

# SAFA

*journal*

1996

VOL No 1



SOUTH AFRICAN  
FALCONRY  
ASSOCIATION

# S A F A

## *The South African Falconry Association*

*S.A.F.A. is an association formed from affiliated Falconry Clubs or other organisations that practice or support Falconry and activities allied to or with the sport and all that it stands for.*

The aims and objectives of S.A.F.A. with regards to Falconry are clear and they are:

1. To support the aims of affiliated clubs and other organisations that practice and or support Falconry as a sport.
2. To promote and protect the recognition of falconry as a legal field sport.
3. To actively promote the conservation of birds of prey.
4. To initiate and co-ordinate communications and discussions with Nature Conservation Bodies and Decision Makers on a national level, for the purposes of obtaining uniform laws and policies regarding Falconry. At the same time fostering sound working relationships and understandings based on integrity and mutual trust.
5. To actively promote the scientific study of raptorial species, their care, welfare, training and captive breeding as well as information on wild species.
6. To establish traditions which will aid, perpetuate and further the aims of Falconry, its welfare and the raptors it employs.
7. To provide communication and to disseminate relevant information to interested members.
8. To improve, aid and encourage competency in the art and practice of falconry amongst interested persons.
9. To facilitate communications and co-operation with international Falconry Clubs, centres and organisations of matters of mutual interest and which benefit the sport of Falconry.
10. To actively assist with the co-ordination, implementation and management of the breeding in captivity of various raptors employed in Falconry.

In other words S.A.F.A. is the unified voice or face of its members and what we all stand for. It should be noted that there is strength in unity and united Falconry will go from strength to strength.

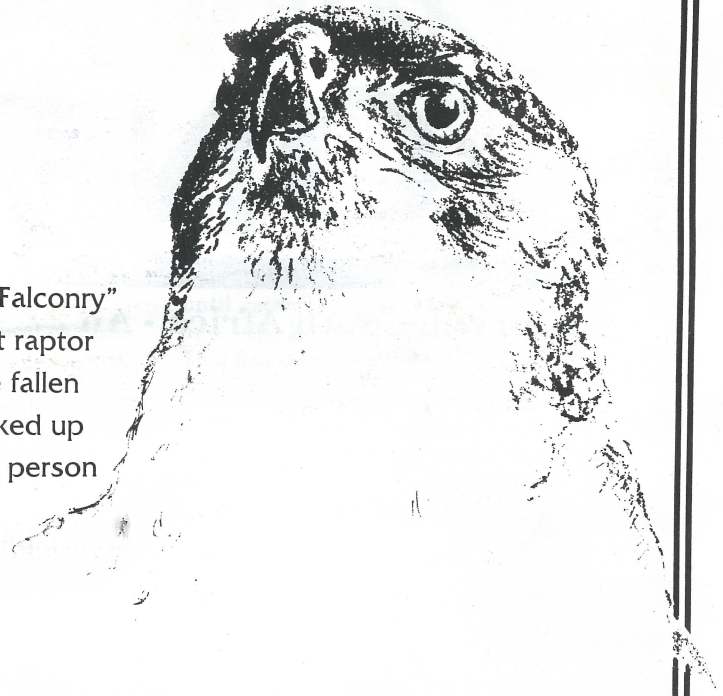
However on the otherhand if we are divided, what is so dear to every Falconers heart will become history and a faded memory. So, lets all embrace the challenges that the modern world of Falconry and the modern Falconer in that world are facing

Greg Jean-Jaques  
FOR SAFA



# Editorial

H.A.C. WALLER



There was a time when the words "Falconer" and "Falconry" were held in great esteem, infact they were the first raptor conservationists. Today these words seem to have fallen into disfavour and this leads one to ask why? I looked up the word "Falconer" in the Universal Dictionary. "A person who breeds and trains falcons". It is hard to understand from that explanation where such a negative view of the sport comes from.

South Africa is not the only country with such problems as the other day I read an article in "Hawk Chalk" April 1995 entitled The last Falconer, by John Taylor Yezequielian. In the editorial he states, "All of us know how people assume falconry is illegal" and there, I believe is the crux of the problem. Falconry is not illegal in any way but so few people are aware of this, even those who would have you believe they are informed, consider it to be illegal.

