

The
Austringer 
 The Journal of the Welsh Hawking Club No. 47 2015



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Front cover photograph: Female gyrfalcon by Mark Williams.
 Back cover photograph: Gyrfalcon by Mark Williams

President's Preamble

I would like to thank the membership for giving me the opportunity to be your President. I am honoured to be chosen to follow in the footsteps of the previous holders of this position. I am a practising falconer flying longwings, although I have flown goshawks for many years.

It was unfortunate that on the night of the AGM I was not at my best being still suffering the effects of a particularly nasty bug. I omitted to thank Dave and Jean for their years of work and to ensure that they were rewarded in a small way by nominating them for honorary membership. This has now been rectified and your committee will ask members to alter rules to prevent this happening again. We all owe a great deal to Dave and Jean who have held the club together through thick and thin. They have been the rock that gave the club a sound anchoring, leaving a heritage of which we can all be proud.

Thanks are also due to the team that runs the Club and particularly Neil McCann for the organisation of the AGM Field Meet.

This year has seen the loss of two great falconry stalwarts both of whom have influenced many new entrants to the sport. Griff Griffiths and Steve Frank have shown the best example possible being willing to spend time with the rankiest beginner, always having good words of encouragement, showing hawking of the highest quality. A great loss to us all our thoughts are with Norma, Jamie and Griff Jnr.

This year I have represented Wales at the 75th Hungarian Field Meet held on the 5-9 November at Fuzesgyarmat. This club was founded by Lorant de Bastyai in 1939 and he is held in great regard by Hungarian falconers. I had been asked by the AGM to return a collection of books written in Hungarian to the club. Their President was very pleased to accept the collection of Lorant's books. They were to be taken and displayed along with other falconry artefacts at a permanent display in Szyged.

Our hosts made us most welcome, however not many could speak English. There were groups from Holland, Germany and Austria giving a total of 50 falconers. The field meet was held hawking pheasants around the edges of enormous fields of rape or maize stubble.

The goshawk groups were dominated by small passage hawks none of which would have been saleable in the UK; all were just too small, however not too small to take brown hares many times their size. They also scored well on the pheasants unlike our longwing groups, the pheasants just would not fly across the large fields preferring to drop back into wooded field margins. There were no partridges at all, locals told us that now they are very rare and protected wherever they are found. The agricultural systems are no longer favourable, the old Pusztas is now ploughed and there is no room for wild partridges. For those of us who hawk partridges it is an example of what happens if you don't look after what you have.

I attended the Festival of Falconry in Abu Dhabi at which the Welsh Hawking Club was well represented by Mick Cordell, Dr David Ridpath, Linda Wright and Alison Wilson. Many thanks to them all putting on a great stand showing the many falconry opportunities available in Wales.

I finished my season with a week's hawking in Spain, my brookie falcon this year has been flying at a good pitch and taken a variety of quarry. In Spain I was shown great sport with many falcons flying to heights in excess of 1000ft. The trip was completed with a trip to the Troreal, a sky trial for the highest flying falcons in Spain. Regular flights in excess of 300m are required to gain admission.



Congratulations to Gonzalos Cano taking first place with a flight of over 450m.

The world of falcons and falconry is changing at a breathtaking pace with innovations in training and a new sport (in my opinion completely separate to falconry) of "falcon races".

With this change comes new challenges and opportunities for the falconry community.

One aspect is the flood of new entrants into the world of falcons. This is challenging for falconers as the amount of opportunities to go hunting with our falcons has not increased in line with the new entrants and good hunting land is becoming even harder than it used to be to obtain.

This in part I believe has driven the boom in the falcon races in the Gulf States: a practice that allows people to keep in contact and maintain the relationship with falcons for those who otherwise would not be able to fly their falcons in anger. The races have proved incredibly popular, in part due to the fantastic amount of prizes on offer. This has led to a new huge demand for falcons with some experts saying demand will double. The immediate problem with a doubling of demand for

falcons is that production cannot be doubled as easily for obvious reasons.

As the law of supply and demand dictates, as demand goes up and supply stays the same, price must rise. This has seen the price of peregrine falcons rise to a level well above that affordable by many UK falconers. As the majority of these falcons are not going to be flown but used for the production of hybrids we must be careful not to lose the bloodlines that have created this demand for UK hybrids.

The hawking season is now coming to an end and the breeding season beginning. I wish all members a successful new falconry year and look forward to meeting friends old and new at this year's AGM.

Nick Havemann-Mart

Chairman's Chatter

Another good year for the Club, with a successful meet at Llangollen, where many a pheasant was caught, and



thankfully this year, no accidents to the hawks!

We also had an excellent shop window provided by Mick Cordell, Dave Ridpath and Linda Wright, when they attended the Festival of Falconry in Abu Dhabi. Our intrepid travellers came home and entertained us one evening with tales of the Festival and some lovely photographs.

Many of us were greatly upset by the passing of two wonderful falconers, Steven Frank, the well known grouse hawk, and, of course, our

very own "Griff" Ceri Griffiths. Fortunately we still have his son and step-son still as members, and I'm sure they will become as much of a leading light as was Griff.

Membership numbers have remained pretty static over the last few years, a reflection of the times, I suppose, but it is interesting to see that the flying of different species seems to have turned a full circle and returned to the early days of the Club, when the majority of members flew Goshawks.

On the social side of things, we have again had Huw Kirby helping us with our dog training, and Jimmie keeping us amused at the Xmas bash.

As with all clubs, finding replacement committee members to help out is almost impossible, and it is only now, (mid-March), that we have found a new Regional Secretary in the form of Angie Poyner from Hereford.

The finances I will leave to Dave Sharman to talk about, but before any members whinge about any increases, be it subs or field meet fees, please accept that the committee is doing its best to keep costs down and still enable the Club to exist. For instance we are now again members of the I.A.F., which does sterling work on an international level to make sure that our sport is safeguarded for future

From the Editors

Another year goes by and the time comes to put together another edition of our club journal *The Austringer*. I know there are some members out there who have every edition of the magazine since it was first printed. Oh, how they will have seen the changes!



Previous editors will know only too well what an enormous task it is to put together a good magazine, with articles which will appeal to members. Editors have to rely heavily on the membership for contributions for possible entry into the magazine, we also have to contact ex-members, honorary members and anyone else who may be able to give us something suitable to use. Some members, after reading last year's *Austringer* remarked that it had a little too much of the political aspect in. Unfortunately in today's world we need to keep bang up to date with what is happening not just in falconry but in all field sports both in this country and throughout the world. The WHC tries to stay on the ball through having representatives on the Hawk Board and also by being members of the IAF. Unfortunately membership of the WHC has been steadily falling for the past few years. It so happens that membership of many clubs, motoring, golf, shooting, riding, in fact almost any club have suffered decreased membership

generations. So we need to contribute to this organisation with percentage of your subs.

Still, let's hope that the future brings us some great hawking and the good health to enjoy it!

Roger James.

in recent years. WHY? Well that is not an easy question to answer. One reason is certainly because we don't have the younger generation coming through the club like we had in the past. There could be a thousand reasons for this, from apathy to the modern electronic age of computers and social media. At a recent committee meeting it was decided that we should try to promote the club to the younger generation in a positive way. We have half price membership for all Juniors. This remains for the duration of their full time education, which could be up to 21 years old.



It was also decided that the club will now offer a Supporters Membership. This will be available to anyone who would like to be a part of the club but not own or fly a bird. They would be entitled to attend regional meetings, local and annual field meets etc. They would not have any Club voting rights. Cost of joining as a Supporter Member will be £25

Meanwhile enjoy this 2015 edition of your magazine, tell us what you like, and also what you don't. Then get thinking about the article that YOU will write for next year.

Mick Cordell and David Ridpath

South Wales Region Report, March 2015



We have had another good year in the South Wales Region. Our high monthly meeting attendance has been maintained throughout the year.

Following the successful completion of the club sessions on the LANTRA, Beginning Falconry Award we had the first batch of awards presented to members who had completed their assessments.

Following on from LANTRA we decided that the theme of practical based evenings would be useful to members as part of our ongoing monthly meeting activities.

With the excellent support of our regional members we covered a range of topics including: DIY hawk box ventilation systems, hood making, GPS telemetry, track pack fitting, limping, and a demonstration of the various types of jess and leash systems.

As in previous years we had a number of presentations. In support of the sorting out of the Lorant de Bastyai memorabilia for the British Archives for falconry we had a talk from Mark Upton on the work of the archives and their future plans. He also kindly donated a couple of books for the regional auction which both attracted record bids from members.

Mark Parker, Head Falconer from ICBP at Newent, also gave an excellent talk on what to do if law enforcement agencies call to make inspections or searches. It's becoming a bit of an annual routine now, but a very worthwhile one, with a talk from Tom Dutton, an excellent young avian vet from Neil Forbes' practice. As always with these, lots of useful advice to keep your bird fit and healthy.

Linda Wright gave us a very practical and illustrated talk on wildlife photography; in

particular a few tips and tricks to get those elusive bird action shots!

Our final talk of the year was from Jimina Parry-Jones as our guest speaker at the Christmas dinner. As always from Jimina a very entertaining talk.

As a means of sharing our collective experience we repeated the Falconers' Question Time with Roger James as chair of the panel and also had a discussion on the pros and cons of imprinted goshawks and falcons, ably facilitated by Griff Griffiths sr and Huw Kirby.

Mick Cordell organised a rabbit field meet in the early part of the year with the regular Harris Hawk flyers turning up for what is now an annual event and similarly a family fun day at Roger James' place with a focus more on the social side but with a bit of dog training and fitting of Hawk furniture thrown in!

Its only when you sit down to reflect on the clubs activities that you realise how much we do in a year, all down to the members organising family days, field meets and monthly events. Another great year.

Dave Barber, SW Region Secretary



Region Members receiving Lantra Certificates

North Wales Region Report for 2014

The past 12 months have flown by and the region has had a steady attendance each month with the same committee: Mike Coupe chairman, Neil McCann secretary, Nigel Evans treasurer and Jeff Cockle club rep.

We have had a couple of guest speakers and our thanks go to Derek Stotton and Richard Jones, the club vet for giving great talks and helpful advice.

We held our belated Christmas party, hot buffet and auction, in which we raised nearly £200 for regional funds.

We have had a fair few field meetings on Llandegla and Bryn a Pys and we will be booking more for the season coming.



NW Region longwing group meet

We will only be doing one group each time and keeping it to the same species of hawk or falcon in the group



Steve Kelly – out for a duck

Mark Herbert has been flying a young hybrid falcon and after a few field meets is now doing well, Anthony Roberts is flying a male parent reared Gos and an imprint female Gos. He is putting a fair amount of varied quarry in the bag even the odd dog! It's also good to see John Slincox back in the region and on the field meets.



Jeff Cockle on a longwing field meet

Come along and support the region and attend the field meets.

Cheers,

Neil McCann, NW Region Secretary

Obituary: Ceri 'Griff' Griffiths (1942-2014) by

Roger James



As a personal friend of Griff and his family, I find the writing of this obituary very difficult (I'm not normally lost for words!)

