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**Irish
Hawking
Club
Journal
2021**



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POLICY & OBJECTIVES

The Irish Hawking Club is dedicated to the sport and practice of falconry and to the conservation and dissemination of knowledge of birds of prey.

Membership is open to those who support or 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.



EDITOR'S WELCOME

Welcome to the 2021 Irish Hawking Club Journal, another fantastic round up of falconry tales and images. As the lockdowns restricted field meets and limited travel for the entire 2020 - 21 hawking season, it has been a challenge to gather articles for this journal. However, there have been brilliant contributions from falconers far and wide, both from club members and non club members, giving this journal quite an International feel! It is great to see both the diversity and similarity of falconry in different countries. The fundamentals are ultimately the same!

This year's journal is full of articles that really capture the relationships between falconers and their hawks, which I think is what draws most of us into falconry. This journal also showcases the variety of hunting styles of longwings flown in different countries, over different terrains at a wide variety of quarry.

This is the second year of a three year term as editor that I have committed to. I am delighted at how well the first two journals have turned out and welcome any contributions that will go towards making my third one just as good. I am juggling this role along with a lot of other commitments. I have a young family, I work in two different jobs as a midwife involving crazy shifts and on-call hours, am doing two college courses and have the falconry and beekeeping seasons keeping me busy in my spare time. So if the articles arrive without me chasing them, it goes a long way to getting a journal produced. Putting them all together is the fun bit!

So lose yourself in the following pages, and let these stories inspire your coming hawking season! I hope that this season our calendar of fieldmeets becomes a reality, and to meet friends old and new in the coming months.

Yours in sport,

Darry Reed

IHC Editor



Cover Art:

Image of painting 'Wisp' by Johan Kolman

Cover Design by Darry Reed



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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

I hope this journal finds you all in good health after what has been an extraordinary year, not only for the club but for society as a whole. It seems like long ago when we took for granted getting together for fieldmeets, club meetings and socials. Hopefully we are soon getting back to normality with the restrictions on outdoor and indoor activities beginning to be more relaxed enabling us to get together once again.

Our club is badly in need of an AGM, hopefully this will be achieved soon with perhaps a fieldmeet organised for the daytime and then the AGM later to mull over some club business and for the election of a small number of new officers replacing those that have completed their three year term or more. If you feel you have something to offer to the running of the club, or know someone who would fit into that category to nominate, then please do get in touch with the committee. It seems a daunting task at first but once you get involved and see the way things are organised then a committee position is not too demanding at all.

We have a healthy calendar of events pencilled in so far with the opener in Sneem Co. Kerry from 3 - 6 September in the form of a Small Hawk Meet. I must emphasise that 'small' in fact means 'all', as there will always be a warm welcome for any hawk or falcon at this venue, even if you are manning a young hawk in preparation for the season ahead - it would be an opportunity not to be missed. Also, any new members who do not yet own a hawk and are curious as to what goes on at these events, do come along and see and meet a few of our members, but make sure you have a comfortable pair of drinking shoes packed into your bag.

The committee have been working away on behalf of the club in the background. Don Ryan has kept the NPWS on their toes with issues within a government department that clearly are in disarray. Wild take was again cancelled just as restrictions were being relaxed, and without Don's intervention and subsequent reversal of their decision, five licenses would not have been issued to falconers in Ireland. We as a group are working on behalf of the members of the

Irish Hawking Club, but yet only one of the five successful applicants was a paid up member of our organisation. I hope that this year the four other successful candidates appreciate the time and effort that goes into the maintenance of the wild take on the island of Ireland by the Irish Hawking Club, for the benefit of all falconers whether club members or not.

We have had two remote meetings with the NPWS during the summer relating to CITES and Licensing. It is clear from these two encounters that the Departments are in my view desperately in need of reform from the top down, as both departments complain of overworking and understaffing causing the issues with the paperwork and issuing of licenses and the mess we find ourselves in today. Most documents applied for to the CITES office can only be expected to be processed within a 30 day turn around, but yet I have had some with a completed turn around of 10 days and others 60. We are offered excuses like Brexit increased workload, but Brexit has been coming for a long time, and all the while the Irish government have been urging us to get Brexit ready. What have the NPWS been doing to get prepared?

Travelling to the UK remains a big problem for anyone wishing to take a CITES registered hawk or falcon for the purpose of falconry. At the moment it is import/export both ways, dealing with two departments - NPWS and CITES in Ireland and Animal Health in the UK. Processing import/export certificates again has a 30 day quote for each application, each application runs in tandem with the previous so the realistic scenario is it could take three months to secure paperwork for a short, week long hawking trip in the Scottish Highlands hawking grouse or lowland game, say at a fieldmeet by invitation from our friends across the water.

This of course works both ways and our overseas members wishing to visit Ireland for the traditional snipe hawking calendar or other events will have to go through the same protocol. There is another alternative in the form of the POC document, (personal owner certificate) which some EU countries

have adopted, as has the United Kingdom. Unfortunately Ireland is not one of them, which is annoying as it would make a falconer's life relatively simple, to be able to apply for the document and then travel freely over and back without the burden of multiple applications, processing fees and a whole lot of waiting time. We are doing our very best to persuade the Irish CITES management authority to see sense and embrace the POC document in line with other EU member states, but until this arrangement is ratified I'm afraid we will just have to put up with the frustrating system we have in place.

We have been informed by the licensing section that the practice of wild take will once again be the subject of a review, even though one was conducted not that long ago which obviously did not go in the department's favour. We made it clear that we would be pleased if the review would be considered on the merits of science and not sentiment, and also asked if the 23 eagles wild taken from Norway on behalf of the NPWS recently would be taken into consideration.

For those of us who are taking up fresh hawks for the coming hawking season, I wish you good luck with the training and entering of them. For those who have lost hawks over the last twelve months, as outlined in my last report in the Spring Newsletter, I hope you have found a suitable replacement to carry on with our wonderful sport.

Good luck for the 2021 hawking season.

Regards,

Keith Barker

IHC President



HAWKING IN THE PANDEMIC

by Eric Witkowski

CO. KERRY

Another season has just passed. It was rather strange for us here in Ireland as we had not held a single fieldmeet despite the many that we had planned earlier in the year. The pandemic situation also limited our movement around the country, isolating me from many good flying areas.

I started my snipe hawking season at the end of July 2020 with a new Irish tiercel bred by Bruce Wilkie from the midlands of Ireland. Sadly, Bruce passed away only a few weeks after selling me the bird and never saw the progress of his offspring. Bruce was a keen falconer himself, flying a cracking tiercel in previous seasons and was looking forward to flying the same bird once he moulted.

The tiercel's weight empty was 660g, the same as my previous Irish tiercels. Lure training went well but hood training not so well; he wasn't happy with his hood, and that never changed. This tiercel was the most challenging to hood out of all the falcons I have ever trained. More like a goshawk to hood and dodged it at every occasion.

After a couple of weeks he was ready to fly free. By the first week of September, I felt he was strong enough to show him snipe. At this

time of year, snipe are scarce in Ireland with mainly resident snipe holding in swampy, overgrown places that are difficult to fly. They are also very familiar with the landscape and know where to safely bail from stooping falcons. Knowing all that, I had little hope of success and only wanted to see my tiercel's focus and stamina develop.

His pitch after flying to a dropped lure wasn't impressive, only around 40-50m. On the other hand it was high enough to begin with and improved slowly each time he was served snipe, on which he appeared very keen and stooped hard. Unfortunately most birds bailed. However a few flights were good and he tried really hard putting in a nice tail chase after a missed stoop. Finally he bagged his first snipe on 18 September. Knowing from experience with my previous tiercel, the first snipe kill is a big event for an eyass peregrine. I expected him to improve a lot in terms of his attempt to kill another.

As the winter slowly approached, we were able to find more snipe. However, after the tiercel's first success, the expected improvement didn't come. He tried a few more snipe but with no luck. At this stage I

became really worried as he began to lose his confidence in attack; a key attribute needed to succeed and so important in this branch of falconry. I was happy with wing power and speed but there was an obvious lack of footing skills, despite flying hard for 20-30 minutes daily. Patience is one of the most important things in falconry (beside many others) so I waited and kept trying. His second kill happened eight days after the first one. Not a great kill but I was glad to have it. Unfortunately, this time it appeared the tiercel had potential to carry his prey. Snipe size makes carrying an especially easy vice. Some peregrines tend not to carry, unless you rob them. This guy from the very beginning had a tendency to carry without clear reason. After a few more kills I knew this could be a major issue. It never changed in his first season. It became especially risky to fly in the mountains and near rivers. One day was memorable, when he killed a snipe at the bottom of the mountain, then picked it up and carried it 400m to the summit. Believe me, it wasn't a pleasant climb.

At the beginning of October I reclaimed the other tiercel, bred by Matt Gage in the UK. This would be his third season. At the end of the first season, he was slowly becoming a good snipe hawk and I was looking forward to flying him the following year. Unfortunately, moulting problems made the season start late, around Christmas, and his performance wasn't as expected.

His second moult went well and we were ready just as the snipe appeared in large numbers. Again, the progress was slow at first. This is quite unusual, as once a tiercel is made, it should be performing well in future seasons. Some days were better than others, and there were occasions when he simply blanked snipe. On good days I was able to see progress. There were a few kills during this time but I didn't see great enthusiasm from him. This changed around mid-December when he bagged six snipe in seven days. I knew this was the breakthrough for him.

A similar change happened with the brown bird. At the beginning of December he became noticeably keener on snipe, a welcome improvement after many weeks of uncertainty. Some periods of blanking snipe were quite frustrating. I knew focusing on one type of prey was the key to success. If



we introduced easier prey, he would give up on snipe. After a few good days killing snipe from a low/medium pitch my expectations rose of him gaining higher pitches. A pitch of between 50-90m is best to start your inexperienced hawk on snipe. When we achieved a satisfying level of confidence, I decided to raise the bar and let them climb higher.

Based on past experience with former tiercels, I knew stoops above 150m are rarely successful. The greater speeds achieved from high pitches may not allow the tiercel to successfully react to the snipe's jink as it would at lower speeds. This season I wanted to try something more challenging and serve the tiercels only when they reached heights above 150m. Thanks to GPS systems it is possible to calculate the precise position.

With the intermewed tiercel, the success rate dropped a lot at higher pitches. From six snipe killed in seven days at 90-150m, down to one or two snipe a week.

The brown tiercel somehow adapted quicker and was more successful. He scored a number of snipe each week with many taken in the first stoop. His highest pitch stoop was over 240m and I felt that was an important milestone. After that day, he killed snipe from a good pitch regularly.





My breed of choice are Irish red setters. Max is four years old, and already well experienced, Axel is almost ten years old and slowly heading towards retirement. Both are excellent at finding snipe, working wide and fast. Tireless in work, they can run all day without a break. Good snipe hawking dogs must be steady on point, able to hold it for a long time and flush on command even from a good distance. I am already thinking about Axel's successor and am considering an Irish red and white setter. Pointers aren't really my cup of tea.

From what I've seen in the past season, both these tiercels look very promising. I keep my fingers crossed for a clean moult and am already looking forward to next season.



To achieve success at high pitches, both tiercels had to adopt a different killing technique. This can be seen in the slow motion videos I took during the season. While flying at a lower pitch, my past tiercels were able to react to the changes in snipe trajectory and followed with a quick leg snatch to catch the snipe. Footing ability for a successful kill using that method had to be amazing. My current tiercels at high pitches had no choice but to adopt a different way of stooping with speeds of 200kph and some over 250kph. Such speeds left them no chance to rapidly change flight direction. Instead they both focussed on the snipe's flight pattern in order to predict where their paths would cross. In the past knowing that snipe can move fast in any direction I didn't expect this could be successful. However, my current tiercels proved that this could be done. Both developed efficient ways of killing snipe at high speed. Somehow, my old tiercel was able to direct the snipe into a desired position to kill with an angled strike. I saw a similar ability from my brown tiercel.

The last few weeks of the season are always best. Hawks fly in superb condition above their chamber weight, yet so confident and

efficient in the hunt while flying at a good pitch. On one occasion, my brown tiercel amazed me with four stoops in one flight, all from between 170m and 230m. He didn't make a kill that day as the first two bailed and the others jinked. Another day he got his warm meal after a 180m stoop, then carried it off. I saw him land a few hundred meters away and began to make my way towards him. Then I noticed the GPS signal move over forestry to land 1.5km away. It was a difficult walk through high grass and soft ground. When I got nearer, I saw him come over me. I thought he may still be carrying his snipe but no, he came back to a dead pigeon without his prey. First, I thought he may have been robbed by ravens or even a wild falcon. With his bad carrying habit and quite possessive over food, I never expected he would stash his prey. But he did! We went to the spot where he landed and found an untouched snipe. No feather was even plucked! Nice surprise after a slow start. Both tiercels gave me much joy this season, but also many head scratching days at the beginning. But nothing is easy in this branch of falconry.

Snipe hawking on Irish bogs is hard to imagine without very good pointing dogs.



FALCONRY ANTICS

By Nick Fox

WALES

Whenever I'm in Ireland everyone is so friendly and cheerful. The hospitality is legendary. Surely falconry is all about having fun? It gets me thinking about some of the incidents I have had out hawking over the years. In falconry, the opportunities to make a complete dork of oneself are endless...

One January many years ago when I was even sillier than I am now, I was hawking on a farm in the English Midlands, alongside the river Trent. I saw a cluster of mallard a couple of hundred yards upstream. In a situation like this you only get one chance; you have to flush the ducks cleanly before they realise there is a hawk in the mix. So I marked the spot and did a 'P' loop. I loosened the braces on my goshawk's hood, crept to the spot and rushed over the bank. This is when things started to go awfully wrong. The ducks weren't exactly where I thought they were. They were about twenty yards further on. They flushed well enough and the gos shot off after them, but they had too much lead on her and she knew it. So she broke off the chase and wheeled round, and - oh look - spotted a hare out on a frozen plough 200 yards away. Without further ado she flew straight at it and before it could go very far she hit it and killed it stone dead.

Hmm. The river was about 50 yards wide and I could swear ice floes were floating down it. And amongst our little party was a lady not used to the ways of falconers. There were no bridges... Any glimmer of salvation faded. There was nothing for it but to strip off and swim. Wearing only a hawking glove, my knickers and a grimace, I slid down the muddy bank into the torrid brown water. Within a few yards it got too deep to wade and I had to strike out across the current, drifting slowly down the river. Reaching the far side and gasping back a heart attack, I scaled the river bank and started out across the plough. Whoever said falconry is like a religion was damn well right. I felt like a fakir walking on red hot coals. I tottered across the ridges hopping and skipping like a sugar plum fairy. As I approached the gos it was plain she wasn't delighted to see me. And

I felt very naked and exposed. Gibbering with cold I managed to pick her up and hold the hare behind my back. Periodically she caught sight of it and bated madly. Feet now too numb to notice the bruising, I eventually reached the river. What to do now? I set the gos down on a tussock, slid down into the water and kept the hare out of sight under the surface. Slowly and laboriously I sort of doggy-paddled my way back across the river. Standing in some rank, evil smelling mud, I could see the ribald grins of my companions and the look of horrified fascination on the lady. This only intensified as I hurled a soggy hare up past her, accompanied moments later by a very eager and possessive goshawk. I was too numb to speak coherently as I wrestled with my clothes, trying to pull them onto wet frozen limbs.

There is something about rivers that just asks for trouble. I had a male gos once when I was a student in Scotland. He used to love bathing in the river, which at that point was tidal. I would run alongside waving my lure pathetically at every gap in the vegetation hoping that, when he had finished, he would



swim ashore on my side, not the other.

And then of course there was a sparrowhawk who would bath in anything. Including fresh cow pats... Or the falcon who caught a crow in a flooded bomb crater on the Ranges, the one with a stinking rancid sheep carcass floating in it. Nobody would come with me in the hawking van on the way home.

“There were no bridges... Any glimmer of salvation faded. There was nothing for it but to strip off and swim. Wearing only a hawking glove, my knickers and a grimace, I slid down the muddy bank into the torrid brown water.”

On another occasion hawking at Hotbank, along Hadrian's Wall, we'd had a tough day and were heading back to the lorries. There were a pair of crows in the meadow near Cragg Lough and my companions urged me to slip. I knew it would all end in tears, but I succumbed; we were getting desperate. The falcon went in fast and we galloped down to get them away from the willows fringing the lough. We succeeded only too well, the flight got going and the falcon quickly footed the crow high over the lough. Not good. Not good at all... After some flapping about, the falcon succeeded in drowning the crow and then started swimming ashore. Except there wasn't one; only reed beds impassable to swimming falcons. So, cheered on by companions, I clambered through the tangled willows and started to wade out through the reeds. The water got deeper and



deeper. I could just see my falcon's head and shoulders bobbing ahead of me. I grabbed whatever big bits I could get hold of and started back. And here I can give a tip to all you young falconers who want to learn things that you won't find in books. If you want to get the last of the water out of your riding boots without taking them off, first lift your legs one by one behind you. Then lie down on your back on a steep bank head downwards. This drains the water from the tips of your toes. It really works! I think I shall patent it.

