage jack again (Don Giovanni, DG for short) that was also contributed by the Woodfords and gratefully accepted by me because time was getting on.

My Belgian consignment had not yet materialised, though it did so later. From it I also took to Eire a passage female that I had passed to Ken Wood, who was to join me later. DG was in good flying order, but Sabena had yet to be flown loose, and I worked her up to this before Ken arrived. I had also introduced both merlins to Carla working on the bog.

On the second day after Ken's arrival, Sabena entered herself in somewhat unorthodox fashion on the exercising ground. However, DG had shown no interest in larks on the bog, and, since two days had been lost to the weather, a special effort was needed to enter him. As he was inclined almost to wait on, we planned to mark down a lark, get Carla on point, throw off DG and flush the lark. This device worked well, DG flying the lark, putting it in and taking it.

During the next few days Carla found flights for both merlins, but even she was not always able to find the ones that put in. I have records of only three ringing flights, all by Sabena, in one of which two wild merlins took over and put down the lark in wonderful style. One of them took it at

ground level, the unsuccessful one then chivvying the other round a small turf stack. In a second one, Sabena put the lark down to some distant turf stacks, too far for us to mark the spot. The final one is given special mention later.

In the only ringing flight in which DG was involved, he was the 'quarry'! I had tried to get a slip for him while waiting on over a point, but before the lark got up, he took a dragonfly! At this moment a wild female merlin came up and assailed him, either as a trespasser or to rob him. A fine ringing flight ensued, DG keeping the air of his assailant until both were lost to view in the clouds – and this was a still, warm day. We were lucky to take him up about an hour later, rather shaken by his experience, but unhurt.

We saw wild merlins fairly regularly, so they must have managed to take their quota of larks and pipits (even more than their immediate needs, as shown later), but torn-off dragonfly wings on hummocks in the bog indicated that those insects were frequently taken.

When Ken's visit ended, he left Sabena with me for the remaining eight days of my stay, to fly and possibly to hack back. Actually, for various reasons, there were only three flying days. On the last of these days I lost DG, through over-confidence in his reliability to wait on and in Carla's to re-find a lark that he had put in. He went on the soar and in spite of luring over a wide area during the following days I never saw him again. At the time, I thought that the immediately best chance would be to go on flying Sabena in the hope that DG might come in. She took two easy ones and then went up after a ringer and put it down on a far ridge at the edge of the bog. The distance, later measured on the map, was greater than three-quarters of a mile. Just as she beat the lark in the air, a wild merlin joined her. I knew that the ridge lay beyond



Passage Merlin 'Nox' on Jack Snipe
Murrwash, March 1950.
21 days after capture

a small river that could be crossed only by a footbridge, involving a considerable detour. Matty and I were able to go much of the way by car. On reaching the ridge, I had hardly said to Matty that I thought we must be near the right spot when he said that he heard the bell. Almost immediately I saw a merlin on the top of a large boulder. I do not really know to this day if it was Sabena or the wild merlin! She did not permit a close approach by me and slipped away amongst other boulders. However, Matty was not sure that he had heard a bell at that moment. Anyway I decided not to intrude further but to come very early next morning. There was no doubt about the kill – lark feathers on the top of the boulder and scattered on the ground below. At least one could accord a very worthy half to Sabena.

Scanning and luring on the ridge produced nothing. But at 10.30 a.m., down on the bog, near to the spot where the flight had begun, Sabena came in. When I eventually got back to base at one p.m. her weight was no less than it had been 24 hours earlier.

Encouraged by the recovery of Sabena, I hooded her up and put her in the car, and then walked on into the bog, luring for DG. It was while I was doing this that I observed a wild female merlin behaving in an unusual manner, which I recorded in some detail as an instance of a wild merlin 'caching' a kill (a meadow-pipit). The then editors of *British Birds* just would not accept this! Not, anyway, until John Greaves sent in details of a similar observation, after which an account of both instances appeared in *British Birds* 61 No. 7, pp.310-3 11, 1968. The merlin, perched on a hummock in the bog, was watched with binoculars for about ten minutes from a distance of about 150 yards. She appeared at first to be spreading her wings as though preening, then to be picking at something with her beak. At intervals she ran round the base of the hummock or the circumference of the top of it, the centre of which was later found to have some heather, about four inches long, on it. The merlin permitted slow approach on foot to within about 60 yards and then flew off and perched on a turf stack about 200 yards away. The hummock was then seen to have a dark object, resembling a pencil, standing up a few inches, vertically, at its centre. On my reaching the hummock, the body and head of the pipit were also in a vertical position, head downward in the wiry four-inch heather and were invisible except when viewed from above. The hummock itself was about one foot high. I



was convinced that the merlin had placed the pipit in this position and had not, in alarm at my approach, dropped it in such a way that it had accidentally slipped into the heather of its own accord – a possibility to which the editors of *British Birds* attached considerable importance.