He was not a "jack of all trades", he was a master of many. As a school teacher, he must have been a popular figure with his students, as he had great patience and understanding with the less fortunate members of society. This was proven at his centre in Barry on many occasions, when he employed youngsters who were almost un-employable, and he helped to turn their lives around. His success in this endeavour was illustrated by the amazing turn-out at his funeral from people from all walks of life.

As a falconer, he was one of the most intuitive I have ever known, he almost read the minds of the birds he trained. Much of this he passed on to others, who in turn became good

falconers. His ability in the breeding of falcons was as good as anyone in the country, a fact recognised by many of the Arab falconers he dealt with over the years.

He was very involved with charity work in the Barry area, where his understanding of the problems of others was invaluable.

Like all of us, sometimes his patience was tried too far, and he had a terrible temper, but he was always man enough to apologise if he thought he was wrong.

Griff was an enigma in many ways, and although he would always try to charge "top dollar" when he sold a bird, if the person who bought it had the bad luck to lose it, he would have no qualms about replacing it free of charge!

As a friend, Griff was extremely loyal, a rare quality these days, and he expected the same from his many friends. He possessed a great sense of humour, and although a good falconer, would always laugh at his own blunders when out hunting. He was, by the way, the noisiest bugger I have ever heard when his falcon was in the air!

But I know I speak for many people, when I say that this great man will be missed by so many for a long time to come.

R.I.P. Griff,

Roger James

"Thank You" letter from Jean and Dave Dimond



As some of you already know Dave and I decided before the last AGM that we would not stand for election again as President and Treasurer. We had both thought long and hard about this as were happy to serve the club but felt it was time we stood down and let the next generation take over and lead the club forward.

We have enjoyed the times we have spent at Game Fairs over the years and meeting many

members, but as we are getting older it was becoming harder each year even though we had help from other committee members, past and present, who at this time we say "Many thanks" too, for all the time spent at game fairs and committee meetings.

The other consideration was that in the future we might move to Southampton where our son and family live, and this would be too far away from any region to enable us to attend committee meetings etc.

So accordingly at the AGM we stood down and a new President and Treasurer were elected. We wish them well in their new roles and we are sure they can take the club forward. Those of you who were not at the AGM, and some who were, will not know that after the AGM Dave and I were presented with a bronze bust of a merlin made by Bill Prickett whose work we have often admired when at the game fairs. For those of you who haven't seen his work please visit

<http://www.billprickett.co.uk/Pages/gallery/gallery.htm>



The merlin now takes pride of place at home and we wish to thank all who contributed to it.

Also in recognition of our time spent on the committee we have been made Honorary Members.

Many Thanks for both and we hope to see many of you from the other side of the table at future game fairs!

Jean & Dave

Jean and Dave Dimond, an appreciation by Mick Cordell

I first met Jean and Dave back in 2000 when I joined the WHC. This was my first visit to a Club meeting at the Olway Inn in Usk. Being a newbie to falconry it was quite daunting entering a room full of people that you don't know. The first member I spoke to was Mike Tucker who in turn introduced me to Jean and Dave.

Over the next year or so I attended the Falconry Fair and the CLA Game Fair and whilst helping out on the Club stand got to know them both quite well. They in turn introduced me to other people in falconry, some Club members, some not. What certainly struck home to me was the immense amount of time that this pair put in, all for the benefit of the Club. What a lot of us didn't realise was that they had probably travelled to the game fair/show the day before and then set up the club stand. It was not unusual for them to finish work at lunchtime and then hitch up the caravan and head off to the showground. They would arrive on site full to the gunnels with Club magazines, picture boards, flags and anything else that made the club stand look so good. Then it would be pack it all up again after the show and get off back to Bristol ready for work the next day.

Although we all remember Jean for her fantastic work as Treasurer and Membership Secretary we must not forget it was Dave who did most of the driving and to-ing and fro-ing. He also makes a good cuppal!

Others will have different memories of Jean and Dave as Club and Committee members but I will always remember them as being 'the Club stand'.

Enjoy your retirement Jean and Dave.....you deserve it - Dimond geezers!

Mick Cordell

New WHC Eagle Group



Huw Kirby from the South Wales region of the WHC is eager to start an Eagle group within the Club. This season Huw has been flying a female Bonelli's Eagle, mainly at hares. She is a first year bird flying at 4lb 7oz. He spent some time in Yorkshire with Martin Barber who was flying a Golden Eagle.

It would be a good idea if an Eagle Group could be formed either for those members wishing to fly an eagle or just to attend a field meet to experience the thrill of seeing these magnificent birds in the field.

Knowing Huw, he will put his heart and soul into this project and will also give ample support to anyone who would like to join him.



Contact Huw directly if you have an interest in forming this group or any enquiries.

If you don't have his phone number please contact the club secretary David Barber via the club website who will forward all enquiries.

Don't Waste Rabbit on your Bird or Ferret

...eat it yourself. This recipe is designed for a slow cooker but could easily be adapted for the oven.

Rabbit Pie

25g lard
1 rabbits jointed
34 thick rashers streaky bacon, chopped
100g button onions
2 carrots, thinly sliced

Salt and pepper
1 bay leaf
250ml white stock or cider
1 x 15ml spoon cornflour
150g shortcrust pastry

Heat the fat in a frying pan. Wash and thoroughly dry the rabbit. Brown in the hot fat with the bacon and onions. Transfer to slow cooker with the carrots, seasoning, bay leaf and stock. Cook on low or high. When cooked, remove the pot from the base and cool slightly. If the pot is not removable use a separate ovenproof dish. Remove the rabbit and strip the meat from bone. Thicken the liquid with blended cornflour and return rabbit to pot or dish stirring well. Remove the bay leaf.

Roll out the pastry to fit the dish. Moisten the side edge of the dish before laying the pastry over it. Press lightly to sides and make a steam hole in the centre. Bake towards the top of the oven at 200°C (400°F, gas mark 6) for 30-40 minutes until the pastry is crisp and brown.

You can even buy rabbit-shaped pastry cutters to cut decorations for the top of the pie.

A Season with a Red-tail by Kris Ulens



Most of you will probably know me as the Belgian guy with his red-tail. We've just finished our 10th season together. I'm writing this on 28th of February, my red-tail is sitting at her last kill, a rabbit. Looking at her, with the typical attitude, all feathers at the back of her head straight up, as proud as a red-tail can be, I'm so grateful for all the joyful moments we have gone through together.

The story started with the Welsh Hawking Club, 10 years ago. The club had its meeting at the Ruthin Castle, a beautiful setting! To me it was my first experience with the club. Ben Clereys, son of Hugo Clereys, had asked me to join him, together with my young first year red-tail. I remember I was very nervous, to meet all new people, to come overseas and to fly a young bird at a meet. But it was such a wonderful experience. I remember everyone was so supportive. We first joined the Harris' group. All was relaxed and it was ideal to let my bird get used to the way pheasants react to a hunting action. On the third day Neil told me to join his goshawk group. The whole group was so supportive and willing to have the red-tail take its first kill. After a couple of tries, suddenly Neil called into the walkie-talkies to "get the red-tail in quickly" he had a point on a cock pheasant. The whole group went into position to force the pheasant to fly in a certain escape route, where my red-tail was waiting. The whole action started and my red-tail had her first kill. If you like to see the picture, check out the cover-page of the *Austringer*. I was very grateful to Neil and his group. As a tradition when a bird has caught its first prey, my red-tail has received her name that day: "Anda". It is the Mongolian word for blood brother.

This was the start of a wonderful partnership. We crossed Europe to join meetings, meet other falconers and join them hunting. We went to Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Germany, France, England, Scotland and of

course, Wales. It is such a wonderful experience to see and enjoy all the different areas across Europe. You always have the privilege to be assisted by the local people, something you wouldn't have during a traditional type of holiday.

But why did I choose to fly a red-tail? The question reminds me of a discussion I had when I was out in Scotland with a group of falconers. In the evening we were talking about our personal life and one of the other falconers had asked me what I did for a living. Based on my reply, he asked me the question why I was flying a red-tail and not a falcon. He was kind of surprised based on the grading of my profession (and probably income) that I was "just" flying a red-tail.



I've learned falconry with falcons. My first two birds I've started to fly and hunt with were gyrfalcons. But it is difficult to get decent hunting opportunities to fly and hunt falcons in Belgium. You'll often be confronted with the fact that gun-hunters don't allow you to fly a falcon even close to the hunting areas. Falconers in Belgium more often are asked to fly in industrial areas and smaller places where gun-hunters are not allowed. That was one of the main reasons for me to start flying a red-tail. And after all those years, I still enjoy every single minute we spend together.



When she reached the age of 4, I met Jean, a Belgian austringer, flying a male red-tail. We hunted together and this brought us to the idea of having our red-tails forming a breeding couple. We brought the birds together in the aviary. It didn't take long, within a week they were copulating. The couple had a nest of 3 chicks. This was a wonderful experience. Just the idea, how tough she was when catching hares, that all seems to have fade away once she was feeding her chicks. Very careful, with her talons closed, ripping of tiny bits of meat to feed her offspring.

Since then, both birds remain breeding together.

I'm hunting my red-tail during the hunting season and in the beginning of March, we bring them together for breeding.



Thank you, Anda, for all those wonderful moments together for the past 10 years!

Kris Ulens

Whose Magpie? by Lyn Palmer



It all started off on a lovely hot sunny day. I weighed Jess, my 25-year-old Harris' hawk and walked to my hunting ground which is about one mile from my house. We cross over a bridge over the river Ebbw and see a dipper bobbing in characteristic fashion then suddenly disappearing underwater after some aquatic invertebrates. Also on the fast river there is a pair of gossanders. They swim buoyantly very fast across the water.

We finally arrive at the hunting ground and I put on the flying jesses. I cast Jess off and she flies to the nearest tree following me to the nearest wood. I reward her every now and again so she is flying over me in the canopy of the wood.

Then she sees a grey squirrel which beats her to the dray. She crashes into it so the squirrel makes his escape down the trunk of the tree with the hawk right behind it. Eventually the squirrel makes his escape into a woodpecker's hole. She was not amused.

I call her down to the fist and reward her with a tit-bit.

We come to the end of the wood and cross over the next field. I start to climb the hill. As

I come to the brow of the hill I heard this screaming sound above my head. As I look up there is this female peregrine falcon with a magpie in her talons being chased by six magpies, three each side of the peregrine in a V-formation, just like the Red Arrows, the famous jet display team.



The magpie in the falcon's talons is still alive so is screaming its head off. It happened so quickly I did not know where my Harris' was.

I started to go down the hill to the nearest wood to look for Jess. I could hear her bells ringing. As I got closer, there she was, all tangled up in a blackthorn bush with a magpie in her talons. Had she killed the magpie or had the peregrine let go by the six magpies mobbing her? I will never know.

I let Jess feed up on the magpie and called her to the fist. I have never seen anything like this before. So, who killed the magpie?

Lyn Palmer

Book Review: *H is for Hawk* by Helen Macdonald reviewed by David Ridpath

Jonathan Cape, London. ISBN 9780224097000. Cover price: £14.99.



Club members who attended the Falconers' Weekend at ICBP in August 2014 will remember Helen Macdonald signing copies of her then newly published book *H is for Hawk*. I had already read a couple of reviews of this book in

periodicals which spoke highly of it, so I was delighted to be able to meet the author and buy a signed copy at Newent.