Falconers can look rough, especially after a day's hawking. Once at a fieldmeet of the Welsh Hawking Club we were in a convoy of sixteen cars trying to find our way back to the hotel in the dark. We drove and drove and eventually headed up a little track and stopped. None of us knew where we were. So we got out and went up to the front car. Inside were a young couple trying to have a bit of nookie and not at all appreciative of all these falconers peering in at them.

The British Falconers' Club International Fieldmeets have always been my nemesis. Fortunately most of the witnesses are dead now. Once, about forty years ago, my gos chased a cock pheasant and put it into a copse surrounding an isolated farm house. When I got there I climbed up a wall and, looking over, saw two grey shapes in a pond. My hawk had drowned a gander by standing on its head, and was flapping her way ashore.

When I tried to pick her up she would jump back off my fist and grab the other end of the goose. I had to do the trick of covering it with my bag. Gos duly hooded and order restored, I made my way across to the farmyard. The farmer's wife came out of the door just as the entire hawking party entered the yard... What does one say? Beam me up Scottie.

Falconry provides endless opportunities for exercising one's diplomatic skills. Another time at Woodhall I was flying a female New Zealand falcon called Rebel. These falcons are very gamey. Anything is grist to their mill, from frogs (while waiting on out grouse hawking) to helicopters (ditto). I even caught a hang glider with a male once, the pilot was wetting himself! On this occasion we were walking in line with the VIPs and, I'm not sure exactly where it materialised from, but an owl got up. Rebel lassoed it neatly and they fell at the feet of Anthony Jack, our late President. Cue some sprightly scampering on my part, followed by a rugby tackle and an ostentatious releasing of owl unharmed. Phew...

Another time at Woodhall I was flying Spitty, a male peregrine/New Zealand falcon. People didn't take him seriously. They didn't know that even though he was only 454g (just a pound) he could fly down cock pheasants or crows from a standing start. The only slip I was offered was an ivy-covered tree that might, just might, have a pigeon hidden in it. So I sneaked up on this old tree and out clattered the pigeon. I unhooded Spitty and in seconds they both disappeared over some trees by a farmhouse. We had some visitors over from Ireland that day, in a hire car. They were so astonished that they promptly shunted the car in front of them in the convoy. Meanwhile the farmer, thinking we were coursing his hares, let off both barrels of his shotgun. I thought he'd shot Spitty. Things were getting interesting, but more was to come. The flight evidently had gone on some distance. There was nothing for it but to get in the car and track him down. Fortuitously we had a young lady with us and we bundled her into the back of the car. (I never did find out her name). After some casting about we found ourselves on the outskirts of Lincoln and the signal came from a mental hospital (I know what you are going to say, but please don't. Bear with me,

it gets worse). It was a huge stone Victorian edifice with a front elevation about 300 yards long. We walked around the entire building, but whichever way we looked, the signal pointed inside. That was the bad news. The good news was that the hospital had recently been abandoned. The lower windows were all boarded up. It was time to instruct our young lady in the ways of a Gangster's Moll. Leaving her on guard in the car with one hand ready by the horn, we crept up to the building and cast about for some means of breaking and entering. Eventually we pried open a shuttered window and squeezed in. It was dark and eerie in there with no lights or windows. We shuffled down the corridors

“You must treat those two imposters – Triumph and Disaster – just the same”

using the beeping signal as our pilot. In our wild imaginations we could hear the anguished cries of the former inmates, now facing 'integration' into normal life. After opening many doors and trying to get a clear signal, finally we arrived at a big door. We unbarred it and there was Spitty, wondering what had taken us so long. We were in a service well, open to the sky, three storeys above. The pigeon had dived into it as a last refuge, and now its final resting place.

Spitty lived a charmed life and never got injured in his fifteen years. He's caught crows on the craggs of Hadrian's Wall (we 'fished' for him, lowering a dead crow down the cliff on a creance). He's caught them in the tops of trees and on the roofs of sheds. Or inside sheds full of trampling cattle. But perhaps his strangest adventure was on the far western edge of our hawking ground in Northumberland, near the Cumbrian border. He went out high after a jackdaw and caught it in the air. They drifted down to a row of quarry workers' houses in the valley below. And disappeared. People who know me know how appreciative I am of the fair sex. This was clearly a case where female diplomacy would be more

productive than male grovelling. I sent one of our members from Holland down, a lady called Tula. She sneaked into one of the back gardens, but no sign of Spitty. So she looked over the fence into the next garden. There was a man wielding a spade and a woman in tears. Things were not looking ideal. Tula climbed over the fence and there was Spitty clutching his jackdaw on top of a dead dog in a hole. The family dog had died and the couple were giving it a funeral in the garden. The lady thought that Spitty was the spirit of the dog. It was clearly a Sign. Tula had to give the woman a big hug and console her, then scoop up Spitty and make a discreet getaway. Sometimes it's best not to look back...

Things don't always turn out so well. There was Black Jack, a male gyr/saker who caught 34 crows in his first season. On the very last day of the season I watched him hunt his crow two miles, and stoop. When I got to him he had been trampled by cattle. And Tamsin, an old experienced falcon who had her wing broken by cattle and came running out to my lure. One year, in Morocco, our young female gyr/peregrine caught a cock houbara very high up. They came down so heavily that both were killed as they hit the ground. You

must treat those two imposters – Triumph and Disaster – just the same.

And it's not only the falcons. We've had riders with broken ribs, collar bones and backs. Liam O'Broin broke his ribs, collarbone and shoulder. This season we had one visitor break her back in six places, and her collar bone, another member cracked a knee. We collect for the Air Ambulance and have had to have them out twice. The horses can get injured too. Pushkin this season cut an artery and we had to bind him with stocks and socks to stem the gushing blood. Then my old horse Buckskin, now 31, slid backwards down a bank and got jammed amongst the rocks. We had to fetch a digger from the Hunt Kennels to pull him out.

By the end of the season my nerves are shot. I'm knackered. I'm thinking of taking up dominoes. But then when next year comes and there's a young falcon pattering across the kitchen floor clutching the dog's tail, and the old birds have just a pair of outer primaries to drop...



POLACK

by Nick Wilkinson/Richard Waddington/Nick Ellison ENGLAND



An account of an extraordinary season of one falconer, Richard Waddington, his intermewed tiercel Polack and their interaction with wild peregrine falcons. Told through emails written by Richard and sent to Nick Wilkinson.

We have been watching some real sport lately. All of the stoops have been from high pitches. Polack is one very fit tiercel and there are plenty of snipe on the moor. Today was something different. We had a point and I unhooded him. Polack flew out of sight looking for lift and as usual he came over very high. As we waited for him to get into position, the local peregrines came in and took Polack up high into the clouds. Polack at one point hit the female peregrine. She is a brown bird. They eventually got fed up with each other and Polack came over. We got a fantastic stoop and he pushed a common snipe hard. It bailed to a pond and made cover. Polack went straight back up. I wanted to re-flush this snipe, as he hasn't had a kill for a couple of days. Just as Polack was coming round, the local tiercel flew right underneath him on the back of a pigeon. Well, the flight that followed was, well... Polack came thundering down and joined in the flight. The poor pigeon did not stand a chance, as both Polack and the wild peregrine were taking

swipes at it. I watched Polack take this pigeon right in front of the wild one (you do need those binoculars). I was buzzing. I picked him up a mile away on his pigeon. From unhooding Polack, to him taking the pigeon, he was on the wing 45 minutes. On the way back young Chris and I were talking about the flight, when Todd locked up. I thought it was a jack and Chris thought it was common. We were both wrong. A woodcock jumped, the first one of the season. I was just thinking I would love to get a chance to fly a woodcock and then out of the blue came the wild tiercel. I could hardly believe what I was watching. He must have been waiting on above us. This tiercel meant business, he was all over the woodcock, probably due to losing the pigeon to Polack. The flight was soon over, he took his woodcock in front of us. Chris and I were both a bit stunned. The flight finished in a tail chase across the moor twisting and turning. That woodcock was going nowhere. The wild tiercel made the day. You can only dream of having a bird as fit as that. We watched the tiercel carry the woodcock at least two miles back to the local quarry.

Polack was at a nice height. 'Get in!' Snipe up and Polack was on his way down. He took this snipe off the moor and straight into a planting at full speed. This bird needs to just calm down a bit, or there will be trouble. He



came back on the moor with a green head, obviously where he had clipped the canopy. Today it was blowing a gale and we had a friend out with us, so I wanted everything to be right. Dog on point, Polack was high up and waiting to be served. 'Get in!' We could hardly believe it, a woodcock sprung out of the ground. Polack was coming down like a train. He hit the woodcock at the bottom of

his stoop, hard. There was a blast of feathers and he had it. My mate was buzzing and Chris and I were too. Everything went like clockwork Nick. Falconry at its very best. All I do Nick is take the Polack onto the moor and he does the rest.



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The Wild Tiercel Day by Nick Ellison.

Chris, young and old and myself out with Richard. Polack a little high at 1lb 6oz up at a decent height, but we couldn't find the snipe. Eventually it flushed with the hawk out of position, so a long slanting stoop, which the quarry evaded. So too the second stoop, followed by Polack chasing it into the distance, before coming back overhead. We found another snipe, with the hawk at a good pitch, a cracking stoop, basically the same result as the first flight. Back over he came, another snipe, stoop and it put in. Flushed it again with the same result. Up went Polack again, snipe put up, Polack stooped and again it ended with the hawk flying it into the distance, putting it in. Polack came back over, Rich tried the lure, no chance! Polack was now joined by a wild tiercel, which didn't faze him. Another snipe, this one put in and up went the hawk yet again. Rich tried the lure again, ha! Another snipe which flew low, hoodwinking the hawk (and humans) that it was going to drop in, making Polack pull out of the stoop. The snipe then rose rapidly, powering away, Polack in hot pursuit. Suddenly the wild tiercel joined in, overtaking his trained counterpart. He was all over the snipe, almost getting a foot to him. There can't be a fitter trained hawk in Britain than Polack, but it just goes to show what the wild hawk is capable of. The snipe knew he was in serious trouble and headed for cover, all three birds lost to view. Tracked Polack down off the moor into the valley and a couple of fields away. There was Polack on his very well-deserved snipe. What a hawk!

The daily tales of Richard and Polack are far better than any video one might watch. I think the wild tiercel will soon be trained. He is getting into the routine of showing when Richard and Todd are on the moor. If it carries on like this, they will soon be serving the wild tiercel before they fly Polack.

It wasn't long before we got a point. Polack was sent on his way, gaining height, and then, yeah, you got it, the wild tiercel came in and took Polack for his, what is becoming, daily exercise. We waited a while, until they got bored with their shenanigans. Polack was in position and the snipe was flushed. He was on his way down and the snipe bailed. Polack pulled out of the stoop and landed close to where the snipe was. The snipe jumped and we were back in business. The flight was heading down into a very steep valley. Polack was right on it, and then, you guessed it, out of the blue came the local tiercel. He came in like a train, from a good height. He took the snipe in a fast zig-zag flight and Polack was left sucking his thumb. Oh well...

What a day! We went onto a different part of the moor today. Dog on point, Polack away and getting high. He came round into position and I was just getting ready to flush when Chris shouted, 'That peregrine is here again!' Today was different though, both birds were tolerating each other and both peregrines were directly above us. 'Get in Todd!' Snipe up and both tiercels coming down at speed. This snipe was in big trouble, it just had to bail, which it did and it saved its life. Both wild peregrine and Polack were soon back over and waiting for their next slip. Bang, dog on point. Both birds at a good height. Chris said, 'Which one's Polack?' I said, 'Who cares. Get in!' Both tiercels came down side by side in amazing stoops, one bend, snipe bailed. You can't blame the snipe... after all it is their life. We had four flights with Polack and the wild one, without any bird landing and both birds flying off the moor and then coming back over. I pulled Polack in to the lure and fed him up. I was proud of my little tiercel.

Another great day. Sam, Chris's new pup, was locked up on point. Anyway, the wild tiercel was above us again. This bird does not give up. 'Get in!' The flight was on and what a flight! Up, up, up, the flight went, until we could not see them anymore, the tiercel pumping all the way. He missed his snipe, because he was back over us five minutes later waiting for another flight. Todd was on a runner and I knew it was there. I blew him down and waited for the tiercel to get into position. It was like flying a trained falcon. He

came round at about 200 ft. He didn't need to be any higher. To be honest you don't need a high-flying hawk to catch snipe. 'Get in!' Snipe up and tiercel coming down. The flight that followed was mind-blowing. Both Chris and I were gobsmacked. We didn't see the wild one again. I'm sure he had his snipe. I hope so, as he definitely deserved it. All in all, we had eight flights at common snipe with Polack and the wild tiercel with no kill seen. You must commend those snipe. What a cracking little bird and a great test for a wild, or trained falcon alike. The best flights to be had at common snipe are on the high moors of the North, without a doubt. A truly amazing day and one we will never forget.

Today was a red-letter day for sure. I decided to put Polack up without a point and walk onto the moor. I knew there were going to be snipe on the hill, despite the frosty night. Polack was at a nice height. This time I couldn't believe it, the wild tiercel had only brought his wife to join in the fun. Todd was locked up with Sam, Chris's new dog, backing him. All three falcons high and in position. Nick, all three peregrines knew what was coming. I said to Chris, 'Are you ready for this?' laughing. 'Get in!' Snipe up and all three peregrines come down at this little snipe. Polack was the first to bend the snipe, the reason being Polack was in a better position. He threw up, then the wild tiercel came in and almost took the snipe. It was very confusing Nick; it was happening very fast. Polack came in for the second time and took the snipe. It

was payback for the other day. I fed my tiercel up on the snipe, hood on and we were making off the hill. Chris then said, 'Here look, both wild ones are waiting on above us. Let's get them a flight'. Dog on. 'Get in!' Both wild ones coming down. This was the flight of the day, with both falcon and tiercel taking turns. You could see they were both working as a team. The tiercel caught this snipe very high up and gave it to the falcon on the wing. The tiercel came straight back over waiting for another flush. We found him another four flights at snipe, which he flew into the heavens, ringing them up just like merlin and lark; but he never looked in control without the falcon at his side. He didn't catch any we put up for him. How good are those snipe?!

Well, what a good weekend. Yesterday we were joined by a wild juvenile tiercel. We have had the pleasure of his company a few times now. This is the tiercel that Polack flew the snipe with and killed. This tiercel is not as well trained as the ones on the other moor, but it's learning the job now. Todd was on point; Polack was in the right spot. 'Get in!' Polack coming down like a train, he clipped the snipe, but not fatally. Then out of nowhere came the wild one and knocked it to the ground. Polack took his chance and stole the meal. Amazing! The wild tiercel was not happy, but allowed Polack the meal. I left Polack to feed up and we went to find a snipe for the wild one. Todd locked up and I waited for the tiercel to come round. The peregrines on the other moor know the score and wait on

nearly above you, but this youngster was a bit shy. Anyway, 'Get in!' what a flight! This snipe was in big trouble. It tried to go up, down, anywhere to avoid this relentless tiercel. You will never get a flight like that with a trained hawk, the fitness is unreal. This snipe beat the tiercel to a plantation about a mile away, all watched through the binoculars. Truly amazing, it's the only word I can use to do the flight justice. Five minutes later he was back over us for another do. We walked for a good twenty minutes. Bang, Todd was on. This time the tiercel came right above. I honestly thought it was Polack above, but Polack was now on my fist. 'Go on Todd!' He came down like something possessed, but these snipe are no mugs. I watched the feet come out on the tiercel and he just missed on the strike. The snipe did not want anything to do with this tiercel and bailed instantly. I carried on walking off the moor, but still looking for the wild one... He must have gone, I thought. Todd locked up, but just seemed a little different though, so I walked in slowly to see. It was a woodcock. I flushed it and watched it fly off across the moor. I'm sure you know what is coming next. Yeah, you got it. The wild tiercel came in like a bullet, he was all over it... but fair play to the woodcock; it jinked its way to the same plantation as the snipe did earlier and made its very lucky escape. I walked off the hill thinking about what I had just witnessed.