Unfortunately the blame lies squarely on our shoulders for we do nothing to inform the public of who we really are and what we stand for. Conservation of raptors, the quarry we hunt, the breeding programs, research, rehabilitation, and deep concern for all raptors and the important role they play in our environment. Those that show no concern for the law and have no moral viewpoint, and who believe they can do as they please, are not falconers. They are criminals.

There are, after all, game reserves in this country which are fenced and are in effect protected breeding chambers. Conservationists who protect and monitor these areas are not criminals, but are held in high esteem.

I hope that through this journal's pages a window is opened into the world of Falconry. These folk are proud conservationists who are often unrecognised, devoting much of their spare time to a group of birds that inhabit the same environment we all regard as "Home". Raptors are not restricted to Game Reserves but live side by side with man from the boundaries of our cities, to the rural expanse.

The time has come that the public's image is changed and that once again falconers are held with the esteem they deserve.

# CONTENTS

## Falconry in South Africa - An overview

by Ursula Skellern-Gouws .....p3

## SAFA Sky trials

by Greg Jean-Jacques .....p4

## The kite technique in the Eastern Cape

by Alan Harvey .....p6

## To Catch a duck

by Greg McBey .....p7

## Duck days

by Greg McBey .....p8

## Rehabilitation

by Tom Davidson .....p9

## Birds at field meets

.....p10

## Migrant falcons in the eastern cape province

by Alan Stephenson ..... p12

## Hawking with captive-bred eyass and intermewed rednecked falcons in the highveld of South Africa

by ER Robinson .....p14

## Greywing hunt in the southern Drakensburg

by Alan Harvey ..... p15

## Some thoughts on mass regulation of eyas Black Sparrowhawks

ER Robinson .....p16

## From the past..Gauntlet and lure, November 1971

.....p18

## "Black Flight"

by Greg McBey .....p20

### Cover Page

Migrant Falco peregrinus calidus  
Trapped on Beach near Alexandria Woody Cape dunes  
- Perdevlei  
1 January 1995 \* Male, weight, 570 g  
Photograph: A. Stephenson

### Editor

HAC Waller  
PO Box 855, Parys, 9585 South Africa  
Tel & Fax. 0568 - 2328

### Published Annually by:

SAFA (South African Falconry Association)

### Design & Layout

B Breedt

### Printing

DUPLA PRINTERS, BFN 051-4473036

The views expressed in this magazine are the views of the author. All material included in the SAFA journal is copyright SAFA Journal 1996, and may not be reproduced in part or whole without permission of the publishers.

# FALCONRY IN SOUTH AFRICA

## - AN OVERVIEW -

By Ursula Skellern-Gouws

The history of falconry in South Africa has been somewhat unstable. Subject to political fluctuations, public opinion, and separated from one another geographically, falconry clubs have tended to form and reform under various different names and regions. In retrospect, it is possible to trace some sort of order in the chaos of clubs and associations, mainly in the form of dedicated individuals who year-in and year-out get into the field and fly a hawk.

These individuals have kept the spirit of falconry alive while the official bodies have come and gone.

In Europe and Asia, falconers have centuries of tradition to draw upon. Not so in South Africa, where the sport was almost totally unheard of and where the first falconers had to rely on books and trial and error. In the early sixties a few organised falconry groups began to emerge around the country, mainly divided into provinces.

In 1961, Durban, the Natal Falconry Club was formed with two members. Aubry Neale, one of the founding members is still active today within the Natal club in an advisory capacity and as a bell and net maker. The Natal club is the one body which survived the ravages of time and has grown from strength to strength, as documented by their publications 'Hawk Talk'. Today it is the second largest club in terms of active members and is known for its strong 'mentor' system of training new falconers.

Almost simultaneously to the Natal club formation, friends Paul Venter and Jack Stuhler started a group called 'Raptor' in the Transvaal in 1964.

There were four members in total, including a Mr Peter Millstien of the T.P.A. Under him the first permits were issued. Jack Stuhler was a member of various international clubs including British, Austrian, German and American.

He met and conversed with legends like Mavrogdata and Glassier and in 1966 his contact with Roger Claude of America brought some radical changes to the South African Falconry scene, such as the Aylmeri, nylon leashes and the ring perch.

Paul Venter later moved and formed an organisation named 'Gauntlet and Lure' with a publication of the same name. To join, falconers were invited to write of their experiences for the newsletter.