Before I had an opportunity to read it, the book was nominated for the prestigious Samuel Johnson Prize for non-fiction and subsequently won that prize against some strong opposition.

Falconry related books fall broadly into two categories: the 'How to' manuals and the books of falconry anecdotes and reminiscences. This book, although falling more in the latter category, is much more complex. Helen's father, Ailsair Macdonald, a renowned and highly respected press photographer, died suddenly and prematurely in 2007. She and he had been very close and, through him, she had developed a love of falconry since childhood. It is a long story better told by her in the book, but, in short, grief stricken, she bought a female goshawk from Northern Ireland as a homage and diversion. She called it Mabel.

But the book is more than a description of the training and flying of a young bird of prey: that we have all read many times and most of us have practised for ourselves. It also describes her overwhelming emotional state while both grieving over her father and building a relationship with the bird to the point where she senses her own being as that of the bird.

Macdonald weaves into her story that of the early 20th century writer T.H. White, whose most well-known work, subsequently made into a Hollywood film is *The Once and Future King*, a retelling of the legends of King Arthur. White had also written a book called *The Goshawk* in which he describes his training of a goshawk. Even bearing in mind the standard techniques of falconry available to him between the world wars – weighing birds to ascertain and maintain flying condition was unknown then – hawk handlers will be dismayed at Macdonald's retelling of White's treatment of his goshawk, which by today's standards would certainly be regarded as cruelly.

Earlier this year, *H is for Hawk* was again nominated for a prize, this time the Costa prize, in the biography category. Again it won, which is a testament to Macdonald's writing. Her prose is at once illuminating, informative (she is a Cambridge academic) and vibrant – as good as any you will find in a falconry related book. And her story is captivating. To call it a biography is an understatement: it is a closely woven tapestry of three biographies, her own, White's and Mabel's. That the book won two major prizes, against books of more conventional subject matter is a testimony to Macdonald's writing skills. I can only endorse that testimony.



Helen and Mabel

It is to be hoped that the double prize winning status of this book will further the standing of falconry and, indeed, to encourage females into what is still a male dominated pursuit.

The final sadness is that Mabel died of aspergillosis after a few seasons of flying.

reviewed by David Ridpath

I Have a Little SatNav a poem found online by Mick Cordell

I have a little Satnav. It sits there in my car. A Satnav is a driver's friend, it tells you where you are. I have a little Satnav. I've had it all my life. It's better than the normal ones, my Satnav is my wife. It gives me full instructions, especially how to drive "It's sixty miles an hour", it says, "You're doing sixty five". It tells me when to stop and start and when to use the brake. And tells me that it's never, ever, safe to overtake. It tells me when a light is red and when it goes to green. It seems to know instinctively just when to intervene. It lists the vehicles just in front and all those to the rear. And taking this into account, it specifies my gear. I'm sure no other driver, has so helpful a device. For when we leave and lock the car, it still gives its advice. It fills me up with counselling, each journey's pretty fraught. So why don't I exchange it, and get a quieter sort? Ah well, you see, it cleans the house, makes sure I'm properly fed. It washes all my shirts and things, and keeps me warm in bed! Despite all these advantages, and my tendency to scoff, I only wish that now and then, I could turn the buggler off.

Dates for Your Diary

The Club Field Meet will be held at the Bryn Howel Hotel, Llangollen, on 20th to 23rd October 2015.

The Club AGM will be held at the hotel during the period of the meet. (see WHC website for further details in due course).

The WHC will run stands at British Falconry and Raptor Fair, Chetwynd Park, Shropshire, 3rd/4th May 2015
Falconry Weekend at ICBP, Newent, Glos., 5th/6th September 2015
Volunteers to man the stands please make yourselves known to the Club Secretary.

Other events that you may be interested in are:
CLA Game Fair, Harewood, House, Leeds, Yorkshire, 31st July – 2nd August 2015
Midland Game Fair, Weston Park, Telford, Shropshire, 19th/20th September 2015
Usk Show, Usk Monmouthshire, 12th September 2015
Royal Welsh Show, Builth Wells, Powys, 20th-23rd July 2015

The Falcon Races of the Gulf by Mark Williams

Unless you have spent the last few years in a coma or solitary confinement, most people by now would have heard about the falcon races in the Arabian Gulf. For some it might be the recent difficulty of trying to buy a bird locally or wondering why the prices of falcons have gone up. Either way the falcon races are beginning to affect falconers...and breeders around the world with the seemingly recent huge demand for falcons. The truth is that the falcon races have been around for about a decade but it is only in the past four years we have started to see a big upsurge in its popularity. This in part is due to the efforts of the two biggest emirates in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), these being Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Subsequent race competitions have been hosted in Saudi Arabia and Qatar and I believe also in Kuwait but the UAE has by far the biggest...and richest race events in the Gulf.



A line up of prizes awaiting lucky winners

The falcon race competitions have only really started to become a huge event in the past three or four years and every year Dubai and Abu Dhabi have an unspoken friendly rivalry to outdo each other for the biggest and richest prize events. Each race contest can go for several weeks with falconers competing in various categories such as Telwha (Lure swinging), airplane and balloon competitions. Within each competition there are sub-categories for the species of birds competing. These are usually divided into hybrids, pure gyrfalcons, saker falcons and pure peregrines and each separate category for males and females of the species. It is only once the category finalists are selected from the fastest times do we see them race against each other for the super finalists.

So why the huge demand? Truthfully, falconry or hunting in many of the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) countries is almost



non-existent. Qatar, Kuwait are tiny countries by comparison and have no game to speak of. The UAE comprises seven emirates and most have no game to hunt or too many falconers to compete for so few migratory game birds like keruwan and houbara. With the exception of some hard-core opportunistic falconers from each of those countries who go to Saudi Arabia to hunt, those privileged few groups who still hunt are usually sheikhs who mostly go to Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Sudan and Morocco for their hunting. These trips are too costly for most individual people. It therefore strikes me as a newcomer to the Gulf how ironic it is that for such a wealthy group of falconers with some of the finest falcons that breeders from around the world have to offer, they have so little to hunt. It also makes me appreciate of how good some falconers have it back home in the western world like USA, Canada, South America and some parts of Europe.



Houbara hunt

So in parallel with the diminishing opportunities to hunt in the Gulf, there is a growing movement to maintain the cultural heritage of the Arab people as their relative new found wealth and modern western influences forces itself upon the Gulf countries. This is in part why the UAE government in particular has supported and developed the falcon races. While not true falconry in the purest form it does provide a

reason to own a falcon. Each year the races evolve and improve and there is a constant effort to ensure the same winners don't win again and again, otherwise pretty soon this becomes a competition between a handful of individuals instead of the masses. Upon closer examination it is seen to be to some extent a numbers game and some contestants with seemingly unlimited resources, (Sheikh funded), will start with as many as over a hundred falcons from some of the best falcon farms. Pretty soon some of the best (fastest) birds will become apparent and those usually end up comprising the elite team that that contestant will go to race finals with. Compare this to a private individual going to the races with only two or three falcons who has to do the best he can with the best he has, you can see how disadvantaged he would be. For this reason the Sheikhs are separated from the individuals and now this year there is a new category for the professionals, these being individual private falconers who may enter with upwards of twenty falcons.



The prizes have also grown and this year saw some of the richest prize pools ever. Each race has between 15-20 million dirhams (approx. \$5.4 million). It is

so great to see individuals walking away with expensive cars and cash prizes and is always tempting to make you have a go, but it's not as easy as it looks to a distant observer. This year there are even prizes for the falcon breeders who produce the super final race winners and prizes of Range Rovers were given away. Training takes on the form of different fitness and conditioning methods often depending upon the discipline the bird is being trained for. The use of radio-controlled airplanes, quad-copters and in some cases live lures are used. Speaking as a falconer of some 37 years' experience and someone who has lived here for over two years now, I have to

say these birds are incredibly fit and the top birds have incredible athletic stamina and fitness. Similar training methods are used for hunting birds also.



Falcon chasing lure behind plane

With so much emphasis and attention given to these races it is inevitable that they have become a national sports event much like soccer or football elsewhere. Live TV coverage of the falcon races play during race competitions and cameras and media coverage are always present on a race day. Some of the state of the art TV video cameras are used with slow motion footage showing every wingbeat and manoeuvre of the falcon. It's easy to get caught up in the hype and now some competitors are like sports personalities.



Abu Dhabi Falconers Club winners at prize ceremony

Just like the pigeon derbies in the USA, the falcon races are not falconry but the birds used are as fit, fit and fitter, and more tenacious than most game hawks I've seen. Indeed in many cases in the US pigeon derbies and some falcon race contestants here, some game hawks are used for the competitions, but with a different objective in mind. Therefore I try to keep an open mind about it and I'd recommend if you ever get an opportunity to try come and witness such events at least once.

Zhora by Ricky Norton

Zhora is my peregrine x saker. She's a 2008 bird. I trained her as a game hawk when she was an eyass. And as the years have gone by her flying style has moved on to flights out of the hood and pursuit flights. The land that I fly is a hill about 150ft high. It's an old landfill about a mile long. Part of it is still in use and so there are usually lots of gulls about. She has killed pheasant, pigeon and crows. But now she has more or less become wedded to gulls.

Years ago the hill was left to grow without any disturbance and there were plenty of pheasants in the thick cover and so I could fly her over a pointer and she had some lovely stoops and kills during the early part of her career. Now all the cover has all been cut or turned over by machines so the pheasants have been pushed out.



The usual plan is: I pick Zhora up at the end of the game season, when I've finished flying my goshawk. Maybe next season I might swap round and fly the falcon first for a couple

of months and then get the gos going. When I get to the hill, say on a Saturday afternoon, I have a look about and there are usually quite a few gulls flying about and sometimes there are as many as 200 gulls sitting on top of the hill. If this is the case then it's going to be a chance for a flight out of the hood. I walk them up and wait until they are all at least 100ft up and then unhood her. Zhora is off in a second and starts to ring up above them. When she's got above them, she singles one out and stoops at it and either strikes at the gull killing it instantly or binds to it in the air and they both tumble down to the ground. If there are no gulls on the ground I sometimes slip her and she flies up and rings round above me and waits for some gulls to come flying off the river.



It seems like the gulls are getting fewer every year so maybe Zhora is becoming a victim of her own success. I had the time of my life flying this falcon as she was the first falcon that I owned. Some of the things I've witnessed when flying her have taken my breath away. The power, grace and beauty of falcons has to be seen to be believed and I hope to own and fly more of these royal birds in the future.

Ricky Norton

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The IAF - The Falconers' Defence and Advocacy Organization in a Changing World

by Adrian Lombard



Adrian addressing a meeting of the IAF (International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation) in the Hungarian Parliament in 2013

The International Association for Falconry and the Conservation of Birds of Prey (IAF) was established by eight European national falconry clubs in 1967 in response to anticipated challenges to falconry. This was a timely development as it followed a period when, around the world, raptor populations were dropping and falconers were being blamed for unsustainable use. We know now that this global environmental catastrophe was caused by pesticides, primarily DDT. In Britain, it was the falconers who first noticed the declining breeding success of peregrine falcons and this is clearly shown by letters to *The Falconer*. At this point British falconers voluntarily declined their permits to harvest peregrine chicks as a responsible act in the face of environmental evidence, thus ending 15 centuries of sustainable use of wild raptors. Despite clear evidence that Peregrine numbers have now been restored to probably greater numbers than ever before, falconers have not been allowed to regain their access to wild-taken birds. Nor, for that matter, have we been able to lose the stigma of those initial accusations that illegal trade and Middle-Eastern markets lay at the root of the raptor population declines.