Today we were joined again by the wild juvenile tiercel peregrine and what a display he gave us. The weather was shocking, blowing a gale and rain. Great eh? Chris shouted, 'Heyup, the wild ones here again!' You could see he was struggling to get through the wind, but he was on it and he knew what was coming. Sam was on. We waited a while for him to get into position, but those wild peregrines don't need position; they have something trained birds will never have, sheer power and unbelievable fitness. 'Get in!' Snipe up and the wild one coming down like a banshee. The flight that followed was a fitness flight indeed. Up, up they went. I honestly thought the peregrine was beat... how wrong, he checked his snipe and that was it. He was all over it. The snipe bailed from high and the peregrine checked his snipe three times on the way down. Incredible, stooping on a stoop. I hope I'm making sense. The flight

was over. They had gone out of sight. I turned to Chris and said nothing. We both knew what we had just seen. Five minutes passed and he was back over. He had missed. Todd was on a runner and the wild one was in a real position. Another cracking flight followed, very similar to the last, all this... and we had not even flown Polack yet. He was back. He had missed again; how I don't know. There's one thing I do know, he wasn't beaten in the air! The wild one was directly above. It was time to unhood Polack. He went straight up to the wild one. Not a yard apart... both birds waiting for the inevitable. Snipe up and Polack coming down, the wild one didn't even stoop. He just left it to Polack. I would have put money on both birds coming down together in fantastic stoops... and I would have lost. Polack took his bird on the second stoop. The wild tiercel had flown out of his skin on those snipe. He is well trained now and a lot fitter than the bird I have on my fist. I can count on my hand how many times we have missed flying in the last three months What I am trying to say is, you could only wish to get a trained bird that fit. These wild peregrines have made the season for Chris and me and a few others who have been lucky enough to see them in action.

Both Chris and I had a reckoning-up today and we think we had about fifty different flights with the wild peregrines. Four other people witnessed the flights, old Chris and Nick Ellison being two of them. Two friends of mine saw some breath-taking flights, but I don't think they realised what they were watching, not being falconers. I would just like to thank Old Chris for the pictures. By the way, the reason we called him Polack was because of old Chris being part Polish. And, of course, thanks to my very understanding wife Anne, who knows how dedicated I am.

Richard Waddington



THE HUMBLE HARRIS

by Stephen Power

CO. DUBLIN

Just another Harris' hawk!... is what most would say, but when given enough opportunity, time and dedication they can become versatile, tenacious and deadly hunting partners!

For three seasons I had the pleasure to hunt almost daily with a small but brilliant little male Harris' hawk, Tango. In the beginning, he wasn't the rapid cover crashing, automatic rabbit stopper that I had read all Harris' hawks were straight out of the box! It took a lot of practise, a lot of patience and a lot of field time and of course help from others to get him to know just what he was capable of.

I learnt so much from the day I received him as a 22 week old, skittish, bright eyed, batey speckled hawk! From the relief of him finally feeding on the glove, to tying the falconer's knot like it was second nature... the first time flying free and that nail biting thought of him being mobbed by crows and thinking 'will he ever get a break to just fly free'. I guess in the end I had so much to learn about the wild world of nature and falconry, field craft ect., it wasn't going to happen overnight and the young hawk had the big bad world to learn about everything outside the breeding pen!

As time went on slip after slip of just missing rabbits and crows, after many many hours in



the field he started to catch the odd rabbit, the odd crow, ect. Then mid-way into his second season he was fully sure of himself and what he could do... transformation! He would crash full speed into heavy bramble thorns after speeding rabbits, it was as if he knew that the very second the rabbit hit cover it would momentarily slow and he would shoot straight in and almost always catch and subdue the bulky bunnies with the help of the thick cover. He caught almost all of his rabbits like this, some in the open after brilliant flat out tail chases, some in the eerie dead silence of frosty nights on the lamp. He stopped almost all but the luckiest of rabbits with ease after his second season. It felt brilliant that we were getting to grips with hunting and together we bagged a good number of big healthy rabbits, but in reality he had just needed the confidence boost to know that he could do it.

From his third season he was dynamite on rabbits and seemed almost suicidal in his pursuit of all things furry including a massive 2lb grey squirrel. Crashing cover and rolling down hills bound to speeding



rabbits, getting his 1lb 5oz self dragged underground attached to rabbits, hitting or flying through fences at full pace after his quarry... so determined, so confident, he had truly mastered rabbits and wasn't letting them get away from him. I'm fully sure if I had land with better numbers of rabbits he could have filled a small car boot on the day he was so gamey.

This season he also mastered the art of catching his nemesis, the cunning crow. With lockdown and travel restrictions, we targeted the prey we had plenty of, rook, magpie, hooded crow, most of which were ambushed with quick twisting 20-50m flights. Most of the crows would outpace him in straight line flight, but some would flip and spin to the ground, hoping the chasing hawk would fly right past, but after a few flights he learned to put in more speed and force the crow into a panic downward flip, at which point the Harris' would instantly flick over and grab the crow. He took many members of the corvid species in this style this year. Some were also taken as he followed on from trees, in some cases 15-250m off as he spotted

crows out on the grass he would put in a long shallow stoop and when the alarm went out that he was approaching they would break apart and put up, at which point he would zero in and pick one on the rise. A mad dash through the alarm calls from a murder of crows would get me to him, where he would just sit tight holding the crow, waiting for a quick dispatch and a smooth trade off. It was as if we both knew the game down to a T. It was brilliant how far he had come in his hunting versatility.

He was so good at catching crows at this stage he was filling the freezer, feeding himself and feeding the ferrets. We caught so many we could supply corvid carcasses to help other club members get their young hawks and falcons going.

He was so stable and predictable. I hunted together with my nine year old daughter on a few occasions. Corvids, rabbits bolted by ferrets and lamped rabbits from her glove, it made me so proud of my hawk, my daughter, and myself for coming so far from that very first exciting day.

A hawk that could do it all so to speak. Lamping at night, ferreting in the open, crashing hellish cover that I would have to snip my way in to retrieve hawk and prey and he would come looking for me after an unsuccessful slip that took him out of sight, almost like a boomerang! He had bagged 73 head in his last short season. Just a good all round gamey, fun and exciting hawk to keep and hunt.



In the end Tango grew weak with sickness, his once bright and keen eyes fell dull as he battled with infection. With help from the vet, other club members and full time care from myself and even my wife, I watched as he faded away day by day and when finally his bell fell silent one late January morning, it fully hit me what I had lost. A truly wonderful hunting partner, 'The Humble Harris' hawk'.

We didn't just bag game, we bagged some magic moments together, some great memories that will stay etched in my mind...



THE 'ART' OF FALCONRY

by Ed Pitcher

USA

It seems that we falconers need to be reminded from time to time about the 'Art of Falconry'. The 'Flying of Falcons' was my first attempt to share my experiences and practices in falconry. Although well received by the falconry community, there were some realistic and valued criticisms about my approach and methods. Some objected that I did not share all of my secrets. There are no secrets. The labyrinth is well known and well written about in the historical falconry literature. Some complained that I fly my falcons too robust to be serious game hawks. That is true, although my falcons have caught plenty of quarry. My focus has evolved more towards the flight than the kill. I prefer several ascents into the sky followed by several stoops at quarry that may or may not result in a kill. That is why the book was titled 'The Flying of Falcons' rather than 'The Catching and Killing of Game with a trained Hawk'. Others were in disbelief about the altitudes my falcons would fly. However, Marshall's GPS telemetry has put that criticism to rest.

I approach the challenges before me with the simple mantra: *'It is not what I think, it is what the hawk thinks.'* This approach has served me well, maybe it will help others to become more skilled in this fascinating endeavor. My biggest regret in authoring the book was two metaphors that I used: *'A sharp hawk is a smart hawk'* and *'being touched by the Angel of Death'*. These metaphors were mis-interpreted as a physical condition of the hawk and not the mental state of mind of anticipation which is discussed later in this article. This mis-interpretation may have put some hawks in jeopardy. That said, having been guided by the above mantra I have long realized that the goal in managing hawks and falcons is based on molding the mindset of the hawk rather than controlling its physical weight. A well managed hawk develops anticipation and pays extra close attention (keen) and becomes greedy to eat (sharp set), all without weight loss. I never meant to encourage falconers to deprive their hawks of food or reduce their weight to

the point of being endangered. For that error in judgment, I apologize to the falconers who were mis-guided and the hawks that may have been subjected to a heavy hand.

Historically, falconers took time to develop a trusting relationship with their birds. The hawk was given the courtesy of time. The falcon was 'introduced' to the block and the lure. This approach took time because the hawk was not reduced in weight but rather allowed to gain trust of the falconer. The falconer needs to develop patience; *'He that can have patience can have what he will,'* Benjamin Franklin. Currently, the 'art' of falconry is hanging by a thread and is being pushed aside by game greed and the lust for killing. All disguised as the 'sport' of falconry. Contemporary falconers fall victim to training techniques and conditioning gizmos. Weight reduction is used to teach the hawk a new trick or to get an immediate response. In reality there is nothing to teach or train, there is only the opportunity for the falconer to learn. I am always compelled to use Symon Latham's quote, *'I hope you cometh to learn'*. It is your turn to learn how to manage the hawk in the field, the weathering area and the mews. You are supposed to learn from the bird on your fist, not train it. The falconer is tasked with learning how to manage his hawks so that the daily relationship is beneficial to the hawk. Reducing the hawk's weight cannot make up for your incompetence as a falconer. When the sport of catching game takes precedence over the art of managing hawks and falcons then the hawks and falcons are reduced to simply being tools for the narcissistic falconer. In the 1970's passage Tundra falcons were frequently flown around 900g. Today's falconers rarely fly them over 800g. Prairie falcons were flown at 750-800g. Now they are flown closer to 650-700g. If you do not understand the 'art' of developing anticipation and how to provide successful slips at quarry then you are forced into the simple mindedness of weight reduction to provide the 'sport' of catching game. The art of falconry is all about learning how to manage hawks and falcons so they can be



doing it wrong. *Two wrongs do not make a right. Plus, it is not all about you.* Twisting the arm of the hawk through weight reduction demonstrates a gross misunderstanding of what falconry is really all about. And, as Gilbert Blaine points out, *'flying falcons in low condition actually disables the hawk by lessening its full capacity as a predator'* (paraphrased).

On the other hand, hawks too full from their last meal should not be flown until they are *'ready for the field'* E.B. Michell. Hawks that are considered too fat are simply too full from their last meal. Falconers that restrict food in order to have the hawk at weight the next day are simply robbing the hawk on a daily basis. This leads to bad manners and distrust. Hawks do not gain fat or loose fat by the hour, they empty their gut with each mite which is reflected on the scale as weight loss. It's neither fat gain nor fat loss. Your patience and understanding are required!

The scale is measuring food in and poop out by reflecting more or less weight. Hawks too full from the last meal weigh more and are less motivated than hawks with an emptying gut. All the hawk needs is more time to empty their digestive tract. A robust hawk with an emptying gut is a powerful and motivated predator. A thin hawk with an empty gut is weak and incapable. This is a common error because too many falconers have consumed the kool-aid of strict weight management as the Holy Grail of falconry. They do not fully understand that feeding a hawk well and often and then managing the hawk's next opportunity to be a successful predator is the key to good falconry. Managing a hawk through hunger alone shows a complete lack of understanding. Natural selection uses opportunity and success for survival. Using hunger as a motivator is a recipe for extinction, not survival.

The second article I recently read was well reasoned but it left me with a sense that the falconer's satisfaction was more important than the basic needs of the hawk. *'They will not love you more because you feed them more'* is a quote. There is some truth to that. They do not love you more when you feed them more, but they do learn to tolerate you more when you feed them more. And, they develop anticipation sooner when you feed them well. It is counter intuitive to me to use the premise of hunger as the motivator and

successful predators in a natural way, not a forced or contrived way.

The Art of Falconry is reflected in two other quotes: *'Feed them well and feed them often'* Major Charles Hawkins Fisher and *'After an unsuccessful flight feed the Black Shaheen a good meal. She will fly stronger the next time'* Taymūr. Many historical authors have attempted to remind falconers about the 'artful management' of falconry. Misunderstanding the 'Art of Falconry' has been going on for a long time.

I recently read two articles about weight management that I found interesting. The first was from a falconer who rationalized his practice of flying his hawks at lower weights (thin). He stated that he did not want to waste his time in the field with a fat hawk that was not serious. In his mind the falcon is supposed to fly exactly as trained and then catch game. He demanded results. His argument was based on his experiences of watching other falconers fly their hawks too heavy to fly well or catch game. He continued and pointed out that sometimes these episodes with fat hawks resulted in lengthy chases to recover the hawk. My response to him is this: *'I'm sorry, but flying a hawk too fat does not make your way more correct. You are both*

then not satisfy that hunger. Let me give you four simple arguments why hunger is not the prime motivator:

1) If hunger was the motivator, hawks would not chase, catch, kill and then cache food rather than eating it - but they do.

2) If hunger was the motivator, hawks would not chase, catch and then not kill but instead release quarry to chase it again - but they do.

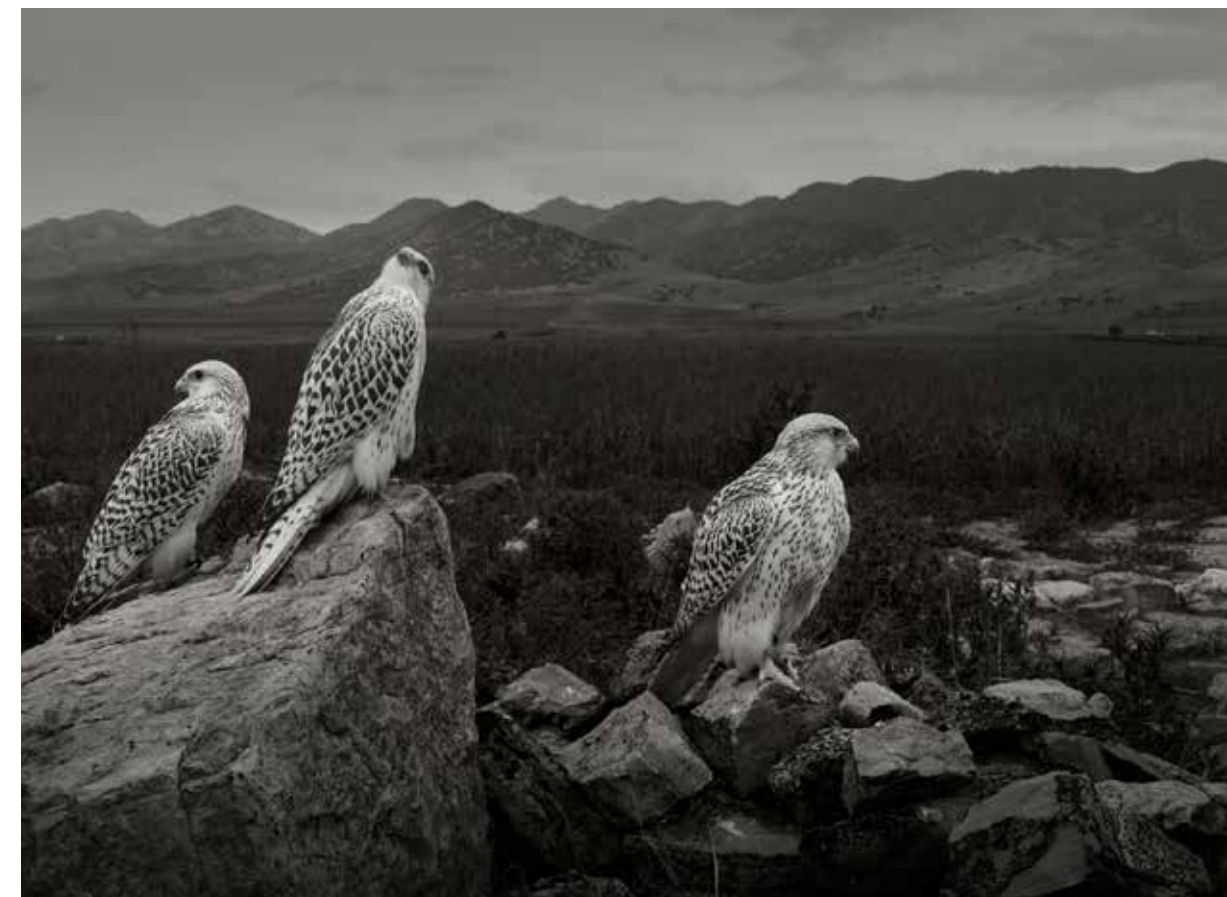
3) If hunger was the motivator, hawks would not chase and not catch it but instead drive the quarry to cover - but they do.

4) Adult birds do not starve their young into becoming better predators, they feed them! Nor do they use failure as a means of encouraging their young to chase more aggressively, they use success! Let me repeat that in a different way, Parent hawks do not withhold the opportunity to eat or employ failure in order to make their young more aggressive predators. Instead they feed them well and feed them often. And, they feed them well even after unsuccessful attempts as Taymūr suggested above regarding the Black Shaheen.

“It is not what I think, it is what the hawk thinks”

So, the answer is not hunger. The answer is the opportunity to chase, to be predatory. Hawks want opportunity, not hunger to be the relationship with the falconer. Well managed hawks anticipate the opportunities provided by the falconer. It is this anticipation for opportunity that historical falconers referred to as being 'sharp set' or 'keen'. It's the mindset of the hawk that is important, not the thinness of the keel.