In 1969-70 the Transvaal Falconry Association was formed. Many of the core members of the today's TFC were members of the TFA during its short existence. In the mid seventies falconry was banned in the Transvaal, forcing the club's members to stop or go underground. In a sense the banning was a very formative and positive happening for falconry in the Transvaal. When the club finally re-emerged in 1985 as the Transvaal Falconry Club (TFC), the organisation had had a total revamp in order to convince the apartheid government to unban the sport.

A strong involvement in captive breeding, raptor data collection, strict permit control, and a grading system meant that a healthy relationship with the conservation authorities could develop. Since then the club has flourished, becoming the largest active club.

Although there was some activity in

the Cape during this time, the sport was also banned here and it was not until recently that the ban was lifted and official clubs began to emerge. This has been invaluable to falconry in general in South Africa, and the Cape provides some excellent hunting grounds. The Orange Free State club only recently formed. Prior to that its members joined the Transvaal's activities.

In the New South Africa the split in the provinces is mirrored by the formation of new clubs. As this is being written there are clubs in Gauteng (TFC), North West, Orange Free State, Northern Province, Natal, Eastern Cape, Western Cape and Mpumalanga. This split has brought with it its share of problems in terms of inter provincial travel and standards control. Realising the weakness of individual clubs against political and public forces, the clubs got together and formed a national body, SAFA (South African Falconry Association). The individual clubs still deal with internal administration and socials and all the normal club activities. SAFA deals with matters of national importance such as grading and standards control, permit systems and club interaction. It is hoped that through the formation of this unified front falconry will be secured as a sport for generations to come and that the instability which accompanied the sport's formative years is banished forever.



Hunting party, Pietersburg May 1968

Back row: George van Niekerk, Black Spar; Carel van der Merwe, Black Spar, John Snelling, African Hawk Eagle  
Front row: Paul Venter, African Hawk Eagle; Bert Brooklyn, African Hawk Eagle; Quintin Chambers, African Hawk Eagle

# SAFA sky trials

by GREG JEAN-JACQUE

The words SKY TRIALS conjure up very different images to different people. It could be a Concorde Jet on its maiden test flight or it could be the Silver Falcons practising for an aerobatics competition or it could be your ordinary Harvard airplane doing circuits and bumps with a trainee pilot and his instructor.

However mention Sky Trails to a true, full blooded falconer and we then have a whole new perspective on things. One's imagination and aspirations climb to momentous heights as we picture the pure essence of superb physical and mental conditioning and the calculated speed and agility of a noble falcon hurtling across the blue skies on high overhead, from one horizon to the next and that's the picture they wish to see or the tale they would love to tell.

The sport of sky trails has even evolved out of the need for Falconers to test their falcons skills, speed and stamina against other Falconers Falcons and in so doing develop higher standards of performance, for these captive Falcons, at the same time creating a fairly controlled forum in order to be able to access the salient issues pertaining to the sport of sky trials.

Some historical background on sky trials which should be of interest to everyone, is that the very first Pigeon Derby as it was known were held in the late winter of 1975 in the State of Utah. In the freezing conditions only one Falconer turned up. The following year, 1976

again one Falconer, however four spectators were present. In 1977 seven Falcons were entered into the Pigeon Derby and it was watched by some one hundred spectators.

1981 saw the change in name from Pigeon Derby to Sky Trials and by 1987 some thirty, pre qualified falcons were entered and this included some three hundred spectators.

Since then the sport of Sky Trials has grown in Stature in North America and the standards which are attained by a big percentage of these competitors are awesome to say the least. What one can witness at these events are that Falconer (name) takes place before the event and the first entry drawn can choose his time slot on the day and so on as the entries are drawn. Contestants can however swop out their time slots. Each round is fifteen minutes to a maximum of twenty minutes. There are three judges, a steward / time keeper / pigeon handler. During each round, once the Falconer feels his bird has attained sufficient pitch he then calls for the release of a pigeon and his falcon is then also marked on the stoop and pursuit element of the trial. Judges therefore look for qualities that would be most sought in or perpetuate a superb game falcon and that is strength, stamina, spirit, command of air space and sheer perseverance.