In the nearly 50 years that have passed, the IAF has grown and changed beyond the dreams of those early founders. We are now

a truly global organization with 105 member organizations from 67 nations.

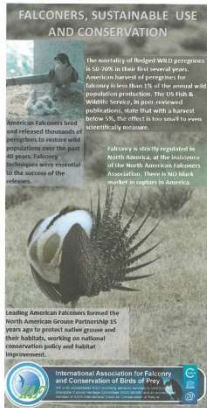
There are a further 5 nations who have been granted "observer" status as their falconry organizations are not ready for full membership. There are yet more nations with whom we are in contact and who may join our organization in time. We estimate that we currently represent about 40,000 falconers from around the world and estimates show that there may be a further 40,000 falconers in China with whom we are in early contact.



IAF and CIC meeting in 2014 during the Convention on Biological Diversity in Korea

The IAF has members from as diverse a group of nations as Vietnam, Chile and Namibia. Despite this diversity, we are aware that global challenges to our art are likely to originate from Europe. Within Europe, the anti-hunting and animal-rights groups are well established and find fertile ground for their philosophies amongst an urbanized population whose roots to nature are considerably eroded. These groups have powerful lobbies within the European Union and its member nations and are pervasive within organizations which represent "non-consumptive" users of nature. Policies originating from the powerful block of European nations are likely to influence policy, or be imposed as policy, elsewhere in the world. It is thus, the responsibility of the IAF to monitor these developments and to provide counter-pressure along with our allies in other hunting organizations. To this end, we have now established our permanent

office in Brussels which is staffed by our newly appointed Executive Officer, Gary Timbrell. We monitor developments within the European Union on a daily basis through information fed to us through the British-based Dods Monitoring Agency, as well as by direct contact with other NGOs, parliamentary structures and participation in other organizations and structures. This has included regular attendance of relevant meetings of the Bern Convention where we have right of representation.



IAF Conservation poster

We anticipate that the developing challenge to Falconry will be an increasing pressure on "animal welfare" issues. This pressure will be driven by animal-rights groups who masquerade under the guise of animal welfare or conservation organizations. We must not be confused by this; within the ethos of these groups, animal rights supersede conservation issues and this may prevent management strategies required for good conservation if they impact the rights of individual animals.

To these groups, hunting is anathema as is the subservience of animals to man. This makes falconry doubly unacceptable, even though every falconer understands that our art is based on a partnership and not subservience. Similarly, we all realize that the welfare of our birds is paramount if they are to hunt with us successfully. Thus the IAF is developing its standing as a reputable "animal welfare organization". We believe that falconers are the experts on the welfare of falconry raptors and that only we can establish the standards of welfare applicable to these birds. We recognize the importance of veterinary knowledge and expertise but also recognize that not all veterinarians have the knowledge applicable to our birds. To develop this aspect of our organization, the IAF has evolved general guidelines on the welfare of falconry raptors. These guidelines are basic and set a standard which can be broadly applicable on a global scale. They, by no means, prevent falconers from setting standards which are more stringent but could rather be seen as guidelines which set a minimum accepted standard. This is a living document, subject to review and change and is available on our website (www.iaf.org). Further to this we held our first Veterinary Conference, aimed at disseminating veterinary knowledge relating to falconry raptors, in 2014, supported by the Alghansa Falconry Club of Qatar and the Souk Wafik Falcon Hospital. This brought together veterinarians from all over the world to listen to presentations by expert raptor vets. The proceedings are published on our website. A second such conference is in the pipeline and an even bigger event is under discussion. Whilst the IAF represents "hunting falconers", we recognize that others who use falconry methods in the management of raptors will influence our right to continue to practice our art. The methods which they use will be the target of the animal-rights movement. At this stage, the IAF is discussing the development of a capacity to provide animal welfare audits for commercial and other organizations which manage raptors. These would include breeders, bird displays, pest abatement and rehabilitation groups. The audits could set acceptable standards for these various groups and management by the IAF would ensure an impartial and independent auditor. This may

go some way to addressing and deflecting criticism of the management of falconry birds. Current developments within the European Union include calls for positive lists for companion animals. These lists will stipulate which species (of birds, reptiles, mammals etc.) may be kept by the public as pets. The concept is driven by animal-welfare concerns and is promoted by various groups such as the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe. Whilst one cannot deny that there are welfare concerns related to keeping of exotic pets and that the desire for exotic pets fuels the illegal wildlife trade, our concern is that such regulations will not stop people keeping strange pets. These regulations will drive such people underground and thus worsen the welfare status of the animals within their care. We have experience of countries where falconry is illegal. This does not prevent the practice of falconry but it does cut such falconers off from mentoring programs, veterinary support and free access to information which would improve the standard of practice. For this reason, the IAF is strongly opposed to positive lists for companion animals and we would urge all falconers to approach their local veterinarians and parliamentarians to explain these concerns. We strongly support mentorship programs for aspirant falconers and this principle is included within our welfare guidelines. We also maintain contact and support falconers in countries where falconry may currently be illegal. The IAF has developed global support for falconry. We focus on four main areas: support of hunting falconry, support of conservation by falconers, development of animal welfare related to falconry and support of falconry culture, both tangible and intangible.



IAF AGM in the Valkenswaard Town Council Chambers, Netherlands 2013

This involves considerable work by a dedicated team of volunteers, now augmented by the establishment of our professional office in Brussels. We have been very fortunate in receiving significant financial support from the Emirates Falconry Club in Abu Dhabi. This is a fixed-term support and the IAF must develop financial support from all falconers to continue this effort. Never before have falconers been as well represented as hunters and conservationists at so many different forums. We are funding and managing the first of the Flagship projects of the Global Action Plan for the Saker Falcon, in partnership with the Convention on Migratory Species, the United Nations Environmental Program and the IUCN. We are seeking ways to address small game declines within Europe and to address very serious concerns relating to the electrocution of raptors around the world. All these could be the subject of other articles.

I have very fond memories of the time which I spent with the Welsh Hawking Club at your Field Meet in Rutin and have some very dear friends within your membership. This makes it a particular pleasure to me to see the Welsh Hawking Club regain its place within the member organizations of the IAF. It is also evidence that we offer better representation, within the IAF, to member organizations. We have developed a slogan – "the IAF - Falconers working for Falconers". This is very true, but our hard work is justified whenever a falconer takes the field and flies his hawk well. In this I am confident when our efforts support the members of the Welsh Hawking Club. In turn we must have your support.

Adrian Lombard, IAF President

The 3rd International Festival of Falconry Abu Dhabi, 7th-13th December 2014 by David Ridpath

It was at the Falconers' Fair in May 2014 that Jean and Dave Dimond reminded Mick Cordell and me that the Club should be looking for delegates for the Festival of Falconry that was to be held in Abu Dhabi, UAE, in the coming December. Jean and Dave had represented the WHC and organised the Wales Tent at the previous Festival. Mick and I consulted at home and were granted permission for absence and so put our names forward for sponsored places. No one else having put their names forward, we were duly selected for sponsored places as country representatives for Wales.

On further investigation, we discovered that there were also sponsored opportunities for a photographer for each country who would provide an image for a photography exhibition at the Festival and for an arts or crafts exhibitor to exhibit in an Arts and Crafts exhibition. We immediately thought of our good Club friend and bird of prey photographer, Linda Wright, to fill the first of these sponsored places. Despite the Festival starting just four days after a planned one month holiday in New Zealand, she accepted the challenge. Her name was put forward and accepted by the organisers. We were unable to find a willing artist or crafts person to provide a suitable exhibit but the Festival director, Dr Nick Fox, was able to nominate an artist, Alison Wilson, who had painted hawking scenes particularly with his crow hawking group.



The desert camp

We are all grateful for the sponsored places. The Festival was under the patronage of H.H. Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the UAE to whom thanks are due for his patronage without which the Festival could not have taken place.

There was much to do before travelling to Abu Dhabi. We collected the relevant Club display materials from Jean and Dave's in Bristol and arranged to take them over to Nick Fox's near Carmarthen to be included in a shipment to the Festival site.

On December 6th, Mick, Linda and I assembled at Heathrow T4 at 06.30 to check in for the 7-hour flight to Abu Dhabi. Alison was flying from Manchester so we met up with her at the Desert Camp which was to be our base for the first four days. After arrival at Abu Dhabi, we were transferred to coaches for the 1½-hour journey to the camp which included a stop for diesel, where we noticed that the pump price was the local equivalent of around 25p per litre! At the camp, there was a fairly lengthy registration process after which we were allocated tent accommodation – Mick and I in a tent with the Yorkshire Hawking Club contingent. Linda was placed in a tent which was subsequently invaded by several Ukrainians – the next day she moved into the tent with Mick and me which already had a Yorkshire female occupant.

The accommodation was more than adequate – beds, mattresses and sleeping bags and each tent had a power supply for lights and for charging cameras, mobiles, etc.



Our tent

Rising bright and early the following morning, we found the vast dining marquee and helped ourselves to the array of breakfast offerings – the first of many appetising meals in the emirates. We signed up for the activities that we wanted to pursue and then spent the morning familiarising ourselves with the Camp site and taking photographs. We also took some time to watch the falcons training sessions that were taking place. Some of these involved a newly developed "robot houbara", contracted to "Robara". Houbara are the desert species of bustard at which the Arabs fly their falcons.

The battery-powered model birds are radio controlled and, in skilled hands, can mimic the flight of natural houbara. They are being used as training aids to develop falcons' fitness and ability. There were two models being used (the only two in existence at that time); one had fixed wings, the other had wings that moved to more closely mimic the natural birds. It is difficult to describe the flight of these polystyrene simulators in words.

Interested readers can view movie footage (albeit filmed in Carmarthen rather than in the desert) at <http://www.rafalconry.com/>. The launch of these very realistic models was a major feature of the Festival.

There were three excursions that we attended during our stay at the desert camp. We all took a city tour which visited the Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital, the Grand Mosque and a Cultural festival that was taking place at that time.



Falcon Hospital Director, Dr Margit Muller, telling us about the hospital's work

Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital has an international reputation for raptor medicine. Although it is not really geared to take visitor groups of multiple coach loads, the impressive nature of the hospital facilities and professionalism of the staff was clear. During a relatively short presentation in the falcon waiting room (handlers have a separate waiting room), two of the waiting birds muted. The mutes were immediately mopped up and the floor disinfected by what appeared to be a member of staff dedicated to that purpose. Money is clearly no object to the Emirati falcon owners: some have their birds hitched on a weekly basis and they make use of special moulting aviaries at the hospital where birds, after undergoing checks, are housed for the full six months on a daily diet of a whole quail each.



A moulting aviary

The hospital is set in very attractive gardens, which made a very pleasant setting for a picnic lunch.