The falconer's job is to learn how to manage the hawk's mind by reducing fear, increasing trust and then developing anticipation. This can all be done with little or no weight loss but it does take time. Then the falconer must learn to manage the falcon's mindset by understanding the condition of the falcon's gut. As I mentioned



above, a robust falcon with an emptying gut is a formidable predator. Learning to wait until the hawk is ready for the field is the responsibility of the falconer. Controlling the hawk's weight to get results and then feeding it a restricted amount of food leads to bad manners, unsuccessful attempts at catching game and then blaming the hawk instead of the falconer for these poor outcomes. It is usually the result of misunderstanding the importance of managing the fear factor in the initial stages of falconry. Don Roeber's insightful article about training wild caught Prairie Falcons mentions that *'every bate creates fear and resentment'*. I think it does with every fresh hawk.

Hawks can differentiate good food from bad food. When fed well with a good quality food, tolerance, fidelity and anticipation will develop more rapidly. The hawk's tolerance of the falconer will grow and their fear and resentment will subside and you are seen as a benefit. But, when the falconer decides that the hawk has eaten enough for today in order to be on weight tomorrow he has just made the fatal mistake of robbing his hawk. Every hawk should be fed all it wants every time it is flown. Period. *'It's not what you think, it's what the hawk thinks'*. Feeding them more does not make them love you more but feeding them less makes them resent you more. You are a robber in their eyes. *'The falcon soon learns the ill-intentions of the falconer'* Symon Latham. Mantling, covering, screaming, biting and avoiding the hood are all symptoms of being robbed of their food. Gilbert Blaine describes an ill-mannered hawk as *'difficult to gaze upon'*. Why? Because it reflects the incompetence of the falconer. Somewhere along the line the hawk has perceived the falconer to be adversarial rather than being a benefit. The relationship has been ruined by the falconer's impatience, greed to kill and the selfish need to follow the schedule of man rather than that of the hawk's.

So cutting your hawk's weight should not be the 'go to standard' to solve all problems. Not until you appreciate the whole story of weight management, nutrition, digestive cycles and the mindset of hawks and falcons can the falconer begin to recapture the 'art' of falconry.

Developing the mindset of anticipation is the better route to success. The genius of Symon Latham (1615), Ferreira (1616), E.B.

Michell (1900), Col. C.H.Fisher (1901) and Gilbert Blaine (1936) along with many others, is that they understood that feeding a hawk or falcon well and often created an expectant mindset from the falcon. The falcon soon anticipated the opportunity to take another meal regardless of weight. This is what happens in the wild. Hunting in the wild is based on opportunity, routine and success. Again, this is what the old literature referred to when using the terms 'keen or sharp set'. It had nothing to do with reducing the hawk's physical status; remember, there were no scales back then. The falconer keyed into the hawk's response to the approaching falconer; Did the hawk show signs of 'anticipating' another opportunity or did it show signs of fear if approached by the falconer? The 'art' of falconry requires that the falcon's body language is 'King' if the falconer wants to be a successful falconer. Learn to read all the signs and not just the numbers on the scale.

“When fed well with a good quality food, tolerance, fidelity and anticipation will develop more rapidly”

Because contemporary falconers seldom appreciate the body language of the hawk they think the hawk's readiness or reluctance is weight related. And, because they never recognize the mindset of the hawk they never learn that in time, the hawk can be flown in a more robust state. Using strict weight management the falcon becomes enslaved to an arbitrary weight which, in the beginning, satisfied the falconer's need for the hawk's tolerance and immediate response to training. The hawk's changing needs and development is ignored. What is also missed is the opportunity to learn that in time with increased fitness and robustness the hawk will only eat what it needs until the 'next time'. 'Next time' may be in hours or it may be in days depending on the routine

introduced by the falconer. Once the hawk or falcon recognizes this routine and feeding schedule it sees the falconer as beneficial. They develop anticipation and very quickly begin to trust the falconer and the routine. Bad manners are no longer a concern because of good management. Bird abatement falconers have realized this approach and fly their hawks several times a day for extended periods of time and in robust condition. This approach is real, It has worked for millennia and it works significantly better than simple weight restriction. The relationship between bird and man is greatly improved and now the 'sport' of falconry can blossom into a hunting partnership. It becomes 'The Art of Falconry.'



Below: Ricardo Velarde & Ed Pitcher - Authors of 'The Flying of Falcons'



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FROM THE ARCHIVES

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Irish Letter by Ronald Stevens...



A notable characteristic of the keen falconer is that he is never satisfied.

One of the commonest complaints is that he is wrongly placed as to terrain. In my own case I was dissatisfied with the Shropshire hill country where, until recently, I used to hawk. Valleys in that region are numerous and they are choked with deep bracken which has spread to the tops, forming perfect cover to which grouse may put in. In such conditions even the very best hawks cannot be expected to give a good account of themselves.

So, having reached retiring age, I decided to settle in Ireland. In searching for a new home, I combed all the west, from Donegal to Kerry. I wanted to get as far away from towns, villages and main roads as possible, to find a tract of country where my hawks can fly without risk of being sniped at by people with guns. The search ended in the wildest part of wild Connemara, seven miles inland from the little village of Costello which forms part of my postal address. From Fermoy Lodge, where I now live, vast expanses of moors sweep in all directions. Grouse are not numerous by Yorkshire and Scottish standards, but they are to be found, and it is hoped that by careful keeping they will increase. Fortunately this area is too far from the beaten track to be troubled by poachers. Woodcock are fairly common in certain places and at the right times. Snipe are plentiful and golden plover are seen in large numbers most winters, and many pairs are breeding here now and their yearning notes make the moors seem bigger and lonelier than ever. I hope these species will afford exciting, if rare, flights - one cannot expect more. Mallard and teal can be expected to provide variety from flights at grouse, but whether my old gyrfalcon 'Norge', now in her fifth year, can ever be persuaded to fly wild geese remains to be seen.

There are at least two practising falconers in this country, Mr Mackey in the Six Counties, and Mr McDougald who lives near Dublin. I have been fortunate in receiving a visit from the latter. We are all planning to get together sometime for hawking meets.

It has been great fun building a mews and planning a weathering ground, etc., to provide everything that the falconer and his hawks can possibly need. My own house, too, is at present receiving considerable attention. The builders are modernising it, for I am determined that life in the wilds will not deprive me of home comfort. One has heard of the man who has crept into the dog - kennel when conditions in the home have become unbearable. In my own case I am now sleeping in the new mews, while my falconer, Jacques Godard, still has a tenuous hold on the one bedroom in the house that remains (pro tem.) intact, even though he has to climb a ladder to get to it. We are hoping that the house will be habitable by October, and I want to reassure any hawking friends on the other side of the Irish Sea that when they come to stay they will not have to endure anything comparable to a log - cabin.

Because of the move I missed the past hawking season. So far the only trained hawk that has flown over Fermoy is a last year's eyass Alaskan jerkin which has been flying at hack for the past five weeks. His chief pleasure was to chase a wild falcon, but lately she has kept away, perhaps because she regarded the encounters with less amusement than he did. There is a peregrine eyrie on my own home ground but to our relief, it is untenanted this year because peace and quiet are needed for the imported grouse which are now experiencing their first breeding season in Ireland. So probably this falcon is nesting in the Maamturk mountains which form a background to a view to the west.

There are few winters when gyrfalcons do not visit the west of Ireland. A beautiful white gyrfalcon was shot in the suburbs of Galway City last Christmas.

When I go fishing, when I take my eyes off the river to look up at the jerkin, at hack, who has followed me, and who likes to sit on some rock above the tumbling waters, looking just like a Lodge painting, I sometimes wonder whether a day will come in winter when perhaps this same trained hawk from Alaska will be joined by a wild white gyr from Greenland.



EXPERIENCES WITH SUNNY MY 2009 CAPTIVE BRED TIERCEL GOSHAWK

By Elisabeth Leix

GERMANY



Autumn is a season that many people don't like at all as it means saying goodbye to summer, the season that gives many of us a great feeling of being alive with warm temperatures, bright colours and a new birth of both plants and wildlife. So when the leaves on the trees slowly start to change colours, they announce the return of the annual cold season, yet I feel better than at any other time of the year. Because, this is a time when the hawking season begins with my falcons and goshawk. Although the hawking season for the crows that I hunt with Sunny, my tiercel goshawk, starts in mid July, I don't usually take him out of his chamber until the beginning of November when he has cleanly moulted and the crows are stronger and smarter on the wing. Another reason that influences this decision is that I fly my two peregrine falcons on partridges beforehand. Unfortunately, the partridge hunting season is very short in Germany. We have only eight weeks from 1 September to 31 October and in Poland, where we have hunted for the past seven years, it is even less at only six weeks!

In Bavaria, our homeland where we live close to the Alps, there are no partridges at all. This has prompted my husband, who is a falconer

too, and myself to use our annual holiday of three to four weeks to travel into areas where there is still a good game population. To make the most of this short season we must start our falcons several weeks prior so as to have enough fitness, stamina and strength to make several flights a day. Depending on whether we are training a young falcon or just our old falcons, the procedure is different. Actually, as in nature, young falcons should be given the opportunity to develop skills hunting young game, but this natural process cannot be followed in Germany. We are bound by the legal hunting seasons, which are unfortunately based on gun hunting laws which have remained unchanged for several decades. However, like many parts of Europe, modern farming practices means there is often no longer small-scale agriculture, but huge fields with only two or three crops. Corn and wheat deserts prevent hunting even when partridges are still abundant, because the harvest of corn is mostly so late that the hunting season is almost over or even already over.

Additional challenges come in the form of strong regulations about animal welfare. It is not legal to use bagged game in Germany to train young birds. These factors create

a great challenge for falconers to let their young hawks develop naturally to become motivated, confident hunters. To motivate a young falcon when he does everything right, we can only use freshly killed prey as a reward and then drones later on for fitness. With our old falcons, the annual procedure of muscle building and endurance training is of course much easier, because we can do it with the drone relatively easily. In general, we start the training process about 4-5 weeks before the hunting season begins. When we then arrive with the good trained falcons to the hunting ground, we sometimes succeed right on the first day of hawking.

The training with my goshawk Sunny looks completely different. He is already a seasoned hunter in his 13th season and after the moult I bring him back into shape with jump ups, because he did not learn the drone in his youth and when I tried it I recognized that he simply did not like it. When I received him in 2009, after being raised by his parents in the chamber, I had limited spare time because I was focused on my professional



“He is already a seasoned hunter in his 13th season”





development. He was delivered to me by a friend in the middle of July, but I had to go away for a week to a workshop and couldn't take him with me. So, I made an instruction plan for my husband Klaus. At that time, it was sweltering hot on those summer days. Therefore, during the day we kept him in a dark, cool room on a hanging perch untethered. When the night arrived, Klaus brought him out in the darkness to the high perch in the garden. There he laid one or two wet chicks next to him in the dark before he switched on the spotlight on the chicks. So Sunny had no other distraction and Klaus could watch him from a distance. Quickly, on the second day, he ate the chicks. After that, he was able to enjoy the pleasant night temperatures. This process was repeated every day and changed only slightly in that the spotlight was increased a little bit more every day, so that initially he could not see anyone, but after a week he perceived and accepted humans and dogs as shadows. When he was brought back into the dark,



cool room, the light was turned off so that he could not yet see the person at this stage.

When I returned from my workshop, it had cooled down to 23 degrees celsius and I could hardly wait for the evening to finally take out my goshawk by myself. At around 10pm, I went into the dark room and spoke soothingly to my goshawk, who was used to humans' voices because I had a radio playing intermittently with news and music. He couldn't see me, but he could hear me and so I told him what we were going to do together. Carefully I gripped the free-hanging leash and upped my glove to his legs. With a gentle pressure he stepped over onto my glove and we went into the feed kitchen where the scales is. Armed with a small lamp, which I flicked on for a very short time and off again, I could indicate after three flashes the weight without scaring my hawk. 650g was an average weight for a male European goshawk and a good size to hunt crows. After that we went in front to the high perch, where I had deposited some food. As he had already eaten on the perch, I placed my fist on the top of the perch and slipped from below a piece of pigeon between my thumb and forefinger. Sunny could see me in the sketchy obscurity of the darkness and stared

at me with wide eyes, occasionally risking a glance downwards. It didn't take long for him to start eating the fresh meat in jerky, hasty movements. The first invisible bond between us was forged.

Only a few days later, in the morning twilight I took him out to the garden to the high perch and soon he took a chick leg out of my hand when I walked past. The days flew by and his familiarity grew quickly. I took strict care that he only made positive impressions of me, my hand and my fist and on 3 August I was able to fly him free in the garden for the very first time. As we live alone and have a large garden with many trees, I could do the initial training right in front of our home. However, I did not repeat any exercise, but steadily increased the exercises. When he came immediately to the fist, we started to learn to catch dead crows in the air. There was always only one successful flight, which meant he saw the crow, caught it and could eat it in peace. In this way, the goshawk developed into a very friendly companion, without any airs and graces on the prey or on the fist. Later, I also started giving him small tidbits from my hand, on the prey or on the perch. This has developed into a real ritual to this day. He never has grabbed me with



his talons or been aggressive towards me in any way.

About two weeks after the first free flight he was released from the moving car onto a dead crow. Klaus was hidden in a hedge for this and Laura, our daughter, had to drive the car. The first attempt went wrong, but only a few days later he immediately chased the thrown crow from the car, hit it and got a full crop.

Finally on 27 August 2009 we made our first attempt on a flock of crows. To distract Sunny in the car until we found crows, I had a pigeon wing for him to nibble on. But it wasn't long before we spotted a suitable flock of crows next to the road. My pulse rose as you could imagine and when we were level with the crows, I released Sunny through the window. Without hesitation he took off from the fist and energetically chased the crows, but unfortunately, they were better than him. Two days later we tried it again and I still remember it as if it was yesterday. At 5pm it was still 28 degrees celsius and even Klaus thought it was still much too warm. I managed to persuade him to drive me. Right at the edge of the next village crows were sitting between 1-80m from the roadside on a small slope. At a speed of about 50kph,

the goshawk took off from the moving car in the direction of the crows. He did not pay any attention to the nearer crows and flew dashing towards one further back, which had quickly noticed the goshawk as the nearer crows began to scream. Flying upwards, the crow tried to save itself, but as if my goshawk had never done anything else, he flew briskly after it and caught it skilfully out of the air. With a scream of joy, I jumped out of the rolling car to help my goshawk with the defensive game. Klaus was thrilled to bits because it had worked out so well and I was overjoyed. The beginning was made and 'Sunny' received his name because of the sunshine on that day and his sunny disposition. His reward was a fresh crow and for us a glass of wine under the big oak out in the garden. Every falconer knows the incredibly satisfying feeling when your hawk has taken its first prey and is then standing in the garden with a full crop. I couldn't get enough of the view and pondered with Klaus what was to come.

That was already 12 years ago and our 13th hawking season lies in front of us. We went through a few accidents together, which we both thankfully survived, albeit with consequential damages. Sunny collided with

a car and since then has a displaced beak and one side of his chest is atrophic. An abscess caused by injuries from a crow had to be surgically removed and he has also survived bumble food and an unknown infection. During these years I damaged my right knee jumping over a fence. Torn meniscus, medial ligament and cruciate ligament, which happened back in 2013 but still causes me problems today. I also almost completely tore my left thigh muscle (musculus rectus femoris) while crow hunting. Well, it was also diagnosed too late because I can't perceive pain properly and therefore it hasn't healed properly either. This means Sunny and me are actually two cripples chasing crows together! He flies a bit crooked and I run after him a bit crooked to help him if he succeeds. Since about his fifth season we hunt about 20 crows per season - in the past it was sometimes 50. Partly why we don't catch as many anymore is that I give him much more difficult set ups to challenge him, but when he succeeds, that's it, no more flights on that day. His motivation to chase crows is so high

that even when he flew twice into a domestic chicken yard, he flew out without gripping a chicken. Although he lacks muscle mass I can fly him up to 670g. I usually leave him in his transport box until I see suitable crows, so he is not tempted to jump on nearby crows. That means the crows he sees are at least 30m away. The furthest crow he has caught was about 110m away and the average in a season is about 80m away.

I am so very grateful for all the wonderful experiences we have had together and I hope that there are still many to come. But even if Sunny goes one day, I can relive all my memories again with a glass of wine under the old oak in the garden.



HUNTING THE NILE GOOSE

by Xavier Morel

BELGIUM

Hunting the Nile Goose with an imprint gyr falcon... a modern interpretation of Middle ages falconry?

2020 was a strange year, by any standards, but it was a very successful season for me. I discovered a new style of falconry quite unexpectedly. My brother had bred a gyr falcon which had not been properly reared by her parents. Kelly and I hand-reared her from day five, with the aim of selling her later in the season. Her mother is a white gyr, her father a silver gyrkin. She is the sister of my 2019 gyrkin, which flew off whilst at hack, being recovered, amazingly, in Hamburg, Germany, having flown 1000km in a couple of days.

We have named her Godzilla, and she has been imprinted and hand-reared with a white gyr puppet. She was later socially imprinted together with other falcons as much as possible, in order to avoid her screaming. She has become quite a big falcon, at a full weight of around 1650g.