On my return about one and a half hours later, after fruitless luring for DG, the dead pipit had disappeared without any evidence of its having been plucked on any hummock in the vicinity, and a female merlin, presumably the same, was perched 100 yards away.

The subject of concealing/caching / storage of food is a wide one, on which our president wrote in *The Falconer* V Nos. 1, 2 and 3 (1967-1969), and which deserves

to be brought up to date. The habit seems to be most highly developed in Eleanor's falcon.

Further luring for DG in the afternoon and on the following day produced no result. His initial soar may have taken him right out of the area that I could cover.

I had really left myself too little time to try to hack Sabena back. However, it was at least gratifying that she remained for three days on the exercising ground, coming in to the lure and also following me round the field while exercising Carla. We found one lark for her, but it kept on putting in, and she did not take it. As I was to leave on the fourth day, I took her up to bring her back to England. I found that she had begun the moult, and during the next five days she

dropped a further four pairs of primaries and could hardly fly! Left out at a regular exercising ground in Surrey after these feathers had come down, she disappeared at once.

The score in Eire was not impressive: Sabena and DG each had six larks between 10 and 20 August. These larks had two to four old primaries still to drop.

I hoped that we might do better in 1965, but as it turned out, the less written about that season the better. It was disappointing both for Tim Bowles, who went over with me for part of the time, and for John Morris and John Greaves who joined me later. The weather was persistently stormy and wet. This was apparently attributable to a hurricane in the West Atlantic. About all that we learned was the advantage of my having come prepared to put up (on poles locally obtained) a rain/cat-proof weathering shelter.

Nevertheless, I returned home convinced that the future of lark-hawking lay not in the late-harvested and early-ploughed fields of the combine-harvester era, so different from the stubbles of the reaper-and-binder era described elsewhere in this number, but on moorland, and with the aid of a dog.

The opportunity, albeit with a vicarious element, arose after the 1967 Act. In 1973, I

had a Scottish-licensed eyass female merlin, Erica, which I planned to loan to Robbie Wilson for the first half of the flying season. He would be on leave then, and with the very considerable advantage of being home-based with his parents in Cornwall. He would later return her to me, since I had by then retired to Wiltshire where I hoped by then to have sufficient stubbles to fly her there. Robbie had a GSP, Bella, and the reader should be in no doubt that I urged him to employ her to find larks for Erica. This he did, and the combined operations resulted, I think, in 24 skylarks taken. I did the sensible thing by letting him complete the season in Cornwall, because there was still too much standing corn in Wiltshire.

After the 1973 season, Robbie gave me two colour prints of photographs, taken by one of his field, that show a close-up of an unflown skylark with Bella pointing it from less than a yard away!

Erica is now rising seven and a great-grandmother. A great-grandson distinguished himself in 1979 by taking a higher than usual proportion of his larks in the air.





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Lark-hawking with Merlins in Britain

Grant Haggard and Con Taylor, England
Photos by Rob Conohan, USA

The authors write: "This article was first published in the 2007 edition of the British Falconers' Club journal as 'The Lark in Winter'. The intention was not to help guide apprentice falconers to train and fly their first merlin. Nor was the intended reader those who wish to fly a merlin in late summer and to achieve a large number of kills when the larks are disabled by the moult. "Traditionally it is thought that lark hawking in winter is virtually impossible as merlins begin to refuse fully moulted larks towards the end of September. Further it is also assumed by many that intermewed merlins do not fly as well as first year eyasses.

"The intention rather than is to encourage merlin falconers to attempt to fly their merlin throughout the winter at a challenging and sporting quarry, where virtually every flight is a 'ringer' and vertically out of sight. And not only to do this with a young eyass, but to achieve it year after year with an intermewed merlin."

Special thanks to Dr Mike Nicholls for recommending this piece for inclusion in the Journal.