The very first South African sky trial experience was held in the very picturesque surrounds of Bloemfontein in the Orange Free State. This area is also very aptly known as Big Sky Country. The sky trials were included with the first SAFA Field meeting held from Wednesday the 10th of May through to Sunday the 14th of May 1995. Friday the 12th of May was set aside for the sky trial.

For the record and posterity, fifteen falconers with seventeen falcons took part in the trial and if one considers the minute core of our Falconry Fraternity in South Africa, this is very encouraging for the future of sky trials and the sport of Falconry in general. It is estimated that we had about fifty spectators who were mostly falconers as well.

The weather conditions for flying the various falcon sub species were quite superb, infact most felt perfect. Crisp and cool for the early morning sessions and then warming up to be really balmy for the midday session ideal for thermal flying and then cooling down late afternoon with fairly still air to really get the Falcons work rates going.

The falcons are scored on the following categories:

Mounting	20 points
Position	20 points
Pitch	20 points
Stoop	20 points
Pursuit	20 points

A maximum of 20 points per Falconer can be scored. A trial takes place before the event and the first entry drawn can choose his time slot on the day and so on as the entries are drawn. Contestants can however swop out their time slots. Each round is fifteen minutes to a maximum of twenty minutes. There are three judges, a steward / time keeper / pigeon handler. During each round, once the Falconer feels his bird has attained sufficient pitch he then calls for the release of a pigeon and his falcon is then also marked on the stoop and pursuit element of the trial. Judges therefore look for qualities that would be most sought in or perpetuate a superb game falcon and that is strength, stamina, spirit, command of air space and sheer perseverance.

All the falcons that partook in the trial, performed well and the term skied out was seen to be a true thing and

not a misnomer. The spectators were treated to some real power flying and judging by the tumultuous applause on occasions everyone really enjoyed the trial. I think it needs to be noted that not one of the pigeons that were prepared for the sky trial were caught. In fact not at any time were they really threatened. Good strong sessioned pigeons are a very important facet of a successful sky trial.

The aim of SAFA for the future of sky trials will be to establish a forum where Falconers can see one another's falcons in action in a managed environment, where they can come together and they can learn from each other the techniques and nuances required to turn out a really fine Falcon for a sky trial and or other Falconry exploits. SAFA feels that it is also vital for the fostering of progressive ideas and modern techniques to develop and improve the standard of Falconry and even more important good relationships and communications amongst fellow Falconers who live in the Southern portion of the African continent.

The first SAFA sky trial by all account was a resounding success and it is hoped that it will become a major draw card on the Falconry fraternities calendar future. The competitors and their Falcons scores are posted together with this article as well as the first, second and third places and the Falconers choice on the day.

**REMEMBER, IN THIS SPORT ONLY THE SKY IS THE LIMIT**  
 NOW THERE'S SOMETHING TO ASPIRE TO.

*Best wishes for the upcoming 1996 sky trials!*

TIME	FALCONERS NAME		JUDGES SCORES	AVERAGE SCORE
8.50	Heroldt Gauche	Passage Lanner Tiercel (John)	61-66-61	62.7
9.10				
9.30				
9.50				
10.10	Kobus Bezuidenhout	First year captive bred Lanner Falcon	56-54-50	53.3
10.30				
10.50				
11.10				
11.30				
11.50	John Bamber	Passage Lanner Tiercel (Bat-Man)	84-82-82	82.7
12.10	Francois Breedt	Once intermewed passage Lanner Falcon (Mia)	90-83-84	85.7
<b>LUNCH BREAK</b>				
	Howard Waller	First year captive bred Scottish Peregrine Tiercel (Fire)	87-87-87	87.0
1.50	Paul van der...	Passage Lanner Falcon (Nikki)	86-87-87	86.7
2.10	Kenny Pinnock	Passage Lanner Tiercel (Rasta)	78-81-81	80.0
2.30	Mario Lazori	First year captive bred Lanner Falcon (Tasha)	Disqualified	Unfortunately
2.50	Greg McBey	Twice intermewed captive bred African Peregrine Falcon (Sage)	89-79-90	86.0
3.10	Dieter Nischk	First year cap... African Peregrine Tiercel (Schmidey)	48-54-59	53.7
3.30	John Bamber	First year bred cap... Tiercel (Turbo)	81-81-84	82.0
3.50	Dirk Verwoerd	Once intermewed Passage Lanner...	46-45-43	44.7
4.10	Howard Waller	First year Peregrine / Prairie Hybrid Tiercel (Shit Head)	68-65-69	67.3
4.30	Alan Stephenson	Once intermewed Captive bred African Peregrine Tiercel (Chunks)	70-64-64	66.0
4.50	Alan Harvey	First year captive bred African Peregrine Falcon (Scratch)	88-90-90	89.3
5.10	Tim Wagner	First year captive bred African Peregrine Falcon (Witch)	98-98-97	97.6
5.30	Mark Labuschagne	Once intermewed captive bred African Peregrine Falcon (Havanna)	53-46-48	49.0
5.50				