After a couple of weeks of tame hack at home, I began training her in a traditional way. Between mid August and the end of September I began to train her with a quadcopter, to gain muscle and fitness. Godzilla became a fit falcon, climbing strongly and fast up to 400m, out-flying the drone on days of strong wind. As sales did not look very good that year I decided to try and hunt with her, but still had to decide how and what.

My team of waiting-on birds was more than complete (three game hawks is already far too many); so I had to think about something else, something different, that would be complementary to my existing hawking equipage.

The Nile Geese are very common here, and they are considered an invasive species. They can be hunted throughout the year, you only need the permission of the landowner. I had accidentally taken a couple of geese in the past with a peregrine falcon. As these geese are strong and combative, I thought they would be a good and interesting match for a female gyr falcon.

They also are surprisingly fast and agile prey, as I would discover later in the season. Most falconers that have flown them do not advise to hunt these geese, as it can be dangerous, but as far as I know, nobody in Europe has really tried consistently with a female gyr.

It is also a dangerous slip as it often ends far away and the flight can finish on a road, in a garden with a dog, or close to someone who wants to help the goose and many other hazardous scenarios.

With the aid of a friend we sourced three easy slips and this quickly built her confidence and taught her that this was what we wanted. This apprenticeship phase went quite smoothly and easily, at a weight around 1380g.

After those first three geese, I immediately started to slip her on more geese, allowing them to get up before I would take off the hood and then slip her at her quarry. My first aim was to avoid easy kills on the ground after short flights. Gradually she made longer and more spectacular flights, with the geese taking off at a great distance, but my ultimate goal was to let her go at geese in full flight.



“Godzilla followed the goose for 6km as the crow flies, achieving an incredible horizontal top speed of 135kph”

So on the 16 of October, the third day of attempts, weighing 1406g, and after a pursuit of 300m, Godzilla took her first goose. I was lucky enough to be there to help her out. I made sure never to slip her more than two or three times in an afternoon, allowing a rest time between each slip.

Gyrs are very intelligent falcons, and the last thing I wanted was for her to be discouraged by these difficult and combative prey. A gyr falcon needs to be decently rewarded if she has made a good effort, even after an unsuccessful flight. This avoids frustration, from which these birds can suffer. A mistake is easily made with pure gyrs, and is very difficult to correct afterwards.

As I mentioned before, I wanted to have long slips and I would soon discover that the geese spotted the car from far off, like crows do, taking off sometimes at distances of 200-300m.

Most of the time this resulted in long, spectacular flights which finished at a great distance and which you had to follow with

binoculars. The longest and fastest flight I had was on a day of very strong wind, about 70-80kph. Godzilla followed the goose for 6km as the crow flies, achieving an incredible horizontal top speed of 135kph! I noticed that when she is really keen, she makes horizontal top speeds of between 80-110kph. At between 65-75kph she is less motivated and does not really go for them.

These eye-catching flights often finish high in the sky, between 40-80m. There were some flights where the falcon abandoned pursuit after 3-3.5km at heights of between 100-120m.

Regarding motivation, it is important to keep it very strong and present, and in this regard several factors have an influence:

- Has she had a bad experience recently?
- Is her weight the right one? Her average hunting weight is 1400-1440g. She took some at weights between 1450-1470g, but I noticed that she was most incisive and effective at around 1430g, holding the goose longer.
- Did she take a break? I have noticed that the motivation to hunt is greatest when she has not flown for a few days.

I reward every successful flight and kill with a full crop, giving generally one complete

pigeon plus 6-7 day old chicks. She will then fast for the next day or two, until she reaches the right weight again. This allows me to fly her in quite high condition, but in a yarak mindset. She absolutely needs that mindset as hunting these geese on a regular basis is very demanding, both physically and mentally.

These geese retaliate, hitting the falcon with their wings, even when she is holding them at the head and the neck. They then rear up and hit the falcon, until she eventually lets go. I also notice that often other geese from the group land nearby, to rescue the goose that has been caught.

Between 16 October and 2 April Godzilla has killed 37 geese, and at least another 25 have escaped after a fight on the ground.

Goose 21 was killed after a pursuit of 3.2km, with a top speed of 100kph, climbing up to 40m. It was a long, powerful and clever flight, with the gyr pretending to abandon the attack, subsequently returning to it even harder. She was also holding the goose very well on the ground, although the goose was striking very hard with its wings.

Goose 22 was killed after a 2.5km pursuit. She separated 6-7 geese from the





Scan QR Code
with phone camera
for video of
Godzilla in action!



Above: Painting of Godzilla by Shaun Bannister

main group, then two, then finally one. She dominated it to a height of 50m, and hit it on the head. The goose lost balance whilst the gyr climbed up again, stooping and hitting the goose hard on the head causing it to fall out of the sky. It took me over ten minutes to get to her and when I arrived, the goose was dead and the falcon was completely covered with mud, but she held on bravely.

She had two intervals of about ten days each when she lacked motivation and killed nothing. She did actually catch at nearly every flight but would not hold the goose long enough for me to reach her and help her. Sometimes she was unlucky and the flights ended up in the water. After catching 14-15 geese, I did notice that she started holding them much better.

If it has been raining a lot and the terrain is very muddy, she'll only be capable of doing oneslip, as she becomes too dirty and wet after the first flight and is unable to fly at all after that.

Real-time GPS was also crucial in these slips, enabling me to get to the falcon to help her as soon as possible. It is an exciting,

emotional and spectacular type of falconry that I would recommend to everyone to see at least a couple of times, as it is very enjoyable. One of the interesting aspects is that these geese nearly always try to escape by out flying the falcon and never try to regain cover. If they are put under pressure by the falcon, they will sometimes dive into a pond or river.

Also within this article you will see the painting of Godzilla, a surprise gift from fellow falconer and a good friend Shaun Bannister. The painting was an unexpected surprise and takes pride of place in my home, so I take this opportunity to thank Shaun for his very kind and generous gift. Thank you Shaun!

I will carry on flying her until late April, with my aim being to end the season with a tally of 40 Nile Geese in the game bag.

If you are in my area and want to see some flights, please feel free to contact me.



WE'RE BETTER TOGETHER

by Andi Chewning

CO. KERRY



COVID-19, everywhere we turn we are reminded of it, and its effects. For the last 18 months, the scourge has permeated everything we do, razing our normal to the ground and re-writing much of what we know.

But one thing, at least, remains true. We are better together. The fieldmeets are more craic, the sport more sporting, the banter sharper, and the overall of it just that bit... better. And so it was incredible to witness first hand that despite the distance, all the logistical issues, the technology hiccups, and all kinds of other snags that came along, we were still able to come together toward a common goal and do something wonderful. I am talking about the IHC Raffle that I organized to benefit The Barn Owl Project based right here in Ireland, and the amazing way people from around the globe drew together to help.

Last year I organized a similar raffle for the Dingle Fieldmeet, with proceeds going to Project Luggar, and with the success that it was, I wanted to do something similar again, but with effects playing out a bit closer to home. Originally I had been thinking of donating proceeds to The Golden Eagle Trust, but Don Ryan pointed out that the

fledgling Barn Owl Project could use the help and with Alessandra Oliveto a key player therein, the choice was hardly a choice at all. So that was the charity recipient of this year's proceeds.

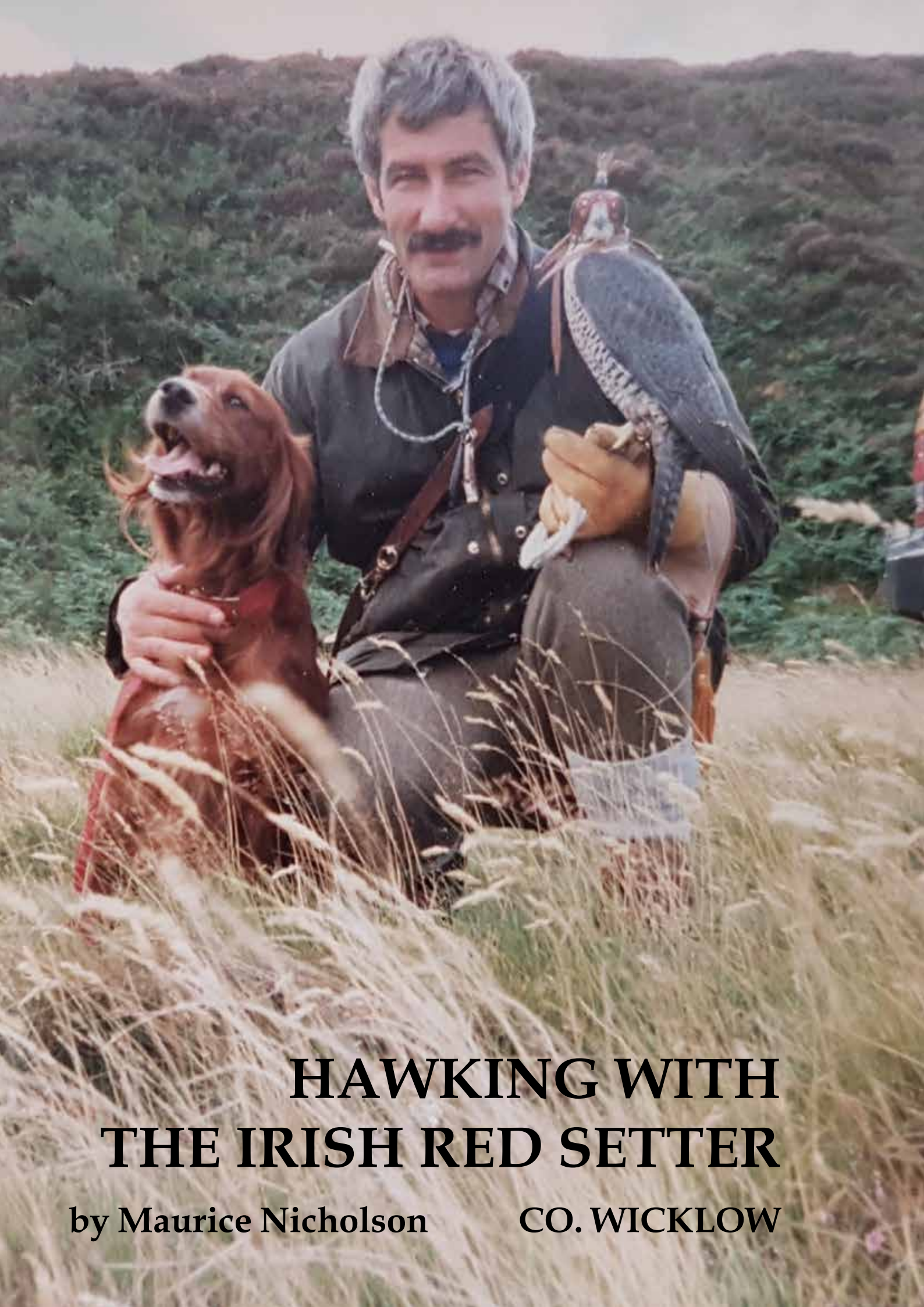
It took quite a lot of man hours to craft the majority of the prizes, and nearly as many in leg-work to sell tickets and get donations, but the outcome was beyond worth the investment. In the end the live-stream raffle draw took more than an hour (nearly two) to complete, with donations of prizes coming in from several different people/businesses around Ireland and the UK, and tickets were sold to people in seven different countries! We were able to raise a clean €450 for the organization. Given that this is only the second year, and that the costs for shipping prizes and other things detracted from the overall earnings more than an in-person raffle, I think that that amount is a fantastic accomplishment.

And it just goes to show that, even with distance between us, we truly are better together.



FIELDMEETS 2021 - 2022

EVENT	DATE	CONTACT
Small Hawk Meet Sneem, Co. Kerry	Fri 3 - Sun 6 September	Don Ryan 085 711 7863
Rabbit Meet Tory Island	Fri 15 - Sun 17 October 2021	Aodhan Brown 0044 7873 529374
Snipe Meet Ballycroy/Belmullet Co. Mayo	Fri 22 - Sun 24 October 2021	Robert Hutchinson 086 235 4875
Pheasant Meet Ballinabrackey, Co. Westmeath	Sun 14 November 2021	Damien Maloney 089 239 8853
Falconry Meet Sneem, Co. Kerry	Thurs 18 - Sun 21 November 2021	Don Ryan 085 711 7863
Pheasant Meet Dunbrody, Co. Wexford	Sun 5 December 2021	Don Ryan 085 711 7863
Rabbit Meet Midlands	Sun 12 December 2021	Damien Maloney 089 239 8853
Snipe Meet Moate, Co. Westmeath	Fri 17 - Sun 19 December 2021	Don Ryan 085 711 7863
Pheasant Meet Kilruddery, Co. Wicklow	Sun 9 January 2022	Neal Carroll 087 249 5113
Pheasant Meet & AGM Midlands, Exact Venue TBC	Sat 15 January 2022	Damien Maloney 089 239 8853
Rabbit Meet Midlands	Sun 16 January 2022	Damien Maloney 089 239 8853
Rabbit Meet Dingle, Co. Kerry	Fri 28 - Sun 30 January 2022	Andi Chewning 083 132 6646



Back in early 1985 I decided it was time for me to move forward in my falconry experience and try something new. At the time, I was living in Kent in southeast England and, for the previous three years, I had been flying peregrines at rooks and crows, either out on Romney marsh or else on the South Downs of Sussex. It had been a great, though sometimes hair raising time of learning the basics of flying long wings. I had no telemetry and so; it was imperative that I flew only in truly, open country and with a falcon that was very strictly weight managed.

Nearby to me were the north Kent Downs which held some partridge, both grey and red legged and where I knew I could get permission to fly from the local farmers, many of whom were serviced by the veterinary practice I worked in. However, it wasn't the thought of hawking partridge that had caught my imagination. For years I had been gobbling up any information I could find on falconry, beginning with the books by Michael Woodford, Gerald Lascelles and my favourite, Ronald Stevens. It was the thought of hawking Steven's favourite quarry, the red grouse in its wild natural environment that had really caught my imagination and I had my well thumbed copy of his book,

'Observations on Modern Falconry'. Running to just over a hundred pages, it is surely the most practical and succinct dissertation on the subject of game hawking ever written. When it came to the use of dogs, Stevens couldn't have been clearer. *'If the falconer is to succeed in game hawking he has to be a perfectionist; therefore, only the best dogs can be used. Everything else being equal, good dogs will make good hawks but unreliable dogs will spoil any hawk's chances'*.

My own, late father had been a game shooting man and he had always run English setters, having one particularly brilliant dog, 'Hardware Boy' who sired a number of field trial champions. As for myself, I was attracted to our native breed, the Irish red setter. The previous September, I had gone out grouse hawking in Co. Wicklow with John Morris and his wild take falcon 'Laragh'. John had borrowed an Irish setter bitch, 'Gail', from the renowned red setter breeder and field trialer, the late John (Jack) Nash for the month of September and had killed a nice few grouse flying his falcon over her. I had really liked the way this bitch worked; she galloped at a lovely steady pace, she ranged widely on each side, yet was beautifully responsive and easy to handle and totally reliable at finding game.

Left: with my first red setter, Chilli and my first grouse hawk, Heather. Scotland 1989

Right: Silver (Moanruad Fairaisle) the dog of a lifetime



HAWKING WITH THE IRISH RED SETTER

by Maurice Nicholson CO. WICKLOW



Left: Brian Morris, his intermewed falcon and his red setters Moss and Mountain North of Scotland 2020. Credit Brian Morris

Right: With Gale feeding up the tiercel on snipe January 2020

The Irish setter has not had the most straightforward career trajectory, even in its native country. In fact, there is no doubt that the working qualities of the breed had greatly deteriorated in the first half of the twentieth century, as it became fashionable throughout the world, especially in the USA. The downside of this popularity was that it had been bred largely for its show qualities, in particular its beautiful red coat, at the expense of its innate hunting qualities. The Irish setter in 1985 though, was well on the road to being revitalised as a working breed and Jack Nash had been at the forefront of this renaissance. It had begun back on 24 July 1950 in Strabane with a meeting between Dr Deeny, Dr Mulligan and John Nash to formulate a breeding plan to resurrect the working Irish setter. They started off with four bitches and every mating was planned with the greatest attention to detail. Thirty five years later, the breeding programme had come to fruition with Irish setters back at the forefront of working bird dogs, winning their share of trials against the other pointing and setting breeds, the English pointer and English setter. In fact, the bitch John Morris had run the previous season had been 'Clashawley Gail', one of Jack's latest great bitches. He had won the Irish Pointer and Setter Championship with her a few years

before.