"Louis XIII kept hundreds of big hawks. He could have a good day's hawking whenever he liked at cranes, kites, or herons. Yet he did not disdain to devote a whole morning to lark-hawking with merlins, and was overjoyed at killing one lark with a cast of them. It is true that this was a winter lark, but it was only a lark for a' that!"

E. B. Michell, *The Art and Practice of Hawking* (1900)

The point of lark-hawking is not to catch skylarks but to witness excellent, high, ringing flights. Such flights can go so high

that the merlin, and certainly the lark, is out of sight, other than with binoculars. We are then treated to the excitement of a succession of stoops as the merlin attempts to take the lark, or at least get above it in the air. Sometimes after such a flight the merlin may kill the lark or merely just 'put it in.' Either way, this is a success, and we always feed up the merlin as a reward for her efforts. If the merlin is rewarded only when it kills, and not for the effort of a very high flight, it may equate success with killing a very easy lark. If it is rewarded after it has chased a lark 'to the Gates of Heaven' without quitting, and then followed

The photos in this article were taken by Rob Conohan on trips to England and Wales in August 2017 & August 2019



Con Taylor

it to cover, then it will always be willing to 'do it.' We think that this is the key to successfully obtaining excellent flights and encouraging merlins to fly ringing larks.

Also in *The Art and Practice of Hawking*, Michell says:

"As soon as the larks have all moulted they become practically all ringers. Such larks have never yet been taken regularly. Usually the merlins begin to refuse them in the latter part of September. The latest lark that I have killed was on a 7th of November."

And also:

"Any falconer who could succeed in taking them through the winter would have accomplished a greater feat than that of which Louis XIII was so proud."

We would like to explain how we have succeeded, season after season, in taking skylarks with intermewed merlins from September throughout the winter to January and even February.

Selection of the bird

In Britain today there is no choice but for domestic, aviary-bred merlins. We recognise types and families of merlins which can 'do it', while others don't seem capable. Grant has been breeding merlins for several years and it seems true that good merlins

that have shown themselves capable of exceptional flights have a good chance of producing young that are also capable. Only about a third of merlins trained are prepared to really succeed. We always try to breed from merlins that will, but often these are the ones that are lost or even killed, for example by foxes, while being flown.



Merlins are sometimes obtained from friends who have bred from good, proven birds, so a nucleus of domestic merlins exists from which there is a good chance that a young bird chosen could be a good performer. Sometimes one may breed from a wild disabled bird, and this must benefit the domestic population by bringing in new genes, though there is no guarantee that the offspring will be better than any other captive-bred bird.

Training

We do not here list the stages of early training, since the process should be familiar to those who already fly merlins, and may be found elsewhere for those who do not. Significant deviations from standard practice occur later, and these we detail below.

Advanced training

The debate on whether or not to hack eyass merlins has gone on for years. We have seen no evidence to suggest that, in the long run, merlins with a traditional hack are any better or worse than merlins trained straight from the aviary. Certainly imprinted merlins that have had a tame hack are quick to get entered, and some have been excellent performers, but then there have been many unhacked merlins that have also excelled in ringing winter flights. There is also a very good chance that young merlins will get lost when out to hack. For a fuller discussion of the hacking debate, we refer the reader to Bryan Carrick's article [in the 2007 edition of *The Falconer*]. Our preference is to get the hawk flying loose, and then to give a period of controlled hack.

Once a merlin is flying loose and will return to the fist and lure it is possible to tame hack it. On summer evenings our practice is take the bird to an area with small bushes and hedgerows, preferably where there are populations of suitable prey species around. We simply cast it off and allow it to take perch on a fencepost or whatever. We now just go for a walk and take the dog with us. At first the merlin won't fly around much, so keep an eye on it with binoculars. Give any likely bush or hedgerow a tap to try to flush likely quarry. The merlin soon gets the idea and will fly after quarry (including, at first, butterflies) that is moved in this way. It must be borne in mind that most small birds are legally off-limits, and that the laws are subject to change. In any case, the object isn't to catch anything, just to encourage the young merlin to use her wings and get fit.



Two people can take their merlins out together in this way, and the birds have fun chasing each other and their quarry. We walk and talk and exercise the dogs – a good way to spend a summer evening.

This is a good time to practise throwing the lure into long grass when we call the merlin back; we encourage her to take the lure in grass or crops so she isn't afraid of following a lark into cover. At this time we alternate between calling to the fist and the lure, and finish off with a good stooping session to encourage fitness – “Stoop the Granny out of it!”