## THE RESULTS AS FOLLOWS

### FIRST

Tim Wagner & African Peregrine Falcon - Witch TFC

### SECOND

Alan Harvey & African Peregrine Falcon - Scratch CFC

### THIRD

Howard Waller & Scottish Peregrine Tiercel - Fire OFSFC

*Falconers choice: Tim Wagner & Peregrine Falcon, Witch*

# The KITE TECHNIQUE *in the* EASTERN CAPE

Alan Harvey

The past few seasons flying eyas Peregrines at duck has taught me that although pitch is not everything it comes pretty close to solving a lot of problems when the quarry is large (900 gms) and very fast.

Additionally last season my eyas Scottish falcon showed me she was quite capable of hooking any bird smaller than a heron, and that from a pitch of 50ft.

This resulted in severe problems trying to keep her fit and teaching her to fly high. Whilst racking my brain trying to think of ways to counteract this behaviour, I remembered reading somewhere about a new technique being developed in America.

I wrote to Carlton Green of Boulder enquiring about the balloon method of training falcons to wait on. He sent me a comprehensive paper on his and Tony Heads methods. Subsequently I read an article by David Scarborough in the Hawk Chalk on the use of the kite as a substitute for the balloon.

After a bit of research I found that the costs of using a balloon were prohibitive, with the balloon costing R175 and the helium R100 per filling. As I live in a windy part of the country I decided to try the kite technique. After some false starts I developed the following system.

The kite I use is a delta conyne made by Highfly Kites in Howick.

The kite line is 1200 ft of braided 50 kg nylon, marked every 100 ft with indelible marker.

This is wound onto an electrical extension cord reel with a drum modified to accept a pulley that is belt driven by a windscreen-wiper motor. The second line is 350 m of 20 kg fishing line on a Diawa 50 h reel.

Basically this is how the system works:

1. Connect the release clip to the kite
2. Tie on one quail breast with feathers intact.
3. Clip kite line onto the kite.
4. Hook the steel hook through one eye of the swivel.
5. Release the kite maintaining tension on both lines until the kite has lifted the bait.
6. Maintain equal tension on both lines by regulating the reels, ensuring that both lines stay together.
7. When the kite gets to the desired height, lock the brake on kite reel and set the drag on the fishing reel.
8. Now unhood the falcon which takes off into the wind and mounts rapidly in wide circles until she reaches the bait.
9. As she snags the quail breast the release clip releases pulling the steel hook out of the swivel and the 20 kg line falls free from the kite and the kite line.
10. If the falcon comes toward you, reel in the slack, if she drops straight downwind, use the brake on the reel to spool her down. When she lands, walk towards her reeling in the fishing line. When you get to the steel hook, tighten the drag and put the reel down. Now you can make in and titbit her on the ground etc. before picking her up.

To get the bird started on the kite is sometimes quite tricky. I start a falcon as soon as it has flown free for about a week and it has learnt the basics of flying.

I start by setting up the kite, with the bait at this stage an unplucked dove, at a height of about ten meters.

The bait at this height it is usually being lifted and dropped continuously. I then walk to a position about fifty meters downwind of the kite.

The falcon is unhooded and held aloft. At this stage some birds ignore the bait or don't seem to recognise it. Eventually though they will fly at it. The first attempts at binding at this stage are pretty clumsy.

Once the bird goes immediately it is unhooded, usually after two or three days, the kite can be lifted to 100ft, 200ft, 400ft 800ft and finally 1 000ft.