So I wrote to Jack and told him I was looking for a trained red setter for hawking, giving him a list of all the requirements I thought such a dog should have. When I heard back a couple of weeks later, I realised that he knew much more about the requirements of a good hawking dog than I did. He told me he would have a think about it and see if he had a suitably trained dog, for as he said: *'What you are looking for is not as easy to find as it sounds.'* It's not hard for me to remember when exactly I collected that first red setter from Jack. It was the evening of 8 June 1985 when Barry McGuigan became world featherweight champion. I sat down with Jack and Dorothy Nash and two of their daughters, Clare and Anna and with a couple of glasses of Black Bush whiskey to sustain us, we watched the *'Clones Cyclone'* take the title. It was the first of some great evenings around his fireside where Jack held court like an old Irish seanchaí. We talked of dogs and trials, grouse and hawking into the early hours and I began to get an insight into the vast breadth of his knowledge. Jack had been training dogs since the 1940's and had made up the incredible total of 43 field trial champions. The long list included pointers and springer spaniels but the majority of his field trial champions had been Irish setters.

“she galloped
at a lovely steady pace,
she ranged widely
on each side,
yet was beautifully
responsive and easy to
handle and totally reliable
at finding game”

He had contact with falconers from early on in his career and supplied the late Steven Frank with 'Queenie', probably the most famous of hawking dogs. Steven, and I am sure many of his hawking friends, killed a large number of grouse over this amazing little pointer bitch, year after year in Scotland and she was the founding dam of his 'Embercombe' kennels. Jack had other falconry connections, knowing both Ronald Stevens and Derry Argue. Indeed, he recounted to me how he had climbed down to an eyrie near Ballyheigue in Kerry and got Ronald's last Irish eyass for him sometime in the early 1960's.

The bitch Jack had chosen for me was 'Moanruad Chillí', a daughter of his champion Gail and when I finally got up to Scotland for my first attempt at grouse hawking, Chillí proved to have all the necessary attributes. During a couple of weeks hawking, I killed three grouse over her points with my eyass of the year, 'Heather'. Chillí was very 'birdy' as the trialing fraternity say. She had a great and serious intensity about her when she detected bird scent about. She didn't have the highest of head carriages but she covered the ground methodically, at a beautifully collected gallop and rarely if ever missed a bird on her beat. She made starting off my eyass that year relatively trouble free, as I never had to worry about false points or

premature flushes. She would not move an inch in on a squatting bird and was really steady to rising birds so I often got second flushes from her when she found a nice sized covey. There is no doubt that the start she gave my falcon Heather set her up to become a first rate grouse hawk and proved Ronald Steven's old adage to be accurate indeed.

I had bought Chillí on breeder's terms and Jack was keen to mate her with 'Rustler Boy', who had won the UK Championship for pointers and setters, so when she came into season, I brought her north to Billy Darraghs kennels in Yorkshire and she was mated to his big running dog. A litter of seven duly arrived and Billy took his choice of puppy, Jack took three dogs and a bitch and I kept a bitch for myself and a dog for my brother Jeremy. I trained on the bitch and Jeremy trained his own dog. I also brought them both out with Jack for some training sessions, as they grew up and I learned more about handling dogs in those couple of days than I could have ever believed. I brought the bitch to Scotland as a pup too and with the help of Nancy Reade, who ran her dogs for shooting parties locally, I introduced her to grouse. Nancy always had a couple of coveys of grouse close by her house, so I used to bring 'Silver' over there every morning and get a few nice easy finds



with her before I went out for some hawking later on. I took Nancy's advice too and did not bring her hawking until she was ready.

Both the pups went on to become excellent falconry dogs with 'Moanruad Fairaisle' or 'Silver', as I called my bitch, becoming the cleverest of operators around grouse. She ran like a gazelle, covering great swathes of the hill and became very dependable at finding birds. We developed a fantastic relationship and understanding of our mutual role in providing opportunities for the falcon high above. If a single, wily, old bird slipped away from the point, she would turn her head around slowly to let me know. At a wave of my hand, she would back cast over and back and pin him solidly again. She flushed on command and dropped instantly to feather so, like her mother before her, she often provided more than one flight from a covey. Roger Upton was a great admirer of her work and, years later, he told me she had been the best red setter he had seen used in falconry. Silver was tragically killed in a freak accident when only five years old and before she had successfully bred, but along with her brother 'Moanruad Flyon' and her mother Chilli, she provided some great years of grouse hawking for John Morris, my brother and myself.

“she would not move an inch in on a squatting bird and was really steady to rising birds, so I often got second flushes from her”



Left: My intermewed falcon Heather with Silver and an Irish grouse September 1991

Right: Eric Witkowski's cadge of tiercels and his red setters

Later on, I trained up Rosie (Mochonog Culcuu) and Rantha (Mochonog Cuchee) both bred by my friend John Carroll and sired by Ray O'Dwyer's 'Sheantullagh Godswalk'. I bred a litter from Rosie with Moanruad Flyon and we got a few excellent pups, notably 'Glensaul Raider' who my brother trained up on grouse. My present setter is yet another bitch bred by Jason Benson down in Clare and sired by Davy O'Neill's 'Glynlark Aramis', a fine dog who won the UK Championship on grouse a few years back. 'Gale', as I call her, is probably the most intelligent setter I have ever had. Any command or lesson took just a couple of sessions to teach her. She has a great nose for game, is very careful and steady around birds and flushes on command. She hasn't got the great drive or wide range of some of my previous grouse setters but I'm not complaining. She has enough good qualities to be an excellent snipe setter and suits me well, now that I have taken on the lead of my fellow Irish falconers and taken up some serious snipe hawking. For me, there is nothing quite like seeing a good red setter floating over the bog or on the slope of a heathery mountainside. An Irish setter seems to have such mastery of its environment as it gallops across the wind, head held high, searching for scent on the breeze. This mastery should not really be a surprise. This, after all, is the very type of

Bottom Right: With our eldest son Marc and Rantha (Mochonog Coochi) Rufus and Codger (Glensaul Raider) Scotland 2004



ground it was bred to work over and it shows. It has been said that their colour mitigates against their sporting use because they can be difficult to see when setting in close to a bird. Personally, I have never found this a particular problem. The whitest of pointers sometimes seem to vanish too when close in to a bird!

I am not the only falconer using red setters in our great sport of falconry. Eric Witkowski and his Irish setters, in particular 'Axel', have proved to be brilliant dogs for snipe hawking out on the raised and blanket bogs of our island. My friend, Brian Morris in Scotland has been using 'reds' for many years for his annual hawking and has had great success trialing them too, on the UK field trial circuit. His dogs 'Mission' and 'Mountain' are both field trial champions and were bred by Billy Darragh's 'Erinvale' kennels in Yorkshire, the home of Silver's sire Rustler Boy. Anthony Crosswell in Norfolk has always had a grá for our national breed and had dogs with Declan O'Rourke's 'Lusca' kennels breeding over many years. I was also really happy to see Xavier Morel heading home to Belgium with a red setter puppy after his last snipe hawking sojourn here in Ireland. I hope to see more and more red setters being used in our sport in the future. They are such wonderful dogs and, over the last ten years, they have had fantastic success in field trial



competitions both in Ireland and all over Europe, more than holding their own with the other bird dog breeds.

Addendum:

On the evening of 24 January 1990, I flew into Shannon Airport and from there began the drive, on a windy, wet night, to my parent's home in Co. Waterford. As I drove through Co. Limerick towards Tipperary, I realised that I was close to Mount Catherine, Jack Nash's home but I had actually passed the turn off, a few miles back. It was a nasty night but I hadn't seen Jack for a while so I pulled over, turned around and headed back. I am forever grateful that I did, for I spent the next couple of hours at his fireside, talking dogs and trialing and falcons with Jack and Dorothy and a Norwegian visitor, who was over to look at some of Jack's setters. We talked long and late over tea and cake and, of course, we had a glass or two of Jack's favourite tippie, Black Bush as well until I parted from him at his front door. Jack was killed at a shoot in Curraghmore the next morning when the high winds brought a tree down on the wagon bringing the dogs and their handlers to the pegs. Dorothy was badly injured but survived.



Above: The late Jack Nash with three of his field trial champions Moanruad Latton Jewel, Bena of Maytown and Patricia of Killone

Below: Brian Morris, his setter Mountain and his falcon Mikaela on a Scottish grouse. Credit Brian Morris



oil on canvas 80 x 100cm

Desert Camp - memories of sunrise at the International Falconry Festival in Abu Dhabi selected for this year's Royal Hibernian Academy Annual Exhibition 2021
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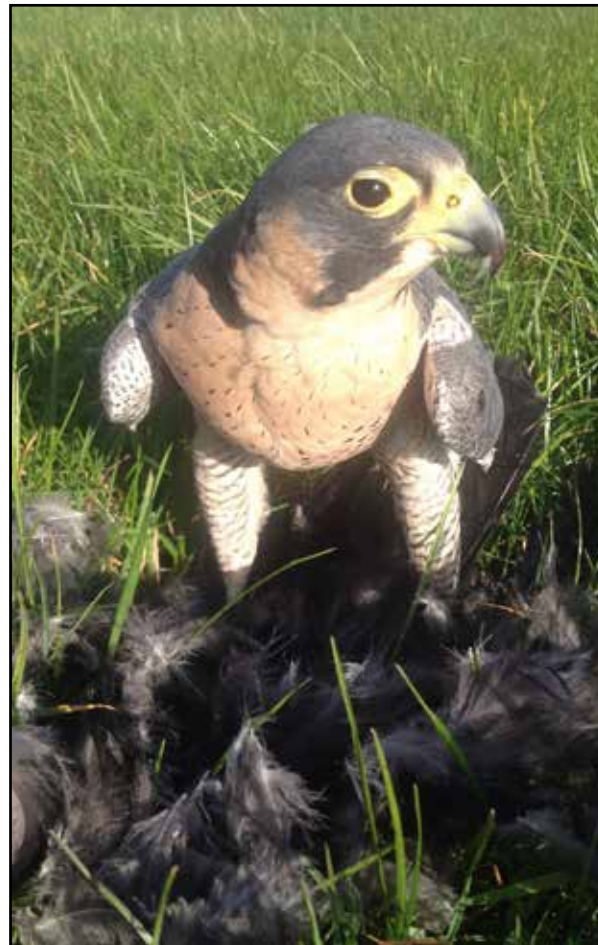
REFLECTIONS FROM THE ISLE OF MAN

by Alan Jackson

ISLE OF MAN

On a bright, cold and breezy April day my wife and I, bored with lockdown walks on our own farm, ventured to the hill opposite. This has been part of my hunting ground for more than a decade and the stroll awakened many memories. These run through my life like the red thread in a tweed jacket... not the whole picture, but certainly the bright shaft that brings the whole weave to life.

I see the ruins of the sheep fold with its few stunted thorns in which many a hard pressed hooded crow sought sanctuary from my peregrine. The hillside nearby where she once had a mighty duel with a crow who was contemptuous of her efforts and kept ringing up shouting insults to the wind. Every time she gained the advantage he dodged her stoops and swore louder. I was fearful she would drift back for the lure but his arrogance was the spur that kept her hooked. He had challenged her and she would not be found wanting. When I saw the two dots converge a mile away I was almost sorry the crow had lost. This gorse hedge was where my home bred female goshawk showed her youthful ambition one day. Not long hard penned and wild hacked she was proving to be a frustrating disaster; I had earlier wild hacked a male and when I managed to breed a female from his brother with my old parent reared female, I thought I would be in for many seasons of exciting hunting. This was not to be the case as she was frighteningly aggressive, my flatcoat feared for his life and refused to hunt with her, and she treated me with total disdain. Eventually I relented and gave her the freedom she craved. But back to her early days, when I was still hopeful. I was walking the hedge line with the (very worried) dog in the hope of a rabbit when a raven, heavy with a crop of lamb he had been eating, came off the carcass and flew across the field 50 yards away. The gos was after it before I realised what was happening and the raven, used to seeing hen harriers, did not at first seem to consider her a danger. His mind was changed when she grabbed his arse from underneath and they crashed to the ground. As I ran towards them the raven



was on top and trying to spear her face with his massive beak but before I got there she managed to get a better grip on his neck and he was dead when I arrived.

Don't think from any of these reminiscences that I am some kind of expert, I have made many mistakes and in the process spoiled some lovely birds but one thing I have always done is got out into the fields with them and hunted. Rather like the old fisherman who observed '*you will never catch a trout unless your fly is in the water.*' One of the privileges of a close association with birds of prey is enjoying seeing them in all their moods. Walking past a small hill pool reminded me of the time I was out with my first imprint male gos. It was a hot August day and I was simply letting him fly around enjoying himself and getting exercise in preparation for the season. He started soaring in the thermals off a gorse bank when the resident kestrel came up and

tried to warn him off. The two of them swirled to and fro above the popping gorse like two leaves in a strong wind. I lay in the grass watching them for some time, engrossed in the display of skilful flying and smug at the fitness of my bird. Eventually they parted and the gos side slipped across the hill to land on the stone wall by the pool. Seeing the water he dropped down and walked into the shallows; expecting him to be lost in a spray of sparkling water I wandered over and was astonished to see him launch himself into the deeper water rowing with his wings and trailing his legs behind. Swimming round in a leisurely circle he came back to the shallows where he splashed briefly and hopped onto fist.

You may have guessed from my reflections that I have witnessed too many seasons and had resigned myself to watching other, more capable, falconers; particularly snipe hawking on the bogs of Ireland. My mews only had a wild peregrine in it, a bird I had

tried to rehabilitate but who, unfortunately, will never recover the full use of his feet. Just before Christmas I heard the shocking news that a fellow enthusiast had died suddenly, and could I please look after his birds? So two falcons and a goshawk are now eating me out of house and home. The gos is a nest sibling to my first imprint, is fifteen years old and he's been on a bow for several years while my friend struggled with his health. Consequently he is very spooky, but I have the summer to make friends with him and next winter to hunt with him. I only hope that I am able to keep up!



THE NOVICE'S GLOVE – HOLDING HAWKS AND MEANING

by Barkat Masood

CO. KILDARE



At one time, from the outside looking in, it did occur to me a strange thing to see falconers playing with birds. It seemed to be an over indulgent and wasteful exercise, hearing of Arab princes specially chartering aeroplanes to fly their raptors for hunting exercises in the desert of Rahim Yar Khan, Pakistan. People of that area told me how the princes would come especially to hunt deer and, an indigenous bird only peculiar to that area, the houbara bustard. Money has poured into the area to the extent that a small airport was built especially for the Arab princes, their raptors and their guns. I heard the Arabs were so enthusiastic for falconry that they wished to annex that area from Pakistan for a fee. Given Pakistan's propensity for corruption, I am surprised that the area did not become a suzerainty of the Arab states. It may be that national security was too ingrained in the public psyche which prevented profiteering politicians from such a sale. Need I say more, given such grand activities by the Arab princes, as to why I found it hard to understand how falconers could go to such lengths to merely play with birds.

Arab princes weren't the first to turn my head. In school, like many students, I studied 'A Kestrel for a Knave' by Barry Hines which was probably my first exposure to the world

of falconry. A young boy living in a bleak Northern English coal mining town seems to find joy when he keeps and trains a kestrel. However, she is cruelly taken away from him. I was left despondent at the end. It left a very unhappy and bitter taste in my mouth. I am not sure if that feeling was due to the story or because I didn't want to be in school. I could understand the misery of North England but I couldn't understand how the kestrel could be a joy.

Delving deep, I find it's likely due to my rearing in an 'animal-free zone' which has stunted my understanding of raptors and their stewards. It wasn't until I kept some chickens that I began to entertain thoughts of keeping a raptor. Chickens are an improbable scenario leading to raptors but when I looked at them, I saw a transfixing in their eye, head and gaze which reminded me of what it might be to be an eagle. Slowly I saw how they would come towards me and allow themselves to be stroked, not knowing if they enjoyed it or if they were only tolerating me. The warmth I expected was unsure and lukewarm. Their sinews seemed fragile yet purposeful. Feathers enthralled and exuded different hues when turned to the light. The beak was open when the body was held - patiently silent but not screeching. This feeling of wanting more and yearning for a connection, germinated in me until I decided that I wanted to learn more about my chickens' cousins. Such a feeling is not unknown to falconers, I thought.

Nowadays the novice has more tools at hand to learn compared to the past when s/he would have to apprentice. YouTube is the delight of the autodidact and I have consumed many videos. Not least of which describes the life of nomads in the deserts of Outer China and Mongolia where falconers fly eagles. Life is harsh in the desert and people survive by all and any means; the eagle and the hunt being of vital importance to nomadic life. As they trained the eagle and took her through her tests, I understood more about the real place for falconry and how it



must have been in the European past. I saw how they would ride three or four together, for hours, with the eagle on one arm resting on a specially designed wooden mount. The tools would not be too different - the glove, the anklet, the jesses, the bells and the hood - recognisable across time and across cultures. They hunted together and cooperated for their mutual survival, waiting on high ground for a wolf or fox. Then came the release of the eagle with a grab or a kill, later assisted by one of the nomads. I then understood the skill, investment and connection that falconer and raptor have together. It is something, like that old cliché, that has to be experienced and cannot be learned in books.