Grant Haggard Entering

The legal season for flying skylarks with merlins in Britain is from 1 September to 28 February. Traditionally merlins would be flown at larks in August, but there was always the risk that there would be very young larks around during that month and that the adults would not yet be moulting. Intermewed merlins must be started where they left off the season before. They will be hard-penned in August, but don't be in too much of a hurry to get them entered on easy larks. Spend August and even early September getting the merlins fit with plenty of lure work.

September

Weaker larks will hold to point by the dogs, while stronger larks will flush of their own accord. In this way early flights for a young merlin are to be found. Sometimes the young merlin will refuse lark after lark before it finally goes. Don't despair, as slow-starting merlins often turn out better in the long run. We don't want a merlin that can slaughter easy larks in September, but one that will consistently take on high-flying larks through the winter.

Always feed a young merlin up on a kill, even if a weak flight, and also feed up after

a good flight followed by a put-in. This will encourage the merlin to try harder next time. When the merlin kills a lark she will often have started to eat it by the time you get to her. We usually let her have the head and neck and then call her to the fist or throw the lure down beside her. She will prefer to feed up on a chick and leave the lark. The dead lark is retrieved and goes in the freezer for feeding later.

A fit, intermewed hawk will catch easy lark after easy lark in September. It's easier said than done, but try to find good larks for the merlin. We have tried different parts of the country at this time of year. It may be





merlin as near to the put-in as possible. Sometimes this isn't possible, as the merlin comes back after a flight to find you! We still feed up.

The merlin will now start to refuse more and more larks during October. The first winter migrants also arrive from continental Europe in October and these are normally invincible. If we walk all afternoon and the merlin has refused lark after lark, we won't feed up until the end of the afternoon or early evening. If the merlin refuses flushed larks it can be worth not feeding up, and waiting till the late afternoon. Sometimes she will take on a ringer later in the day while refusing earlier. Don't reward with a feed up after the merlin returns after an unsuccessful flight. Instead give a good session of stooping to the lure and feed up after that.

Always feed up when the merlin puts a lark in.

November

Late October and early November are the hardest months in which to catch larks. It is important, though, not to give up, as they do become catchable again, usually after mid-November. Probably wild merlins don't even try to catch these strong winter larks. You have to be prepared to keep trying. If she continues to refuse, it can pay to hood her up without feeding and try later the same day.

After the first frosts we find that some easy larks will be caught. They do not ring and only climb to less than treetop height before they put in. This is the encouragement that the merlins need to take them through the winter. They will then start taking on high ringers again and excellent flights are obtained. But don't forget the rule to feed up as a reward for taking on a high flight without quitting. It

Grant Haggar

that in South Wales larks are all too easy, but are better in the Midlands. September is a good time to take your annual holiday and be prepared to travel around the country to find good larks to suit the merlin.

Not all September larks are weak, and we have had ringing flights with intermewed merlins as early as 2 September.

October

There will still be a few late-moulters in the first week of October, and some flights can be quite disappointing. However, as the larks are stronger then, generally high-ringing flights will be achieved. Always feed up after a good flight and a put-in. Don't be tempted to find another lark and fly again, even if the merlin fails to kill. You will reap the rewards later in the season. Never re-flush the lark after a put-in. The lark may be caught but this only serves to reward the merlin for killing after a 'rat-hunt' and not for the high flight.

It is important to point out the value of binoculars when following high flights. Without binoculars it would be difficult to decide whether the merlin is stooping at a lark which is heading for cover, or whether the merlin is quitting while the lark is in the air. Of course the former must be rewarded with a feed-up, while it is essential not to reward the latter. When the flight goes out of sight we tend to assume that the merlin has not quit, but put the lark in, and reward her accordingly. It's essential to get to the



Con Taylor

doesn't matter whether the lark is taken or merely put in.

Don't be fooled into thinking that these easier November larks are emaciated and starved. When they are taken by the merlin, they are still found to be full of fat. In one year a high ringer caught on 5 November was fed to the merlin. The lark was so full of fat that the merlin didn't fly well for the next few days and kept quitting on ringers. It wasn't until 11 November that she was again willing to chase a lark up out of sight!

December

November flights can often be characterised by the merlin rushing to get above the lark, putting in feint stoops and trying to force the lark earthwards. By December, however, ringing flights are more often to be had. This may be due to the reduced ground cover for the retreating lark, or it may be that the merlins gain the confidence to ring up rather than simply make a quick dash for height and superiority.