The Sheikh Zayed Mosque, also known as the Grand Mosque, is an exquisitely exotic building. The impressive white stone external architecture with carved panels proclaims a traditional Muslim structure. The combination of marble floors with inlaid floral motifs, pillars with entwined organic mother-of-pearl forms, a huge hand-knotted carpet in the main prayer hall, hard stone relief decorations on the walls is truly



wondrous. A digital clock shows the prayer times for the day, alternating electronically between western and Arabic scripts. It is said that Sheikh Zayed did not survive to see the completion of the mosque that he sponsored: prayers are said for him 24 hours a day except during normal prayer times.

A visit to the Sheikh Zayed Cultural Festival was a lively, if somewhat noisy, display of Emirati culture, with dancing (men only, of course), food and, in one marquee, a fascinating display of prestige camel race prizes in the form of decorative swords in jewel encrusted scabbards. One was valued at some £9,000,000 equivalent!



Jewel-encrusted camel race prizes

Mick and I took part in two hunting expeditions both of which were remarkable experiences: desert hare hawking with Harris' hawks and houbara hunting on camel back.

The hare hawking took place at the National Forest. Let me qualify that by saying that it is an area of several square kilometres that has been planted with what we would regard as large shrubs rather than trees and which is routinely irrigated. The hares give an impression of great speed once flushed, though I suspect that the speed is an illusion due to the animals' small size. They really are pitifully small and puny. One would be disappointed to catch a rabbit so small in UK. Nevertheless it was a memorable experience and a chance to get out into somewhat green countryside.



Hunting party in the Abu Dhabi National Forest

The camel hunting, however, was in true desert where there were very few small shrubs. The guests were each allocated a camel, on which we perched on rudimentary saddles of rolled carpet, from where we had an elevated vantage point. The houbara conceal themselves by remaining motionless, so much so that the Arab lads had some difficulty getting the quarry to take off. Various falcons were used from peregrines, sakers, etc. Once the quarry was properly airborne, we witnessed some impressive flights. The quarry is all captive reared, to preserve the diminishing wild populations. We understand that they cost around £2,500 each, which puts our pheasant and partridge rearing in sharp perspective.



Throughout the desert camp period, there a series of workshops and conference lectures took place in the Conference marquee. Unfortunately, due to limited time and the desire to participate in the hunting and tour schedule, we were unable to take advantage of most of these talks though we understand from others that they were informative and entertaining.

On the Wednesday morning, 10th December, we packed our belongings for the bus trip back to Abu Dhabi city to check in to the hotel. Checking in took some while due to an administrative error.

The hotel, the Aloft, was very comfortable and the food in the restaurant was excellent. Bacon made of turkey or beef is actually a very acceptable substitute to the real thing!

The rest of the day was taken up setting up the Wales tent at Al Forsan International Sport Resort where the Festival was to take place. As Mick and I had set up the Club stand on many a previous occasion, this proved to be a relatively straight-forward exercise, once we had located the Club display materials that had been shipped ahead. Unfortunately, one

of our party was ill at this point so, on return to the hotel, retired to bed.

The rest of us accepted the kind invitation of the Abu Dhabi Falconers' Club to a demonstration of flying events and a barbecue dinner at their Club house. Unfortunately, our bus got lost and, after inadvertently passing by the First Class Departures entrance at the airport and the Falcon Hospital, we eventually arrived at the Club 2½ hours after we started out – a journey which on our return took about half an hour.

So we missed the falcon racing and flying to a quad-copter. However, we have another article in this magazine, *The Falcon Races of the Gulf*, by Mark Williams on page 14, where you can read about the things we should have seen.



Arabian dancing at the Abu Dhabi Falconers' Club. Despite our late arrival, we had an enjoyable time there watching more Arabian dancing, meeting other falconers and eating the excellent, and plentiful, barbecue.

During the next three days, we had a busy time at the Wales tent discussing Welsh hawking and falconry with visitors of many nationalities. The first of these days was an education day when most of the visitors were local school children. In addition to the usual display of photographs that we use at shows, we had a couple of framed photographs of red kites by courtesy of Jean Dimond. We showed a continuous rolling slide show of images of Welsh birds of prey and hawking scenes which was accompanied by Welsh traditional music.



With Russell, a Mexican visitor to the tent

Every afternoon, Mick and I took part in the Parade of Nations, some 70-odd of them. We were fortunate that Alison was able to look after the tent for us while we were doing that and while Linda was taking 'official' photographs. The Thursday parade was attended by the Sheikh and was part of the official opening ceremony.

Linda and Alison, of course, hung their photograph and painting respectively in the Photography and Arts and Crafts exhibitions. Linda's chosen photograph was the one printed on the back cover of *Austringer 2014*.



Alison's painting was of Northumberland Crow Hawking featuring Dr Nick Fox and his wife on horseback. Linda's portfolio can be found at <http://www.lookingup.me.uk/> and Alison's at <http://www.alisonwilson.co.uk/>.

Lunch each day was taken at the Al Forsan Sports Resort terrace restaurant. The catering was excellent and the service attentive.



On the Friday evening, there was an Arabian Nights Dinner and Concert in an amphitheatre in front of the Al Forsan Club - another opportunity to eat our fill of middle-eastern food, but this time on traditional carpet cushions.

The Wales team was swelled from time to time by Peter Eldrett (Falconers' Magazine editor), our president, Nick Havemann-Mart, and members of Honeybrook Animal Feeds team, especially 'Dave' whose access to a kettle enabled occasional cups of tea and coffee. Our thanks are due to them all. With so many to help, we struck the Wales tent and packed the Club materials ready for shipment back to UK in ¾ hour.



Panorama of the Sheikh Zayed Mosque courtyard

South Wales Region Rabbit Field Meet by David

Ridpath

Nine members of the South Wales region met on Mick Cordell's permission land at Ruardean, Gloucestershire, on 8th February 2015 for a rabbit meet with kind permission of farmers, Mel Thompson and John James. It was a clear and dry day though the ground was a little slippery in places after recent rain. The flying contingent consisted of seven Harris' hawks. Two dogs and three ferrets completed the hunting line-up.

After 'breakfast' of bacon butties in the car park, we split into two groups and headed off to separate areas of the ground. Rabbits were thin on the ground. One grouse saw no rabbits but it was clear from the ferrets' behaviour underground (tracked by ferret finder), that there were rabbits there. We deduced that there were females there protecting babies. This was confirmed when we later met up with the other group whose few flushes were only young rabbits and easy quarry for the hawks, so clearly the relatively mild winter has allowed the rabbit population to continue breeding.

There was one more excitement before we left Abu Dhabi. Shortly after midnight on our final night in the hotel, there was an announcement on the PA system that there was a fire in the building. Mick and I dutifully followed instructions to leave the building. The ladies ignored it! It turned out to be a false alarm caused by an altercation in one of the corridors whereby one of the protagonists set off a fire alarm with his elbow.

The opportunity to get some sleep on the flight back to UK was very welcome!

David Ridpath

On the positive side, the continued breeding should promote a good population next season when we'll hope for colder weather.

Chris Drew with his Harris and quarry



There were many pheasants loose after the shooting season and a couple were caught by the enthusiastic hawks - feathered compensation for the lack of fur.

The day ended at the Malt Shovel pub in Ruardean, where the day's achievements were discussed over welcome pints.

David Ridpath

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WHC Llangollen Field Meet 2014 by Neil McCann



The 3-day Field Meet comes around faster each year. This year there were more members flying goshawks than Harris' hawks. This is probably a reflection on the price dropping on goshawks over the last few years. However the price of a female peregrine has risen dramatically!

This year the weather was kind to us, without the wind and rain of last year, and it was good to get back onto Llandegla where most members managed to catch a pheasant or two. There were plenty of partridge on Bryn-a-Pys but the falcons were given the short straw as there were actually too many about (which has been sorted for this year). There were also plenty of pheasant and duck to fly and a few hares were lost. Carrog produced a good head of game but the climb to the top certainly gives you a thirst for when you get back to the hotel, where members reminisce the flights and also the retrieval of

their hawks from the bottom of the valley. Pen-y-Lan produced some good flights at duck from the pond and few chases at early pheasants chasing them back to the woods at the rear of the hall.

It will be strange organising the field meet this year as Sean and Dave Dimond have retired after many years of doing sterling work for what is a thankless task. I wonder if the incoming Treasurer will be able to take on the cost of a field meet.

The 3-day meet for this year has been organised for 20th to 23rd October at Bryn Howell Hotel, Llangollen, so let's hope the weather is kind to us and that members come along for the banter and crack and fly their birds, hawks or falcons, at game on some of the best shooting estates in North Wales. The price to fly your hawk on these estates is a fraction of the cost of a day shooting.

Game caught at 2014 3-Day Field Meet: Pheasant, Partridge, Duck and Rabbit.

Goshawk Group 1

R Smith, Field Leader, J Simcox, N McCann, J Enwhistle, M Kane
Wednesday: Wynnstay, Thursday: Bryn-a-Pys, Friday: Llandegla

Goshawk Group 2 (Harris' Hawks)

P Harman, Field Leader, A Roberts, W Roberts, P Jones, P Hudson, T Peplow
Wednesday: Carrog, Thursday: Llandegla, Friday: Bryn-a-Pys

Goshawk Group 3

C Frearson, Field Leader, T Hewes, D Fielder, R Norton, S Vaughan, A Watson
Wednesday: Bryn-a-Pys, Thursday: Pen-y-Lan, Friday: Llandegla

Goshawk Group 4

T Watson, Field Leader, B Higham, A Buckham, M Lister, M Hardcastle, M Allison
Wednesday: Pen-y-Lan, Thursday: Carrog, Friday: Bryn-a-Pys

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Goshawk Group 5

M West, Field Leader, O Cookson, K Picking, J Metcalf, D Metcalf, D Sharmar
Wednesday: Carrog, Thursday: Wynnstay, Friday: Llandegla

Goshawk Group 6

I Bell, Field Leader, P Dodd, J Patterson, C Patterson, T Buller, W Duncan, C Davies
Wednesday: Pen-y-Lan, Thursday: Carrog, Friday: Carrog

Falcon Group

N Havemann, Field Leader, J Cockle, M Herbert, E Phythian, P Diggins, A Van Vynck, T Jones
Wednesday: Bryn-a-Pys, Thursday: Llandegla, Friday: Wynnstay

Neil McCann

3rd Welsh Hawking Club Field Meet – 1963

submitted by Lawrence Workman and Lyn Palmer

Lawrence Workman has passed on an article, via Lyn Palmer, that was published in the Journal of the North American Falconers' Association, Volume 2, No 1 1963.

The article, by Lawrence Crowley, is reproduced here as originally published (without any editorial changes). The article was accompanied by two monochrome pictures, one of some of the participants and one of Lorant inspecting a goshawk. Unfortunately, these have proved to coarse to scan and reproduce here. The text is as follows:

On the first and second of November, 1963, approximately thirty members of the Welsh Hawking Club gathered at Newport, Wales, for their second general meeting and third field meet. The business portion of the meeting was conducted the night of the first and closed to non-members, so I can give no report of the proceedings other than that an election was held and unknown policies were discussed. The current officers are: President, Lorant de Bastyai; Vice President, Patrick Humphreys; Secretary, Lawrence Workman; and Treasurer, Les Field. Since Lorant had lost his Utah Prairie Falcon, Mini, on the day of the business meeting, sunrise of the following day found us afield, brisling with lures, to try to locate her again. I noted the terrain was what can at best be described as miserable for long-wings, being very enclosed, hilly, forest and farm land. Thorough coverage of the area produced no sign of Mini, so at eleven o'clock, the search was halted, and we adjourned to assemble again five miles away at a country pub for a days hawking with the Welsh Hawking Club.