So far my experience is theoretical but made richer by YouTube and by one video content maker in particular - the Falcon Lady. Hailing from Canada, she makes no assumptions of one's knowledge and goes back to basic principles, perhaps because so many get it wrong and perpetuate those mistakes. No topic is considered too small - from how to hold a raptor on the fist to filing its beak. She suggests sometimes we need to know about our past to make sense of the now and connect to it. Following her own advice, she spoke about how she liked to refer back to Frederick the Second of Hohenstaufen - a medieval king of Italy, Germany and

Jerusalem - treatise on falconry. When one probes further about Frederick the Second and his accomplishments, one cannot understand how he had time to write such a work. His accomplishments are many: he was a ruler, he fought wars, spoke six languages, promoted literature and learning, reformed laws and was, of course, a falconer. Such an introduction has made it easy to connect to falconry, which is a skill across time and cultures. I look forward to stroking a raptor's back and releasing her to flight. Most of all I look forward to connecting with others across time and culture; recognising the tools and knowledge of falconry; realising and sharing in the pitfalls and mishaps that occur with falconers, and ultimately all human beings.



Left: Goshawk, photo credit Darry Reed

Above: Still from film 'Kes'



INVISIBLE CONNECTION

by James Knight

Co. Galway



I am sat in the Land Rover in exactly the same place I was one year and one week ago. I wanted to write these first paragraphs separated only by time.

You can find this very spot on Google Maps... find Ireland, middle of the west coast, Galway. Go directly north through Headford, Cross, Cong to Clonbur. Turn east until the R345 is about to touch Lough Corrib, there is a tiny crossroads, a widening of the road, almost a lay-by.

It is a beautiful spot, Lough Corrib stretches out from north to south, dotted with islands. The Connemara hills of the distant west and north shore run down to the flat lands of Galway City far to the south. 64,000 acres of clear shimmering limestone water, the largest lake in the Republic of Ireland.

A year ago the sky had been bluer, it had been warmer and there were high fluffy clouds drifting westwards. This year, I am here with pen and paper. Last year the Marshall pocket link sat on the Land Rover dashboard, a sleek black box from the space age, beautifully built, comfortingly heavy, its neon blue heartbeat flickering reassuringly. I had to cup my hands to shield the sun from my phone to watch the Aerovision app and the blue dot tracing its course across the map. A corkscrewing trail, ever growing, that drifted out over the inland sea of silver water. This technology, this connection, was reasonably new to me and, because of the landscape, the liquid barrier, I was going to learn a valuable lesson.

To drive around to exactly the opposite side would take an hour. Through Cornamona to Maam, over the river feeding the north of the Lough then up over the pass, known to the marathon runners as 'hell's hill', down to Maam Cross and turn south. All of it rough, hilly terrain in which I would almost certainly lose the signal to the pocket link.

So I sat on this elevated viewpoint and waited and watched, looking into the vast sky and then down to the tiny blue lights. Out there, with nothing between us but distance, was Atlas, a male saker falcon. By looking at the phone's map and aligning it with the islands, I knew which patch of sky he was in. Invisible and lost to me, but connected.

He was climbing, thermalling, drifting further and further westwards. There was only one place he was heading... the far shore. It was hard to know how this would

end, especially when the beating blue light started to falter. Lifting the pocket link out through the window I sat it on the Land Rover roof. We were back together.

Cars would pull in ahead of me every few minutes. A family got out (minus Dad, plus small dog) Mum arranged them all on the wall, took the Instagram shot and they bundled back in and were off. A Cabriolet driver stopped, held his phone high, snapped the view and was gone in a cloud of dust and gravel. At one point three cars had stopped, people milling about for a minute or two taking photos and glancing at the strange man in the Land Rover.

“By now, Atlas had crossed the Dooras peninsula, a long finger-like protrusion into the lake, he had continued on over open water until he was over land on the western shore...”

By now, Atlas had crossed the Dooras peninsula, a long finger-like protrusion into the lake, he had continued on over open water until he was over land on the western shore. I still had a theoretical line of sight and remember wondering if there was a telescope invented powerful enough for me to see him. To bring him back into focus, back into my world. He was a long, long way away.

I felt things were looking really ominous now. How far could he go in the time it took me to drive around to him? Again I decided all I could do was watch, rooted to this viewpoint, just watch the statistics change every second, every second a new hope. His altitude, his speed, watch the turning trail of blue over the map, at least this way we stay connected.

He caught another thermal and rose again, drifting still further away over the foreign



shore. His blue trail passed over the hill top wind farms, the furthest horizon I could see. From here I was sure he would be able to look west down to Fermoy Lodge, home of Ronald Stevens and the sky where his peregrines and gyrs once roamed. Atlas was enjoying the freedom of the heavens where the first ever captive hybrids were bred. A female peregrine with a male saker, just like him.

I wondered what Ronald would have made of this modern technology, this new connection with our hawks. He was a falconer who gave his hawks freedom to roam, to play at hack, to find their way home. Somehow when I first read Ronald's books over 25 years ago I felt a connection. Hard to explain why, his books had no stunning photographs, heroic paintings of brave falcons, nothing about them but bland words, words that connected to birds. But his was the type of relationship I wanted with hawks.

I have met several people that knew Ronald well, I have listened to old radio show recordings and seen shaky cine film footage from the 1960's. Years ago I went and stuck a peregrine feather along with other hawk feathers on his grave in Oughterard. I now know that I am not alone, other falconers have made the pilgrimage and left an offering, felt the connection.

The blue trail was showing Atlas had come back down from the hills and was over Oughterard, flying above the village it seemed that he was doing the same. A flying

salute to a falconer and his hawks separated only by time.

This was the first time that he had stopped going westwards. He started exploring the shoreline heading south toward Galway. This felt like good news, at least he wasn't continuing on to the Atlantic Ocean! Now I could drive south around the lake through Galway City and up to meet him if I had to. But I didn't like the fact that he was cruising about at low altitude, was he chasing something?, would he land in someone's garden?, farmyard?, catch a chicken? get caught by a collie? hit by a car? So many dangers compared to being invisible to other humans, thousands of feet up in the misty heavens. Lough Corrib may be the Republic of Ireland's largest Lough, and 43.5km long, but it has a waist, a much narrower part in the middle that, like the rest of the Lough, is dotted with islands. Atlas was near the waist, heading out to water again, flying over island after island. Joining the dots. I started to hope that he was coming back over to my side of the Lough. Sure enough, he was, and this was a game changer.

Then, just as he made land on the eastern shore, we lost the connection. The terrain was in the way, cutting the thread between us. But I knew he was to my side, just below Headford. I turned the Land Rover around and headed back into the tangle of roads, walls, trees, farmyards and away from the uninterrupted sky. Down through Cong, Cross, Glencorrib and then I found a place

to pull in where the sky was big and the blue light started flashing again. We all know that feeling. When the telemetry starts beeping again.

Sometime on that drive, while picking up or moving the phone, a clumsy finger must have stopped the recording on the AeroVision app. But I soon noticed and started recording again. I followed him, calmly watching his progress over the landscape, driving from one spot to the next keeping in easy range of the pocket link. I could intercept his flight path and wondered whether he thought the countryside was littered with green Land Rovers pulled over from the narrow lanes into overgrown gateways. At one point I got out and watched as he flew straight over above me at 600ft. Then finally it dawned on me, he was heading home and he was likely to get back there way before me.

I pulled into the golf course at Ashford Castle knowing that he had already beaten me to it and was sitting in one of the tall stately trees planted 150 years ago by the Guinneses. The first time his blue dot had been stationary on the map since we let him go.



He glided down and fluttered onto the lure, stepping onto the glove as if nothing extraordinary had happened. Relief, happiness and wonderment that the invisible connection had become a physical connection. He was there on my glove eating his quail. I stopped the recording.

Looking back at the app, it was all there, his epic adventure. The 4 May 2020. He had been flying continually for two hours and three minutes. His maximum altitude was 4,552ft. He had covered 60.2 miles. 60 miles, that's 96km! But most impressive for me; he came home. I think Ronald Stevens would have appreciated that flight.

Since that first grand tour Atlas has done many more, but it always depends on thermals being present and, some months, they are as rare as a patient goshawk. No thermals, then Atlas will fly well to the lure - crafty and surprisingly agile for the big blond bombshell that he is. On the 19 July Atlas did a northern grand tour of the lake covering 66.3 miles, 106km, in two hours and 27 minutes.

The information from the GPS is incredible, the insights into behaviour fascinating. We

“I found a place to pull in where the sky was big and the blue light started flashing again. We all know that feeling”

have a Ferruginous Buzzard, 30 years old, our first hawk who flew at hawk every day (until the influx of buzzards started beating him up and it no longer seemed fair to send the old age pensioner out on the streets in what has become the dangerous part of town). One of his flights recorded 55 miles in two and a half hours but he never ventured more than three quarters of a mile away. His blue trails are like a ball of string, layer upon layer of criss crossing trails. Atlas doesn't do that, he sets out on journeys, day trips, explorations over new land.

Only twice has he not made his way home. The first time we watched his typical progress thermalling and drifting south, passing Headford, and then it was clear that he had changed course and had decided to head home. However, the weather had changed, becoming cooler, windier. In the diminishing thermals he drifted much further and got less height so on his course home he hardly made any ground at all. His struggle was clear to see, climbing but drifting, not making headway. Time and again. Part of me wanted to leave him so his record of always coming home would remain unbroken. But it was getting late in the evening and a night in the mews would be more comfortable for him and us. It was the right decision to go because as I got close I could see on the phone he had given up and landed in a tree. Five paces from the Land Rover and he was on the lure.

The second occasion happened this year. Somehow there was a mix up and we realised his GPS wasn't connected. There is nothing to make you appreciate GPS like having it taken away. Back to swivelling an antenna and listening to a crackly static beep. All you can know is that he is somewhere over there as you wave a hand through a quarter of the horizon. There were three of us with receivers, one following, one at home base and another on the golf course. Thankfully, after a couple of hours, we all agreed that he was heading home. Then two receivers suddenly lost signal and only the one following still had him. He was found just above head height hiding in a very thick bush. Something had clearly terrified him, enough for him to find a serious hiding place... a peregrine?, a white-tailed sea eagle? a territorial buzzard? We will never know. What a shame we hadn't got the GPS information. With lots of hawks to fly

and only one GPS transmitter that is a phrase we say a lot now.

A very surreal episode happened while I was starting to write this, sat in the Land Rover, overlooking the Lough. As I wrote the first couple of paragraphs, remembering Atlas in the sky above, trying to connect to the past, the phone went. It was Tommy, he was flying Atlas and was concerned about the range of the pocket link.

'How far is he?' I asked.

'He is 3,000ft above Inchagoill Island and drifting'.

I was embarrassed to tell Tommy where I was, in the perfect spot. That, while I had been remembering Atlas in the clouds a year ago, he was actually there, now, invisible yet present. Just a coincidence of course, just a random connection. I told Tommy that I would drive into the Falconry School and he was all smiles when I got there.

'I tried to call you, he is on his way back... any second now'.

A splattering of big fat raindrops hit the windscreen, the app said he was over the distant trees, and then he appeared, cutting through the heavy air, to flutter down to the lure... 34 minutes, 16 miles, 3,228ft... and home.



BURNOUT

I, Hoodmaker, this table my tether
Perched here confronted by knife, dye and leather
Patterns languish on square chunks of hide
Mail it today? Well, I guess that I lied

Legions of hoods these creasing hands crafted
Chapters of patterns these tired eyes drafted
So many hawks, hood tucked in to doze
Such ample delight to observe their repose
Decades of nights: blocking and blocking
Decades of days: more making than hawking

So, I consider, holding stem under bowl
My plan of attack to remove that beak hole
Should I start a new blade? Good ol' trusty Eleven
Or leave it alone and trust it to heaven

Or maybe it's best, having sipped of the red
To wait 'till tomorrow, and trundle to bed.

by James West Nelson

From Cabin Boy of Falconry
(A Collection of Falconry Poems)
by James West Nelson 2015



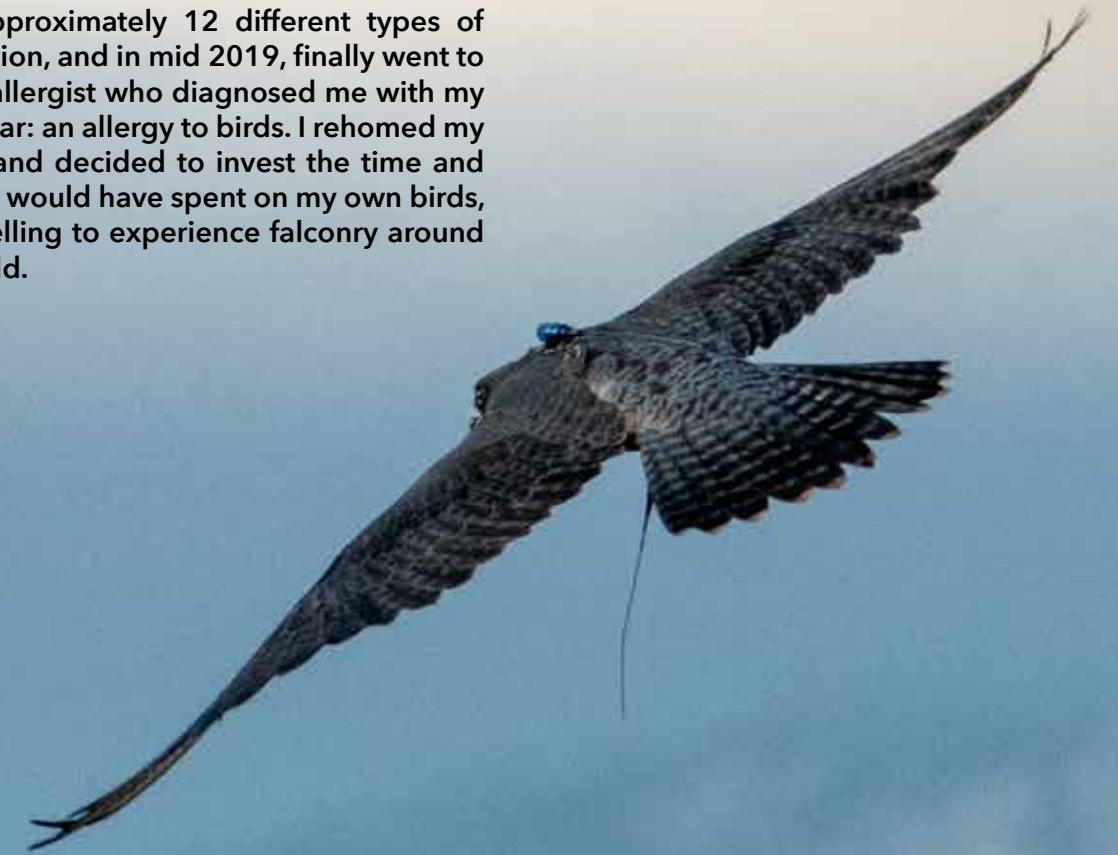
FALCONRY THROUGH A LENS

by Krista Hong Edwards

USA



In mid 2018, I started coughing non-stop. I went to several different doctors, tried approximately 12 different types of medication, and in mid 2019, finally went to see an allergist who diagnosed me with my worst fear: an allergy to birds. I rehomed my kestrel and decided to invest the time and money I would have spent on my own birds, on travelling to experience falconry around the world.



As luck would have it, in January 2020 I had the opportunity to travel to Ireland. I stayed with a lovely falconry family in Drogheda, and had an incredible experience flying hawks with falconers Brian and Carl McCann. My one regret was that I did not have the chance to get some professional photographs of these falconers, their birds, and the landscape they were flying on. When I returned home in January, I purchased a Nikon D500 camera and in late 2020, Marshall Radio Telemetry supplied me with a Sony A9 as well to continue capturing images of falconry.

Of course, as many of us are familiar, in March 2020 the world stopped - and put my dreams of traveling to document international falconry on hold. Instead, with the restrictions put on us, I stayed local - documenting Utah, Wyoming and Idaho falconers instead.

I owe a huge thank you to the many falconers who have invited me out this past year - without whom I wouldn't have been able to document these photos. I've learned many secrets of falconry by observing you and your hawks, and I'm looking forward to continuing these adventures.

The following is a photo journal of falconers, their hawks, and the landscapes they fly. I hope to continue this photo journal with Irish, Scottish, and English falconers next. You can view more of my allergy-free adventures and photography on my Instagram at @kristafeather.

Top left: White gyrfalcon 'Rex,' flown by falconer Robert Bagley, stops and hovers over his falconer for a moment before mounting up and taking a pitch above us. Rex has been one of the loveliest and most well-mannered falcons I've had the opportunity to encounter.

Bottom left: Falconer Herald Clark of Utah's tiercel peregrines, Buddy.

Right: The slate blue of the adult peregrine accents beautifully with the high peaks of the Rocky Mountains in the western United States, which reach from Alaska all the way down to Mexico. These mountains are home to many wild peregrines, prairie falcons, golden eagles, and many more raptors.