January

As winter moves on, some larks remain catchable. In January some can be very easy indeed. Others will ring up out of sight and leave the hawk standing. Somehow the merlin will sense whether a lark is catchable or not. She will refuse several larks in succession until the one she wants gets up. When this takes her up out of sight of binoculars and results in a put-in, this is the sort of flight we want. Sometimes the flight is not only high, but goes a relatively long distance, say a couple of miles. Without telemetry the merlin would eventually be unrecoverable after these long winter flights.

Winter larks seem to be feeding only on vegetable matter, as there are no insects around. Oilseed rape and associated weeds seem to be a favourite winter food, and larks feeding on it are often in good fat condition. We wonder whether it is the lack of insects in the diet that makes some larks weaker, even though they still carry body fat reserves.

Good merlins at this time of year are so fit that they never seem to be breathless when they take on a ringer. Even when they come back after a flight out of sight they never seem to be puffing.



February

Although larks have been caught in February (as late as the 11th), we now stop at the end of January. With the recent mild winters experienced in the south of England, larks start singing and courting in February and so they are best left alone. Also, insects start to become abundant, and undoubtedly the larks would again become invincible.

It is better to finish in January and decide to cut the season short if a particularly good flight has ensued on one day. We think that feeding up after an exceptionally high flight is the best note on which to finish.

Golden rules for obtaining high ringing flights:

- Be happy with a good flight followed by a put-in;
- Always feed up on a put-in or a kill;
- Never re-flush a lark that has put in;
- Feed up at the location of the put-in, or as near as possible.

Lark hawking should be about good flights, not about catching larks!





Year One of 'Project Rowland'

Merlins in the Field

Robert Hutchinson, Co. Offaly

Photos by Aodhán Brown, Co. Antrim

I'm writing this article in my hunting room, my cave. It was purpose built for all my gear. It's a large room; however, there is very little space. I am surrounded by 40-odd jackets and trousers, three-and-a-half pairs of wellies, associated boots and runners, fishing rods and tackle for salmon and trout, stalking sticks, hundreds of long socks, short socks, dog leads, terrier locators and associated well-used trenching spade. The tabletops have my falconry weighing scales, medicines for dogs and hawks, hunting horns. There are three bookcases containing hundreds of magazines and books covering topics from falconry and hunting to trees and

wildlife conservation. On the wall are prints, maps, pictures and a gold medal sika head. I have shelves full of camping gadgets, torches, sleeping bags and rucksacks... and more, much more.

It is quiet in here, a great place to think and reflect. It is also quite smelly, a place I man my falcons and allow my terriers to mend. Three aromatic pointers wander around restless. I can see the moon, and hear the bell of my merlin sat proud on an indoor block. His season is now over and I have already found a breeding female to pair up with him, so fingers crossed. He represents one of two merlins bred for the IHC this year, thanks to the generosity of Grant Hagggar and Mike Nicholls, and

.....
Above, left to right: Jamesie King, Wayne Davis, Robert Hutchinson, Keith Barker, Don Ryan, Grant Hagggar



the breeding expertise and hard work of Sharron Redington.

As I've previously mentioned on the club's Facebook page, I remain deeply nostalgic about my early experiences of merlin fieldmeets in Ireland: long summer days, lots of banter and pints of porter. In 2018 I was shocked to learn that no one was flying merlins at quarry, which led to 'Project Rowland' being hatched, which quickly attracted the right kind of support here and in England. Our aims are simple:

- Fly merlins at quarry;
- Organise fieldmeets that inspire others to take up the sport;
- Breed merlins and provide them to IHC members to fly;
- Adhere to the highest of standards.

So, to recap on Year One: merlins were donated to the project; we had successful breeding; and a fieldmeet was organised in Kerry at which Don Ryan, Grant Hagggar and myself flew merlins.

I have no doubt this branch of falconry will become more popular as the quality of the sport improves and those interested experience a merlin meet first-hand. Rowland, I am sure, would be proud of what he inspired.



Year One of 'Project Rowland'

Merlin Breeding Project 2019

Sharron Redington, Co. Clare



The Irish Hawking Club decided to initiate a merlin breeding project, and two pairs were sourced. I volunteered to take one of the pairs, and the other pair as far as I know went to a breeder in the UK. The female I had was kindly donated by Dr Mike Nichols, and the jack, who was a proven breeder, was donated by Grant Haggar.