When we arrived, hardy falconers were already bracing themselves against the chill and drizzly weather, downing protective portions of cognac and Welsh ale, while awaiting more tardy arrivals. By noon, the membership having been brought into high enough condition, we were about to depart to the field, when a report was received that Lorant's Prairie had just been seen no farther than two hundred yards from the pub, five miles from where she had been lost. Lorant called her down as we, applauding from the sidelines, speculated upon how she had found her way to the meeting.

Quite enthusiastically [sic], encouraged by the good omen of a safe and secure Mini, the hunt began, with a retinue of seven Goshawks, one Bonelli's Eagle, and one Brazilian bird which was tentatively identified as *Buteo magnirostris*. Only one flight was of note, a three hundred yard chase by a Hungarian gas at a pheasant which ended unsuccessfully in cover. Due to the exceeding scarcity of game, and excepting two or three abortive slips which came to naught, no other flight was obtained. A final deluge of rain halted the days sport. In spite of unfavorable terrain, adverse weather, and almost no quarry, the Welsh Hawking Club showed untiring enthusiasm and good spirit.

Lawrence Workman and Lyn Palmer

[Editorial note: It is strange that one of the birds present was of an unidentified species. *Buteo magnirostris* was the zoological name for the Roadside Hawk of Central and South America and has now been re-categorised as *Rupornis magnirostris*. DLR]

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Limericks by David Ridpath

In *The Austringer 2014*, we re-set a competition that had originally been set by Martin Jones of Martin Jones Falconry Furniture (www.falconryonline.com) back in 2007. He set the task to complete ten limericks, of which he had composed the first two lines.

There was only one entry so the competition was abandoned but readers may find those entries amusing.

There was a young falconer from Tring
Put a kestrel up on the wing
She hovered a minute
Then stooped on a linnet
With her bells going ting-a-ling-ling

There was an imprinted gyrfalcon from Dubai
Who was kept in a mew for Al
When the breeder came in
With the sperm, IN A BIN
She let out the most blood-curdling cry.

A stunning jack merlin called Bobby
Fell madly in love with a hobby.
She refused him her bed
And wouldn't get wed,
So he ended all weepy and sobby.

When falconers attend a field meet
They must look where they tread with their feet
Unless they wear spats
To ward off cow pats
And sheep muck they happen to meet.

There once was a large golden eagle
Who dined rather well on a beagle.
As it flew out of the fog
It spotted the dog
But as quarry it was tot'ly illegal.

Raptor-ous applause?

David Ridpath

A vulture is no use to hunt.
To fly one's a bit of a stunt.
They're never the captors,
Though they call themselves raptors,
It's a terribly fraudulent front.

We all like to fly a good hawk
Except when it's started to squawk
But you must understand
It don't need to be banned.
It's just doing its damndest to talk.

To the falconer's utter despair
Many hawking dogs course a good hare.
They'll also catch rabbit,
A terrible habit,
But the dog, of course, just doesn't care.

Some say flying a falcon at grouse
Can cost you the price of a house,
If the cost is too much
You could kick that in touch
And fly it instead at a mouse.

Radio tracking is good
For finding lost hawks in a wood
But it's very much better
For locating the transmitter
That's been dropped by the bird in the mud.

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Mark Montgomery, Artist

Ask my wife how you get to fly raptors all season, over a slightly tubby wirehair, whilst lounging around the rest of the year covered in wood dust, claiming poverty and she would reply that you become a professional wildlife artist and in 2010 that was exactly what I did, though I would argue I don't lounge, I research.

I dropped out of the rat race, mainly as I was convinced my particular rat only had three legs and was one of the original blind mice, and decided to try to make a full time living as a wild life artist concentrating on an area which has been a long time passion of mine, sculpting lifelike full size birds out of wood and bronze.

Although I was born in the North East, I was brought up in Keswick, slap bang in the middle of the Lake District. My abiding love affair with all things natural and wild, began at an early age. My childhood was spent roaming the Cumbrian countryside flying anything I could get my hands on and longing to one day fly one of the mighty peregrine falcons, which nested on a crag near my home. I'm sure I would have fulfilled this ambition aged about twelve, if not for the diligence of the local wildlife group. I always had a special interest in raptors and game birds and as I said spent all my spare time learning how to catch one with the other, much to the dismay of my father who couldn't understand why I didn't want to send an ounce of lead up the chuff of our local wily marsh pheasants, over his spaniels.

Although I think I put up a good argument as to why this lifestyle should continue, my parents put up an even more persuasive one as to why it shouldn't. So after much waving of hankies on sooty stations, I found I had joined the military and I was off to tour the world at the Queen's expense. Although my falconry was over for the duration, as compensation I got to observe raptors all over the world in their natural environment, which I could never have achieved without Her Majesty's travel service. She even supplied camouflage clothing which aided my bird watching greatly.

All of these experiences allowed me to see many birds in different habitats and most importantly study how they behaved and interact with their environment, something I always strive to bring to my work. I am also lucky in the respect that as I am around hawks every day, if I need to see how a particular joint or area of feathers behave I can sit and look at a falcon whilst I work.



Lanner sculpture

A piece of work starts out either as an idea that I wish to develop or as a commission from a client and although they both have extensive research attached to them, they both pose different challenges. With commissions you do of course have to fit the carving to the client's ideas, which can sometimes require a compromise, mostly to fit in with the expectations of what you can technically do with a piece of wood.

Following research on the subject and normally one or two sketched ideas I move on to drawing a set of full scale plans, which can be as rudimentary as a basic profile for a bust or a clay 3D model for some of the more complex pieces. I find that using a clay mock up to follow, seriously cuts down on the

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amount of pieces that end up keeping me warm of an evening in the fireplace.

For the carvings I tend to favour a wood called Jelutong which originates in Malaysia and because of its high density is ideal for carving with both knives and machine tools. The pattern is cut on a band saw and then it's down to trying to create a life like sculpture from the resulting block with various knives, chisels and power tools. This stage of the process can take from three weeks to many months, depending on the size and complexity of the sculpture and how long I spend in hospital getting my fingers stitched back together. When I tell buyers that there is a piece of me in every bird I'm usually not kidding. Each individual feather is first carved and then textured with a small diamond stone and a pyrography pen, some feathers having hundreds of lines per inch.



Mould for lanner casting

When I am happy with the sculpture, which due to my critical eye or annoying compulsive behaviour, as my wife calls it, I call it finished. The pieces are divided into those which are to be used for limited edition runs and they are at this point used to create moulds, for either hot or cold bronze casting. The moulds are then used typically for a run of fifty sculptures before being destroyed. The original piece is then hand painted using acrylic colours, those large one off pieces which are not cast, do of course just skip straight to the painting stage, which just like the carving process can take many weeks. The Tawny Owl which recently won reserve champion in the British Bird Art championships took a month and a half to paint and I could have cheerfully throttled every tawny in the country by the time I finished it.



The Tawny Owl carving

I hope that this article has given you, the reader, a taste of how I spend my life and if you are interested in learning more about the process and my art you can visit my website at www.markmontgomeryart.co.uk. Or find me on Facebook as Mark Montgomery Art.

I do, as I said, take commissions but please not too many during the hawking season, as I don't mind interrupting my summer researching time but would hate to think that my wirehair may get tubbier.

Mark Montgomery

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Picture Gallery



Hawking in a Scottish landscape (Photo: Steve Richards)



Houbara hunting (Photo: Mark Williams)

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Snipe hunt (Photo: Tony Adams)



There are no more rabbits down here, Boss (Photo: David Ridpath)

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A Trio of Goshawks by Neil McCann

This year I drove over 800 miles in a day to collect a female parent-reared goshawk from Colin Asquith, a nice large bird weighing 3lb 2oz; equipment on, jesses, tail mount and tail bell, hooded and placed in box and a steady drive home 16-hour round trip. The hawk was placed on a bow perch in the mews to let the training commence.

I had already started to train last year's eyass goshawk. She had finished her first moult and her weight was being reduced to start the season off.

The training of the brown bird went well and she was free after four weeks but was struggling to hold on to her first rabbit.

Last year's bird took a bit longer for her to lose the weight but was catching rabbits after 5 weeks.

I had given John Simcox my other female goshawk from Mick Kane. She weighed 4lb 2oz out of the pen. I asked John if he fancied a day in Cumbria catching a few rabbits, I took both birds and decided to fly the adult bird first. There were plenty of rabbits about and the farmyard pond had about 30 ducks on, (not a Moorhen in sight).

We ferreted a few warrens and both adult birds had a few nice rabbits in no time at all. I fed the gos on her last kill then put her back in the box and got the brown bird out. With telemetry on and the change to flying jesses she had a good look about. As we walk up on the horse fields there are plenty of warrens and nettle beds. I struggle with her as she bates at the ferrets and starts to call to the adult gos John hasnot a good start!

We decide to split up, so I left John with the ferrets. I start to walk the long grass and nettle beds. There are rabbits in every nettle bed but she loses her grip on every one and is kicked off! She starts to get disheartened thinking them too difficult to catch.

I walk back over to John who is feeding up from a bolted rabbit, my girl bates from the fist towards the gos on the rabbit and calls. John says the ferret has not come out of the warren yet: when it does the gos bates at it and the ferret goes back in. I feel the vibration and rumbles beneath my feet so there's still rabbit or two at home. A half

grown rabbit leaves the warren in full stride and the gos is off the fist and takes it side-on within thirty feet of the warren. She's not letting go of this one! I make in and let her have her feed.

The annual trip to the highlands of Scotland is here again in last week of September. Colin Asquith, John Simcox, Gordon Curry and myself, with Gina, Colin's girlfriend, staying for a few days while we hawk for the two weeks. I take the two goshawks, John takes the other gos I have given him, but he has also been given a Finnish x Albidious female to train. The weather is kind for the two weeks and we are in tee shirts for most of the time.

Gordon is flying a white parent-reared female, a lovely looking hawk but unfortunately it is injured.

I am flying two hawks, firstly catching a few with the adult bird and then flying the brown bird. I offer the adult bird for Gordon to fly and he gladly takes the offer. I would continue with the brown bird who was still struggling to hold on to bolted rabbits because she grabbed them at the back end instead of the head.



The next day we fly on a small moor with plenty of overgrown grass pastures. It was a nice sunny warm day and I leave the ferret box on the fence. John and I walk the fields and within ten paces I kick up a rabbit, young gos leaves the fist and takes it by the head in fine style, she takes another six in the next couple of hours. At last she seemed to have got the hang of it and over the next two weeks we take over three hundred rabbits between us.

Between Christmas and New Year I was out catching rabbits in North Yorkshire, it was a

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very windy day but we caught 5 rabbits. When we bolted a rabbit that ran hard and fast in a straight line she caught it at the base of a large boulder. I ran over but she let it go. I then noticed her leg was just hanging down limply. She showed no sign of pain but I presumed the worst and thought the leg was broken. I put her in my jumper and ran back to the car. I rang Richard Jones who said he was closing in an hour but I was at least two hours away! He told me he would stay on and wait for me. I placed her in her box and after a swift but steady drive I arrived. The hawk was standing on one leg, the other hanging down: I was gutted!