Right: Posing with falconer Herald Clark's cast of peregrine tiercels Buddy and Gino in Utah, where the terrain is also in contrast to that of the Emerald Isle!



Above: Robert Bagley's white gyrfalcon, 'Rex'



Main Image: Two of three gyrfalcons at tame hawk at falconer Robert Bagley's ranch. While I had a goal of getting all three white gyrfalcon siblings in a single shot, only two were willing to play while the third watched its siblings in the sky.

Above: Robert Bagley's black gyrfalcon shows off the eastern Idaho mountains and landscapes as he makes a fly-by. Where Ireland has rich and lush greens and emeralds, Idaho has an array of gold and amber fields. (And is frequently covered in snow from October to April!)



Main image: Falconer Ryan Andersen's peregrine falcon, 'Harley Quinn,' makes a fly by Steve Chindgren in the clear morning air of Wyoming.

Below: In October of 2020, I had the opportunity to visit Steve Chindgren's falconry-famous House of Grouse. Every morning in the early Wyoming sun, one of his three gyr/peregrine tiercels made a fantastic show of stooping on sage grouse - often respected as one of the most difficult American quarry. Here, Badger (who one 1st place at the Utah Sky Trials in 2019) stands on a sage grouse.



Below: Falconer Deno Newbold of Idaho's 3rd year anatum peregrine 'Willow' on a mallard duck. If you look closely in her eye, you can see the silhouette of Deno with his hand raised to wave down another falconer in the distance.



Steve Chindgren prepares his gyr/peregrine tiercel 'Badger' for a flight. The experience I had at the House of Grouse is one I am looking forward to repeating next season!



In the early hour mornings of Wyoming, one of Steve Chindgren's gyr-peregrines lands a hard hit on a sage grouse.



Master falconer Robert Bagley feeds up his gyrfalcon on the fist. In this particular flight, the gyr took a high pitch and then stooped down to return to us. Sure enough, a wild golden eagle passed by. Eagles are always a threat, and falconers in the American west are very conscientious of times and territories that the eagles frequent.



Master falconer Herald Clark and his apprentice, Clarence Wayman, have a short discussion following the flight of Clarence's peregrine. To become legally licensed in America, falconers must complete a two year minimum apprenticeship under the guidance





Robert Bagley's black gyr in the eastern Idaho mountains



Bird-dogs should not be forgotten - Steve Chindgren's English Pointer Scotch was all too eager to point on grouse and wait patiently for the birds to be in striking position.



Hawking on sage grouse in the coldest months of winter, and in the springtime, the mornings are alive with the sounds the sage grouse leks. Occasionally, the males will fight for dominance, clapping each other with their strong wings, but mostly, they are strutting their best strut for the females. I had the opportunity to spend a weekend counting leks with falconer Steve Chindgren, who is as passionate about the quarry as he is about the falcons.



Me, with Sky, the Golden Eagle. Clearly the amount of greens and mist denotes this is not Utah, Idaho, or Wyoming - this is most definitely Ireland! The panorama was breathtaking, and I cannot wait to return.

TALE OF THREE FALCONS

by Brendan Lally

CO. GALWAY

Ophelia

In Sept 2017 I took possession of a gyr/peregrine/saker (GPS) female weighing in at 2lb 6oz (1078g). She came out of a hack pen at 2lb 12oz (1250g) so a large bird (by my standards). Up to this point I have flown mostly falcons: female peregrine, male saker (both in the UK) and passage prairie falcons (USA) nearly all on ducks.

She was a four year old bird and had successfully flown on gulls (up to black backed size of 1.8kg / 3lbs 15oz) so she knew how to hunt and handle herself. This was my first tri-bred and also my first time considering hunting crows. I wasn't thinking I'd be up on a majestic tall horse galloping over hedges as per Nick Fox (even though the Galway Blazers are nearby). My reality was something a little different. I live in Athenry, Co. Galway, so the terrain is not conducive to ringing up flights and lacks large open spaces (such as the Curragh) and instead is very much smaller fields with traditional stone walls, mainly for cattle and mixed sheep farming.

Initial flights were challenging as it was difficult to get her focused. Up to this point she was geared towards chasing gulls and actively discouraged from hunting crows. It took a few sessions to get her going and she got the hang of it. Around here there is no shortage of crows and you can easily find 100-300 within an hour. Early season there are lots of youngsters around so that helps at the start. One of the main advantages is that there is no shortage of land here and farmers are very happy to see you, so no issues regarding hunting permission.

I feed the falcons on the crows they have caught with no issues. Some older literature indicates some birds don't like the meat and need to switch to 'nicer' offerings. I sometimes intersperse food with quail and pigeon as needed. One of the downsides is the injuries, with all of them getting sores on their feet from the crow's sharp beak and it's certainly something to keep on top of. To be clear, 'crow hawking' here is all about rooks. Regrettably, I lost Ophelia (like the storm) after

only a few weeks. I had two transmitters on her as normal and had checked both before I put her in the truck. As I unhooded her to chase crows about 100ft away in a field; she took off and the larger transmitter fell from her backpack just as she left the fist (she must have loosened it on the 15 minute journey). No worries as the second one transmitter (FMV Merlin) was on her tail mount. I could see her chase a group of five crows that broke away and went over the small hill. After a few minutes I could see some more crows get up in the distance and then dissipate. I walked through the grass field and once I got to the small hill, saw no sign of her nor any crows. I watched for a bit and then went back to the truck and checked the telemetry. I had a signal (roughly about a mile away) in the NE direction coming through fine but after about five minutes it stopped abruptly.

There was nothing after that, so I drove around in larger circles, stopping regularly to check for a reading and watching for crows gathering. Nothing. I went back to the original spot and walked the fields but no signs. Put out word with local farmers etc. which did lead to several calls (mostly buzzards). There were a few reliable sightings but I was never able to get there on time. I did spot her myself a few months later (see further down) and it appeared as if she kept within a five to ten mile radius (based on reported sightings). However there is a pair of local peregrines so hard to know.

Solas

After two months chasing the 'ghost' of Ophelia I decided to get her sister and Solas arrived in December. Roughly the same size; a little bit more feisty and certainly kept me busy. Again, she was more aligned towards gulls but switched over to crows ok and no stopping after that.

I flew her for nearly three years and she was very efficient on crows; no messing around and as much as I'd try to get in asap to help on a crow; usually my help wasn't needed. Most of the time I was just a taxi service! I'd release her on some crows in a field





out of the tree behind her! Initially I thought it was Ophelia but no, it looked like a female peregrine. Solas landed on the lure, looking over her shoulder as the other bird did a wide circle and then was out of there. Got a good look and it was a nice female, no blood, so looked like the local bird. Stepped Solas up on the fist; no issues, eating fine, didn't seem stressed, just had lots of blood on her front. As she was eating I felt around and couldn't find any issues. Hooded her up and went home. Cleaned her and checked her out. Found a small cut on the top of her leg but not enough to cause the blood. Only theory was that she had killed a crow and the peregrine came in to rob her or vice versa. Never had any entanglement after that even though it continued to fly within the same areas.

Solas flew around 2lb 5oz (1055g) and later in the season at a higher weight about 2lb 8oz (1100g).

On our last hunting outing (Sept 2020) she had moved two miles away and I tracked her down near a horse ranch, right by the motorway. Went back and forth for

ten minutes and I just couldn't get a proper position with either transmitter (both coming in strong, then fading, then strong). I drove around the other side of the motorway and had the same issue yet it seemed the signal was back on the horse farm. Back over the road again and walked the line with a pop-up every 10ft to jump up and hold onto the tall fence, looking and listening for a bell. Then I drove back over to the other side and this time walked for half a mile along the motorway. Found her eventually tucked into some long grass on the embankment.

Initially I thought she had a crow in the long grass but once I bent down to pick her up I could see she was poorly with a dropped wing. Had to 'cuddle' to carry her; with no resistance or noise ensuing. Brought her to the vet who x-rayed her wing and said it was badly broken but looked 'fixable'. The vet put her under general anesthetic and tried to repair it, but once he opened her up the damage was too severe and he was not able to pin it. She would be unable to fly again so had to be put down.

Sadly missed. Learned a lot.

(normally increase the distance, so further each time) and sometimes she'd be like an arrow and other times she'd go sit on a pole and spend 20 minutes pulling at the transmitter on her backpack. Eventually she'd be off chasing and I'd follow. Yes, I could drop her weight and get her more focused but I like them to muscle up and increase weight over time. With the new technology (Microsensory with SMS) it makes it so more convenient having directional and Google pin drops ability (with driving directions) on your phone.

I'd normally find her in a field within a one to three mile radius plucking a crow. She'd normally drag it in by a wall, under a hedge or once into a very dense gorse bush which was a wee bit tricky to extract. Occasionally I'd find her by following the cows who create a ring around her and just stand there watching the show. On one fine day I had spotted about 30 crows in a five acre field and pulled into a dip on a small dirt road. I got her out of the car and was checking over the wall when all the crows got up and scattered with their alarm call. I couldn't understand it as I was convinced I was well hidden and they

shouldn't have seen the truck (they do get used to the 'enemy' transport). As I stood up I could see to my far right, about a quarter of a mile away, a falcon flying towards the crows and hence the reason they were spooked. It looked as if it could be Ophelia but by the time I got binoculars in my one free hand (Solas still hooded on my glove) it was hard to judge. Maybe it was the local female peregrine that I had seen on occasion.

On another occasion I was flying with a more interested ('into the birds' as they say) farmer and we watched as she chased some crows. Lost sight of her about a mile down the valley but could pick her up on the telemetry. After 15 minutes waiting, I decided to get in the truck and go get her. I walked in from the road about three quarters of a mile and it appeared she was in a tall pine tree (based on height and position from telemetry) which was weird as it was unlikely she had caught a crow up that high. Then I saw her from about a half mile away and she looked fidgety so I took out the lure and after a few swings she came towards me. I was alarmed now as all her front was covered in blood!

After a few seconds another falcon came





Wink

Wink arrived in Nov 2020 (a few weeks after Solas) on loan from Gerard Byrne in Dublin. She was a small female peregrine/barbary and just five months old. Lovely temperament, well trained and became part of the family. She weighed in at 1lb 4oz (590g) and has so far been unsuccessful on game.

I was slow to get her going but she eventually started catching crows. She was a totally different bird in manner and technique to the other two. Crows were somewhat 'less afraid' until she got closer and then she'd single one out and give chase. She was a lot more nimble and able to stay with them as they tried to dodge and out manoeuvre her. This often resulted in the crows ditching into a low tree and holding tight. No bother, she'd go in after them (Solas would do so as well). If the crow was able to move around without getting caught I'd (after a little get fit running on my behalf) be able to flush it out. After a while it became a bit of a game, trying to time the flush as she circled and came around again.

On one occasion this 'bush hopping' went on for a good 20 minutes and carried on over

half a mile across several fields and several trees until we eventually managed to catch the crow (just a wee bit of exercise for me). On nearly all occasions I'll let the hawks have a big crop on a successful kill and then skip a day for flying. This eating often would take some time as the falcons are not as ravenous an eater as a ferruginous hawk! I progressed to letting them eat the head on the walk back; then let them eat freely in the truck while travelling home. They would eventually get the hang of it; either on the perch or on the floor. That may need continuation into the aviary but either way lead to faster turnaround but the downside was cleaning up the feathers in the truck. I need to invest in a small portable hoover!

Wink would fly at around 1lb 6oz (660g) and later in the season I flew her at higher weights, approximately 1lb 9oz (700g). She was pretty fit at this stage and flew nearly every day and started climbing higher. She'd make half-hearted attempts at initial crow chasing and explore the valley. Normally I would track her with the Microsensory positioning app and with binoculars. Mostly she would

come back after 20 to 30 minutes but rarely found any crows on the way back to chase. She played around with a male peregrine on one occasion but it was obviously not a territorial dispute, as they just flew around each other for a bit. Occasionally she'd chase a stray snipe that got up (good dairy grass for cows) and enjoyed chasing them but with no real vigor and always out of position. I've only had one ringing flight that went up to about 600ft, chasing a crow that decided going up was a better idea than making for the local trees. No obvious reason as to why it ended up that way, as we had flown those fields several times, but it was great to see. Eventually the crow bailed out and managed to beeline it away as it was on top and Wink looked like she had given up.



So what did I learn:

No shortage of crows nor hunting ground with many a friendly farmer.

Ability to fly nationally and not restricted to local only ground.

Having plenty of quarry leads to earlier choices on varying hunting strategies .

Crows are always watching with a scout or two on patrol.

Crows will recognise any regular routines including car/truck.

Ringing flights are hard to orchestrate without a focused approach and more open land.

Non optimal flights are still possible in restricted terrain.

May not be as spectacular as vertical stoops on ducks but still very enjoyable.

Recommended as an easier alternative to game hawking.

Modern app tracking telemetry (e.g. Microsensory) makes it a lot easier.



MY MERLIN JOURNEY

by Joanie Lamoureux

QUEBEC



Micro falconry is a modern term used to describe falconry with smaller raptors. Falconry with a bird of prey under 400g is considered micro and for some reason it is always something that has had me fascinated. Sparrowhawks, merlin and Cooper's hawks are birds I've always enjoyed watching in the wild. They are fast, strong and fearless. When I started my journey into falconry, I was, from day one, interested in flying one of those birds.

Mae West was my first kestrel. A female, she taught me a great deal about weight management and feather management on small hawks. To be honest, I had a hard time keeping her on weight and I ruined a couple tail feathers before figuring out a good perching set up for her. Eventually, I learned a lot and enjoyed this tiny 96g female a lot.

A few years later I decided to fly aplomado falcons. Considered in the micro falcon family with most females flying on an average of 320g. My tiercel was a fabulous flyer. I could

fly him anywhere at any moment. But he was inconsistent in terms of hawking. One day he could pursue with tenacity and the next day only chase for a few seconds. Still, I learned a lot. How to avoid screaming issues and high level tidbitting for hooding. I also worked a lot on anti-carrying techniques. Also, it was my first time flying two small falcons in a cast. Nopalito and Pitaya taught me a lot and my falconry journey wouldn't be the same without them.

Last August, after hesitating for a few weeks, I decided to trap a merlin. I prepared myself by reading Jeremy Bradshaw's 'The Passage Merlin', and bought a trap and several hoods. I also built a few wooden perches and started scouting. After a few weeks I had the chance of getting my hands on a jack merlin.

This tiny dark jack merlin stared at me with boldness in its eyes from the first moment. And as anyone could have expected none of my hoods were the right size. They were all too big! Thanks to Graeme Parker from the

IHC I was able to order a well fitting hood quite quickly, but because of Covid-19 it took 62 days to arrive! Obviously, I didn't know at that time it would be so long and I started training my jack without a hood. Which is something I don't recommend or would never do again!

It took 24 hours before he started feeding on the fist and he accepted my setter and my jack russell terrier with ease. Within the first week I introduced the lure and he tried to carry the lure in my yard by day five. At that moment I knew I would have to work on anti-carrying with him.

For some reason flying to the fist stuck pretty strongly in his head, maybe because he liked the opportunity to eat up in the air rather than at ground level. By day 15 he would fly to my fist or to his lure from anywhere in my training field. So, I thought: 'time to put telemetry on and fly free'.

I was surprised that he would rather fly at birds two or three km from us than at sparrows on the ground a few dozen meters

“This tiny dark jack merlin stared at me with boldness in its eyes”

away. Each flight would have me running but he would always come back.

One day he even crossed a river and started ringing up sparrows on the other side, at this point he was a tiny speck in the sky. I thought 'I'm never going to see this bird again' but he eventually came back!

His first kill happened in an open field and I was able to witness it all. Each and every flight is interesting but also nerve wracking as I never know where or when it's going to end.





He sometimes misses on the first opportunity but doesn't necessarily come back to the lure when called. The first few times he expressed that behavior and ignored the lure I thought he was maybe a few grams too high. But then I realized that it was because he had spotted birds a few hundred meters away and wasn't going to let the opportunity pass.

Many of our flights ended up as telemetry chases and I wouldn't ever fly a merlin without telemetry. They are tiny hawks and there's lot of predators around. I remember a specific day where he landed on the ground after a miss and I guess he was just exhausted, so waited there. As I was walking toward him with my receiver, I saw a Cooper's hawk lunging toward him and I started screaming. The Cooper's flew away. I'm pretty sure my falcon would have been dead that day without telemetry!

My jack was surprisingly cold tolerant, much more so than any other small bird I've trained. I've never seen him tuck a foot or show any sign of discomfort or cold during the winter. He did eat much more but other than that was always willing to fly and hunt.

So far, I've learned a lot but it is still only the beginning. Merlins are bold and fearless.

They do their own thing in their own way and as with any bird in falconry it must learn to trust you, but with merlins you also need to trust them a lot...because they're going to do what they want to do anyway, and then come back to you!

Right now, my jack is moulting but I'm hoping to be back out with him next September and my goal is to train him to wait on under my dogs. My merlin journey is just starting but I can already say that I'm hooked!