So, fast-forward to 30 April, when I saw what I thought to be the first successful copulation between the pair. I was delighted when I saw them on the CCTV, as I was starting to think it was a case of 'maybe next year.'

The first egg arrived on 6 May, and then soon enough they had a clutch of four eggs. I thought it was best to leave them with the clutch full term as they seemed to be sitting OK. After a bit of a shaky start, they took turns at incubation. On 6 June I took the eggs and checked to see if they were close to draw-down, and marked the air cells. One of the eggs had been broken by the pair, but three from four was pretty good going for first-time layers.

The eggs started to pip on Monday evening, 10 June, and so the nervous wait began. By early Wednesday morning none of them had hatched, so I decided to remove the eggs and check they were still alive. Luckily they were all still alive, but badly crushed. On closer examination, the first two eggs were shut down and I managed to hatch them out. The third egg had not shut down, so I put it in the hatcher for a further



Photos courtesy of Sharron Redington



Above: 24 days old



Right: One of the merlin eggs, totally crushed during the early stage of hatching, before I decided to intervene



five hours and did another assisted hatch after it had shut down.

The first two chicks were a male and a female; the third chick sadly died at day ten. In the past I have been lucky enough to produce gyr x merlins and peregrine x merlins which were fairly hard work, but I found the pure merlins harder still, and it really was a bit of a rollercoaster ride with them.

I have held back the female for breeding, and hopefully she will go on to produce some more merlins for IHC members in the very near future. The number of chicks produced was small, but the fact that the IHC merlin project produced chicks in its first year I think is a great achievement, and I'm confident over the coming years the project will become more and more successful.



Left: Clutch of four merlin eggs from the IHC pair - three fertile with the draw-down marked and one infertile/broken



The Road to National Intangible Cultural Heritage

Don Ryan, Dublin

The journey for Irish falconry to acquire National Intangible Cultural Heritage (NICH) status began when it was first added to the representative list of the UNESCO Convention on 16 November 2010.

This was the culmination of over six years' work by 11 nations, led by the authorities in the United Arab Emirates, and including Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Korea, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Mongolia, Morocco and Spain. It was the largest ever nomination in the history of the UNESCO convention. Since 2013, we now celebrate World Falconry Day on the date of inscription, 16 November, every year.

With the initial hard work to get falconry recognised by UNESCO as an Intangible Heritage complete, it was up to each country that had a tradition in falconry to begin their own journey to have it inscribed on their National List. This is complicated. In the first instance, each country needs to be signed up to the UNESCO Convention for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritages. In 2010, Ireland had not signed up to this Convention and no amount of posturing or lobbying by the small falconry community in Ireland was ever going to make this happen. Frustrating as it was, we had to wait patiently. Finally, this moment arrived in December 2015, when Ireland signed the Convention. This was no doubt helped by the louder voices of the uilleann pipe and hurling communities that were nominated for inscription in 2016 and 2017 respectively.

With the club's busy events of 2016 out of the way, work began in earnest on our own journey for NICH in June 2017. Contact was initiated with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, and two months later, on 15 August, Gary Timbrell and I met with Thérèse O Connor and Stephen Kenneally from the department at their offices on 23 Kildare Street, Dublin, where we discussed our intention to put falconry forward for the National List. Communication continued between us until November 2017, when Heather Humphries, minister of that department, made a press



announcement inviting expressions of interest for a National List celebrating Ireland's living culture. It continued:

"Once compiled, the list will acknowledge and promote Ireland's living culture through official State recognition. In tandem with this, it will fulfil Ireland's obligations under the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which Ireland signed up to in December 2015 to raise awareness of, and respect for, our unique living culture."

Minister Humphries went on to say: "The traditions and practices of our communities are the backbone of Irish culture and identity. They mould our past, inform our present and pave the way for our future. Up to the present day, they have been a source of great inspiration and pride to our people. I believe that it is our responsibility to acknowledge and celebrate them at a national level for the Ireland of tomorrow."

The closing date for receiving Expression of Interest applications was given as Wednesday, 31 January 2018.

The IHC team created to help complete this application included myself, Hilary White, Gary Timbrell and Eoghan Ryan. Our Expression of Interest, in the form of a comprehensive seven-page document, was submitted five days before the deadline, on Friday, 26 January 2018. Copies of this submission are available on request but the department's online version contains much of the content.