Richard set about his work and after twenty minutes told me that it was not broken but was a bad strain and that she needed rest for three to four weeks and was on 5-day medication. On returning home she was free lofted and the large female was taken out.

Scotland in 2014 by Steve Richards

The party: myself, Matt Whittaker, Darren 'Daz' Hughes, Lee Watson and Alan Evans, 3 Harris' hawks, 1 goshawk, 7 dogs and 6 ferrets.

Well here we go again - Scotland trip: YES!! Thursday the 16th of October up to Matt's at Bedlinoch, loaded the van then off up to Conway and stayed overnight at Matt's mum's (thanks for having us). We picked up Lee and his bird, left midday and got up to the cottage late evening. Daz and Alan went up the week before and were settled in. Bad luck I'm coming down with the flu. The first three days were pretty good - 21 rabbits, sunny and windy days.

Tuesday: we caught the hurricane winds and rain, so went shopping and to the pub.

Wednesday: rain, overcast. We went knocking on some new doors and got some good new land and had some great flights. By now "yuk man-fu big time", by 8pm every night feel lousy, voice lost, coughed my heart up, off to bed early. The boys were considerate - they went to bed at 12 till 3 when the drink was all gone - cheers lads!

Thursday: rain and sunny showers - only 4 rabbits all day.

Friday: last day, I had to leave Mitzi at the cottage as she had gone lame as she cut her pad and I had a big thorn in it. We had a good day and took some pretty good photos and we went

I dropped her weight and went back hawking (the third goshawk I have flown this year). I kept the brown bird's weight the same as her flying weight, 2lb 10oz.

I had to go back to Scotland with Gordon to collect a male goshawk, so I took the brown bird out of the pen, she had not been flown for five weeks. On arriving there was at least twelve inches of snow. We caught a few rabbits while she was there and she was as keen as ever to catch even though there was plenty of snow about.

They are all now away for the moult and I wonder if I will fly another brown female goshawk next season. That brown bird had over 100 head of game and between the three females they had over two hundred head of game in a season.

Neil McCann

to remote places that you would think nothing would be living but up came rabbits.

This year the rabbits were really hard to find and thin on the ground, a total of 54 compared to 145 last year, but on a bad day we got some fishing in and two of the lads got a few days at deer stalking with our local farmers. The only casualty: Darren's goshawk named Matt's ferret on the last day - it was touched and go but it survived thank God, as Matt was not looking forward to telling his missus one of the babies was not coming home!

As usual there was loads of sport: flying, ferreting, working dogs, drinking and the bonus of fishing/stalking, and that's what it's all about. Thanks guys come on again next year!



Steve Richards with Mitzi, the pointer, and Lady, the Harris' Hawk

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A Book Obsession by Mark Parker

Many years ago when I was about seven and a half years old I went on my very first ever Scout camp. My parents believed the Scouts would be good for me and keep me out of trouble. The fact of the matter was that on this camping trip I was fairly ill and struggled with most of the activities. I did not feel that I had achieved a great deal but my attempts to succeed must have been noticed because at the end of the camp I was presented with an unexpected award for my efforts which came in the form of the Ladybird Book of Birds of Prey. That was some 44 years ago and that very same book still has a very nostalgic place of its own on my book shelf. At the time of receiving little did I know that this small gift would become a fairly substantial catalyst that ultimately started me on a journey that would embrace Falconry in every dimension and eventually map out a career path that I never expected. That one book created a spark of interest in a subject that I knew nothing about, and set me on a journey where I discovered a real passion for Birds of Prey.

What I did not anticipate is that over the years this passion created a side effect which developed and grew into an obsession. That obsession is collecting books on Falconry.

Over four decades since receiving that first book I have been gifted, purchased and collected a fairly substantial number of Falconry and related Bird of Prey titles. In fact I now have more books than I have shelf space for. There are old books, rare books, new books, good ones, bad ones, limited editions, collectors' editions and some very special ones that mean a lot to me. Some are valuable, others not so, but they have all played a part in quite an addiction. I have read most but not all, some have been easy to read others not and many contain valuable, interesting and useful pieces of information that have added to one's own library of Falconry knowledge itself.



In the beginning I collected any Falconry Books that I could find and that finances allowed me to obtain, though over the years there have been a few instances when desire and impulse overcame my financial reasoning and the faithful credit card came to play on my side and helped me obtain that elusive prize. On these occasions my reasoning always was that I may never get a chance to obtain that specific book ever again so therefore I must grasp the opportunity before it slipped me by. It's an impulse that I have had to curb. Over the years, I have probably spent thousands but could easily have spent ten times more. The need to obtain that 'important share' of Falconry history in the form of a book can be far more overwhelming. Unfortunately I have reached a stage where the books that I want are not really books but antiques and more often than not come with price tags to match.

There came a time when I decided to be more specific in what type of book I wanted to collect, my collection had become too big and too varied with many Bird of Prey reference books infiltrating my shelves of Falconry titles, I wanted a collection of books that were different and somehow unique.

It was at this point in time (1994) that I began working at a well-respected Bird of Prey Centre in Newent, Gloucestershire (now ICBP).

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The owner Jemima Parry-Jones (JPJ) had her own vast book collection made up primarily of reference books on all aspects of Birds of Prey: only a small percentage were on Falconry.

JPJ did have spare copies of some titles and specifically of interest to me was Major C.H. Fisher's *Reminiscences of a Falconer* a 1st Edition published in 1901. Jemima at the time had three copies and I asked if I could purchase one from her. I must have been in her good books because the following week she gave me a copy for free. When I examined the book and looked inside I discovered that she had signed it as a gift to me, it had also been signed previously by Phillip Glasier, her father and renowned Falconer. And in addition to this it had a sort of library stamp inside the front cover indicating that it belonged to The Falconry Centre, Newent, which of course was the original name of ICBP, the centre founded in 1967 by Phillip Glasier. The book was not in the best of condition, but it did not matter: what appealed to me and ultimately triggered a narrowing in my field of collecting was that the book had a history and provenance all of its own. It had been signed by two previous keepers, it had been part of a two respected falconers' libraries, I could trace where it had spent a fairly large proportion of its life. And so began an avenue of collecting, a sort of mini-crusade where I targeted signed first editions and specifically books that had their own story independent of the actual content of the book itself. Rarity and value together with cost are important factors, as is the actual subject matter and content, but it is the book's 'life story' that always intrigues me the most.

And so began the search in which I have had many interesting and often lucky experiences; in the late 90's I was desperate to obtain a first edition of *Hawk for the Bush* by Jack Mavrogordato. It's one of my favourite hawking books and though I possessed a reprint copy it was the first edition that I craved. One day I

spotted such a copy in a book dealer's catalogue and decided to pay him in Worcester'shire so that I could examine condition etc., before committing to buy. When I arrived at the dealer's home and began looking through the book, to my amazement I discovered that it was signed by Mavrogordato and enclosed a small dedication to a close friend of his who had apparently ordered the first two copies of the book. The essence of this dedication is actually mentioned within the book itself. The question was and still is: could this be one of those two books? If it was then it was one of only two special books in existence. The book had a story of its own, I definitely wanted it. I did not want to seem too keen so I returned home first then rang the dealer back with a cheeky offer which he accepted and the book was mine.

On another occasion after my first marriage had crumbled into a vast mess and the CSA had sent me an outrageous demand for money, that was even after I had given my ex-wife the house and just about everything that I owned, except my books and my Falconry equipment of course. I realised that I had to raise some funds fairly quickly which I managed to do after selling a very special personal possession. After the sale I decided that the CSA were not going to get all the money and I would buy one book that I could keep as a permanent reminder of something lost but never forgotten. I went to one of my favourite dealers in Great Malvern and purchased a rare collector's copy of Valerie Gargett's *The Black Eagle*. It had been specially bound in leather with marbled boards and gold lettering, a beautiful copy. You do not see many of these about so if you are a fellow collector and one becomes available then buy it. The book itself in my opinion is one of the best recorded study of a single species that has ever been written. The standard edition can be purchased for approximately £25 to £50 depending on condition.

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While I was at the dealer's he showed me another well-known falconry classic that had just come in. It was a falconry book that had once been owned by George Lodge, and had been signed by both him and another well-known artist who had also owned the book. I could not resist, the credit card came to my rescue and the book came home too.

There are countless other stories where I have been in the right place at the right time and just got lucky, but to be fair I have also missed a few, especially at auction. In these days with online bidding, people can bid from anywhere in the world, it's a bigger market and more competitive, difficult to get a bargain and be lucky. Buying books on eBay can sometimes throw up the odd rarity or bargain, though it's always difficult to fully commit to bidding without a close examination of a book. Falconry books are very collectable to so many people and the majority really do hold their prices. At this point in time I believe they are a good investment and if you shop around you may find that elusive rarity lurking on the back shelves of a charity shop. I once found such a title in a second-hand book shop in Hay-on-Wye, it was on sale for 50 pence, the owner had

little clue of its rarity, I knew that it was probably worth over £100 pounds. I was not a fan of that particular dealer so I very much enjoyed buying that book for 50p. Hay-on-Wye used to be the antique book shop capital of the world. It's not the same these days, the book shops are dying one by one and making way for other enterprises. In the past I have spent so many days and hours examining shelf after shelf to find a bargain though it is almost impossible to find anything special these days.

There are many antique book dealers about and many offer good books at fair prices, you just have to keep in touch with them and check their online catalogues on a regular basis. There are also specialist book search sites like Abe Books on the internet where you can probably find almost any book that has ever been printed. There are also numerous book fairs around the country throughout the year. Amazon books are always worth checking out too. They normally have a good selection of new and used books some of which are at very reasonable prices.

In many catalogues and some advertisements you will see interesting book descriptions that sometimes use words like folio, 8vo or 4to and many others. Years ago these abbreviations used to greatly confuse me until I discovered that they relate to the size of the book. If you are ever unsure about these phrases/abbreviations used, just go online and type in "book sizes". There are a number of web sites that will fully explain their meanings.

One of the most important things that I discovered whilst chatting to a book specialist at an auction is that a book with a dust cover (if originally issued with one) is worth a lot more than the same book without. With some books a dust cover can represent 80 to 90 percent of its value. Hard to believe I know but in most cases certainly true.

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It's always a good idea to check through the book to see if there are any pages missing or 'foxing' (brown-reddish stains or spots) on the pages. Is the binding O.K. or is the book likely to fall apart? Many old books may have at some stage been rebound. Some bindings can be a work of art in their own right. Personally I love books that have been rebound because it makes them individual. And with some it may well enhance the value.

Ownership signatures, presentation phrases, library stamps and bookplates etc. will all tell a tale of past provenance, some will deflate the value whilst others create more interest and add to its unique status. You never know what you may find. A colleague and I came across a single lot of a quantity of falconry books at an auction a couple of years back that had not been described in any great detail in the auction catalogue. At the time there were some other great titles on offer but this particular lot seemed to have been overlooked. When we examined them more closely we discovered that many had been signed by Guy Aylmer and also had his bookplate inside. Another book had been signed by Mavrogordato and included his bookplate; in addition it had also been signed by the author Leslie Brown, who had drawn a small picture below his signature. What a find. The dealers inside the auction had overlooked these books of which there were about 60 in total all purchased for around £300 for the lot. Needless to say many of them have now joined my collection.

My first ever falconry book was *A Manual of Falconry* by Woodford given to me by my parents one Christmas. In recent years I managed to obtain a very nice 1st Edition.

What made it really special was that this book once belonged to William Rutledge, a well-known and respected falconer. It was signed by him and also his grandson a well-respected avian vet who gave me the book. I love the provenance of this book and to own one of W. Rutledge's own falconry books is a real treat for me.

There are many other books yet to find and like most collectors and falconers alike I definitely have a wish list. One such wish would be to obtain a signed copy of one of Ronald Stevens' books. Possibly there is a chance that perhaps I will get lucky again one day soon.

So in the meantime if I had to recommend a few books to any Falconer whether it be for content, collecting or just a great read it would be these:

Falconry and Hawking by Phillip Glasier (a falconry bible in most people's eyes)

Gamehawk by Ray Turner (a classic in my eyes and very, very collectable, a fantastic falconry book but difficult to find)

Understanding the Bird of Prey by Nick Fox (very informative)

The Art of Falconry by Frederick II (first class, this guy really knew what he was talking about)

The Sins of Falconry by Gordon Robinson (this was a great read and a very informative book on the history of falconry)

H is for Hawk by Helen Macdonald (a wonderful falconry story, one of the most beautifully written books that I have ever read. It will be made into a film one day, of that I have no doubt.)

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There are many more, so many great books, I just cannot fit them all in. It is an obsession that started all those years ago with such a small and seemingly insignificant gift, so perhaps I had to pick a favourite as I am often asked to do, it just might be to most people's surprise that *Ladybird Book of Birds of Prey*; without that book for me falconry may never have happened.

Mark Parker

I have heard all the lame excuses, believe me, and none of them stack up, it takes a few seconds to change from one set to the other, so why are we surrounded by so many numb-skulls.

Even worse, I have often seen images in books, publicity posters or on the internet of falconers in the field, at falconry centres and/or falconry flying display teams, flying falcons and hawks with mewes jesses.



How the heck are novice falconers going to understand the importance of the safety factor when their so-called peers are so negligent themselves?

The day your hawk snags a jess in an impossibly high tree is the moment you know what a dim-wit you really are, but to do the same thing in front of an audience is the moment you become a legendary idiot.

I have rescued or had falcons handed to me by country folk who have rescued them with more junk hanging from their legs, which would not be out of place securing a bull dog.



Slit jess caught on barbed wire

Reluctantly you have to hand back this raptor to their rightful owner, knowing full well he is a complete Neanderthal and will never heed what you tell him.

My words might seem harsh but we are talking about the safety of your hawk in flight or, forbid the thought, that you lose them in fair flight. Imagine the thrill of picking up a signal after days of searching for a lost hawk only to come across a battered feather-ripped mess with broken legs, hanging stone dead from a tree branch.

At that moment as you stand looking up, thinking of the terrible slow death that your magnificent hawk incurred and wishing you had got there sooner, instead of thinking "if only I had changed the jesses, this would not have happened".

Forget all the modified versions of aylmeri anklets, false or whatever. There is only one design and if the right leather is used they work. Hells bells, I have had anklets on female eagles that have lasted years, only to be removed because the leather may start to become a little hard after years of use, and no, the feathers on the legs were perfect.

Overlong jesses can be as dangerous as they can whip around a branch or pylon strut and snag your hawk. I have seen images of falconers with their hawks jesses hanging half way down the falconer's knees. WHY? Leather cut right does not stretch that much, if at all, so why are you making jesses the length of leashes, it beggars belief.

One only has to enter "hawk stuck in tree" into any internet search engine to see how common the sad truth of what I am talking about really is.

So forget all the excuses and use the proper equipment, it could just save your hawk's life. Oh, and you will no longer be regarded as a complete idiot.

Alan Gates

Why Oh Bl***y Why? By Alan Gates

Sadly for quite some time now I have found myself repeating these sentiments, in most cases it is pointed towards some publicity photograph or a real life idiot in the field whose hawk is wearing mewes jesses in aylmeri anklets.

It is over forty years since I had the misfortune to experience the dangers of slit jesses. In those days most falconers used what is now termed the traditional jess, but after that incident I fashioned the first eagle aylmeri jesses using a pair of pliers to fasten the sail eyelets closed.



Anklets with button flying jesses

So taken was I with this improvement, that I produced a couple of rubber inking stamps with slogans to postmark all my letters to other falconers, I also wrote an article in the BFC journal in 1971.

This was at a time when the Hawking Club of Great Britain and the British Falconers Club were amalgamating into one club and Dr Robert Kenward put forward, into the club rules, my idea that all members should furnish

their hawks and falcons with aylmeri flying jesses.

These days all raptors that are flown seem to be fitted with aylmeri anklets but sadly far too many people seem to be so lazy or just plain stupid and fail to change from mewes to slit-less flying jesses (or no jesses) when flying their hawk.



Properly jessed eagle, 'Maria'

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Welsh Hawking Club Officers

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Terry Large and Mike Clowes

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Diamond.

All enquiries should in the first instance be made to the Secretary, David Barber. Mobile: 07785 762373. e-mail: d.barber@whc.org.uk



Constitution and Rules Of the Welsh Hawking Club

(Revised 2014)

Name and Objectives

The name of the club shall be **The Welsh Hawking Club**

The objective of the club shall be:-

- The promotion of Falconry.
- The provision of advice and information for members and other interested parties.
- The promotion and maintenance of the club 'Code of Conduct' amongst its members.

Constitution

The club shall consist of a President, Vice-Presidents, Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Honorary Secretary, Honorary Treasurer and other committee members as agreed and elected at an AGM. Each of these members are entitled to attend the committee meetings and to one vote, except the Chairman who does not have a vote. However, in the event of a vote resulting in a tie the Chairman shall then have the casting vote.

Only full members are eligible for election to office. The officers and the committee will conduct the business of the club (hereafter referred to simply as the committee), which will meet at such times as it thinks fit. A quorum for a meeting shall be five members.

Anyone who holds a current conviction under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, The Animal Welfare Act, Cotes or any other offences to a living animal will not be accepted for membership until any ban enforced by a court of law has been spent. They will then be accepted at the discretion of the committee.

Elections

All members of the committee will be elected individually, annually at the AGM.

During the year should any committee member fail to attend committee meetings regularly then he or she may be asked to give an explanation. If the reason is of insufficient justification, the committee member may be asked to stand down from their post and another member co-opted to fill the position.

Membership

Members of the club will be approved by the committee.

No person will be accepted for membership without completing a membership application form declaring if he or she has had any convictions under the Wildlife & Countryside Act, Cotes or The Animal Welfare Act. The membership form will state that if an applicant declares a past conviction then a committee member will contact them to discuss the offence and conviction, the committee member will then report back to the main committee for a decision if the application would be approved or not.

The annual subscription rate shall be determined at the AGM each year.

Any member whose subscription is more than eight weeks overdue after the end of May shall cease to be a member, but will be eligible for approval as an associate member and will pay the full joining fee as appropriate.

Should the committee have any reason to believe that a member has acted in a manner injurious to Falconry or the club then the member may be required to furnish a written explanation to the Secretary for the consideration of the committee or to appear in person before the committee. The member can claim a personal hearing if preferred. The Secretary will give the member at least 14 days' notice of the committee's requirements. Should the member refuse to comply, the committee may terminate the membership. They may also terminate the membership should they decide that the member has acted in a way harmful to Falconry and/or the WHC.

Any member wishing to dispose of a bird obtained through the club's breeding project

must first offer the bird back to the club at the purchase price.

Only full members are eligible to vote on club affairs.

Proxy and postal votes are not permitted, however email votes are permitted within the committee to ensure the smooth running of the club.

Associate members wishing to obtain full membership may apply in writing to the Secretary for the consideration of the committee. Prior to applying the applicant should normally have completed at least 12 months membership. The applicant must normally have successfully trained and hunted with a bird of prey witnessed by a full member.

All members will be strongly encouraged to complete the LANTRA award beginning with the falconry award during the first 12 months of membership. The WHC will assist with training at regional level.

The WHC will offer junior membership to those in full time education. Junior members will be entitled to attend social and field meetings but not vote on club matters or stand for office. This membership will be offered at 50% discount of full club membership.

Meetings

The Annual General Meeting shall be held at the main Field Meeting each year.

Meetings shall be presided over by the Chairman, Vice Chairman or in their absence one of the other officers as appropriate.

Alteration to Rules

Rules may not be altered by a vote taken at the AGM or at an EGM. Notices of motions for the AGM or EGM shall be sent to the Secretary in writing to arrive at least 6 weeks prior to these meetings. Any member wishing to call an EGM shall inform the Secretary in writing stating the reason for such a meeting. 20 full members must countersign the application.

Code of Conduct

The well-being of all birds of prey both domestic and wild together with the

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continuation of Falconry must be the aim of all members.

Falconry is the flying of trained birds of prey and owls at suitable quarry found in a natural state. No action must bring this into disrepute.

Every hawk must be properly manned and equipped.

Every endeavour must be made to recover a lost bird.

All birds flown free must have mews jesses removed. All birds must wear a working transmitter and it is strongly advised that it is wearing at least one bell. In the case of unentended or aggressive hawks, eagles, hybrids, exotics etc., special care must be taken when flown free.

Relevant quarry licences must be obtained where applicable.

Permission must be obtained before entering upon ground and it must be ascertained whether another falconer already has permission in which case his/her permission must also be sought. Due respect must be given to landowners and their property.

The club considers that fox, deer and mink are unsuitable quarry for hunting with birds in particular with more than two hounds. (In Scotland it is illegal to kill deer by any other means than shooting).

Regions

To provide social and educational meetings for members living locally, although any club member will be welcome to attend.

- To arrange local field meetings which the main club field meeting rules will govern. To be made open to all club members.

- To arrange fund raising to assist with paying for speakers and field meets.

- To promote falconry and the WHC.

Rules

Members will form no new region unless the committee at a committee meeting has agreed it.

All regions must open a bank or building society account in the name of the WHC. It is

recommended that the account have two signatories.

Any non-members attending will be made welcome for 3 meetings after this time they will be given the opportunity to complete an application form to join the club. If they decline they will no longer be allowed to attend the meetings, even as a guest of another member.

A register of attendees will be kept at all meetings, primarily to enforce rule 3.

The regional secretary will forward a written report each year to the Editor of the *Austringer*, to reach him no later than the end of February for inclusion in the *Austringer* for that year.

A report must be sent by the regional Treasurer to the club Treasurer showing the state of the region's finances, to reach her no later than the end of September for inclusion in the Treasurer's report at the AGM.

Each region will hold an election at its next meeting following the AGM. It will elect from its full members a Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer to run the meetings. One of these may also be elected as a member to attend the main meetings. This representative will have full voting rights.

In the event that the Club is wound up either voluntarily by a resolution of the membership or by order of the Court then any surplus assets after discharge of any residual liabilities shall be paid or given to the British Archives of Falconry.

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