The anxious wait then began. Throughout that time, the department received a number of concerned phone calls and emails seeking an update on our submission. Doubts and fear crept in as we began to believe our Expression of Interest had been unsuccessful. Delays were further



The official launch of Ireland's National Inventory on 18 July 2019. Left to right: IHC president Martin Brereton; Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Josepha Madigan; Hilary White, IHC member and board member of the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey

compounded by a change to the minister sitting over that department, as Heather Humphries was replaced by TD Josepha Madigan in late November 2017.

Finally, after an anxious and frustrating wait of over 18 months, on 11 July 2019, we got a phone call from an official in the department with an update on the IHC submission. The following day, we received a letter confirming that 'The Art and Practice of Falconry' had achieved National Intangible Cultural Heritage status.

There was an official launch of Ireland's National Inventory of ICHs held at the Waterways Ireland Visitor Centre on Grand Canal Dock, Dublin 2, on Thursday, 18 July which I attended with Hilary White and club president Martin Brereton. Minister Josepha Madigan was present, and the event and news was reported widely in both the newspapers and on national radio and television.

At the launch, Minister Madigan spoke of the importance of protecting our cultural heritage:

"Each of these threads in the cultural tapestry of our lives makes us richer as individuals and as a country. None of this would be possible without the work of committed volunteers all around the

country, whose involvement in their communities' cultural practices and heritage traditions have sustained them over the generations. I am delighted to honour those customs, practices and traditions through official State recognition on the National Inventory."

The falconry community was delighted with the news. It was a fantastic result and couldn't have come at a better time. This inscription represents an official acknowledgment that serves to protect and promote the art and practice of falconry. It is fitting recognition to the past and current generation of falconers that have sustained our heritage throughout the ages and now encourages us to present our practice, fundamentally unchanged, to future generations.

So what is an Intangible Cultural Heritage and what does it mean for the Irish falconry community?

Wikipedia describes an ICH as "a practice, representation, expression, knowledge, or skill, as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts, and cultural spaces that are considered by UNESCO to be part of a place's cultural heritage. In 2001, UNESCO made a survey among States and NGOs to try to agree on a

definition, and the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage was drafted in 2003 for its protection and promotion.”

The UNESCO website gives more detailed information on how important it is:

“While fragile, intangible cultural heritage is an important factor in maintaining cultural diversity in the face of growing globalization. An understanding of the intangible cultural heritage of different communities helps with intercultural dialogue, and encourages mutual respect for other ways of life.

“The importance of intangible cultural heritage is not the cultural manifestation itself but rather the wealth of knowledge and skills that is transmitted through it from one generation to the next. The social and economic value of this transmission of knowledge is relevant for minority groups and for mainstream social groups within a State, and is as important for developing States as for developed ones.

“Intangible cultural heritage is:

- Traditional, contemporary and living at the same time;
- Inclusive: we may share expressions of intangible cultural heritage that are similar to those practised by others... [whether] they are from the neighbouring village, from a city on the opposite side of the world;
- Representative: intangible cultural heritage is not merely valued as a cultural good, on a comparative basis, for its exclusivity or its exceptional value. It thrives on its basis in communities and depends on those whose knowledge of traditions, skills and customs are passed on to the rest of the community, from generation to generation, or to other communities;
- Community-based: intangible cultural heritage can only be heritage when it is recognized as such by the communities, groups or individuals that create, maintain and transmit it.”

Interpreting the above descriptions from the Wikipedia and UNESCO websites, it’s fair to say that having an NICH is a pretty cool thing. Although we’ve finally got it, we still need to get Ireland on the Representative List of UNESCO to join the other 20 countries that are currently on that list. As of September 2019, this is a work in progress.

This is by no means the end of the matter. We can’t just pat ourselves on the back and say, “Job done, nothing more to see here.” Maintaining our heritage is ongoing; it’s an endless work in progress.



That is why clubs like the Irish Hawking Club are so important. We need to represent our sport in the best possible light. We need to encourage its development by safeguarding the past and nurturing the present. Only by doing this can we ensure it remains safe for future generations. This is what Rowland Eustace worked so hard for over many decades and long before they put a label of NICH on it. For us to do any less would dishonour all that have gone before. And it’s a really simple thing to do; support your club. Turn up to the events and fieldmeets that are organised by your hard-working committee. Offer help to anyone of any age who reaches out for it. And finally, of most importance, go out and practise your sport to the highest possible standard in the beautiful wild landscapes that only the sport of falconry can take you to.