*I have found the following advantages using this system in my training.*

1. There is no better way of getting your bird super fit. Pumping up to 1 000ft builds pectorals like Schwartzernagers.
2. I have found my birds a lot steadier on the ground as a result of the long walk in and the frequent titbitting when the hawk is on the ground.
3. This is one of the best ways of recovering a lost falcon. The kite is visible from many kilometres around.
4. You can get a new bird up to a thousand foot before

showing it quarry. With consistent serving of quarry only when the bird is high very often this habit can be ingrained right from the start of an eyases career. This technique does not guarantee that the hawk will stay a high flyer when hunting.

However if you can engineer the first couple of kills from a very high pitch and never serve her when she is low you are heading in the right direction.

The philosophy here is that I want the bird to think that by flying high she can make quarry appear.

5. For the falconer who can only get to good hunting areas two or three times a week, the kite can keep the hawk super fit and flying high in the intervening days.

6. For the bird that is fast becoming wayward i.e. raking, checking e.t.c. the kite is an excellent way of breaking a pattern of poor behaviour before it becomes a habit.

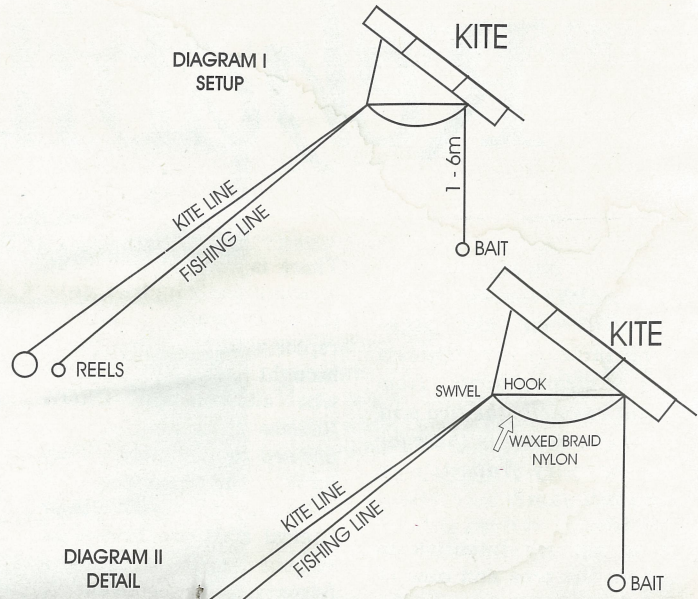
*Disadvantages:*

1. The sight of your falcon ringing rapidly up to over a thousand feet is quite addictive, and some might be tempted to stay on the kite too long.
2. A bird that is worked on the kite often tends to become less responsive to the lure. I try to counteract this by letting the bird eat the whole bait, and then throw out the lure with the balance of the days ration.
3. The way kite trained birds mount, ie very wide rings, and return at a high pitch often results in them being distracted by other unintended quarry before they get back to the point. Therefore this method is best used on falcons to be flown in wide open sparsely populated (birdwise) areas.
4. Whether or not this technique can get your 100ft paalsitter to take a decent pitch is still an open question. A fresh eyas is a much better bet.



The changeover from the thousand foot flight at the kite and the thousand foot stoop at the quarry is the critical stage of this technique. What has worked for me is once the falcon has gone up to the kite at a 1 000ft every day for a week, the next time out I shout and throw a bagged pigeon when the bird is only half-way up. Every day I let her get a bit closer before throwing the bag. Every couple of days I let her get to the kite. I have found that this system teaches the falcon to associate mounting with a reward, either the bait above or a bird to stoop at below.

Once the bird is consistently flying up and away and returning at a good pitch, I enter at proper quarry. I have found that what keeps the falcon flying high is the conditions you expose it to while hunting. Unfortunately here Murphy usually has more than his fair share of say. This is where the kite gives you an initial head start. In closing, I feel I should say that I am not advocating this technique as the only or the best way to get that 1 000ft stoop, however for me it has become as much a part of my falconry as my lure or my telemetry i.e. an invaluable



# TO CATCH A DUCK

by  
Greg  
McBey

In Southern Africa we have good access to a variety of duck species. In Natal the three main quackers that are readily encountered are Yellow Billed duck, Red Billed Teal and White Faced duck. These three species are all pretty unique and can prove to be challenging and spectacular quarry. One of the joys of quacker hunting is that a variety of flights can often be achieved during a single hunt i.e. a stoop from a good pitch can miss resulting in a ringing flight over the water surface followed by a long tail chase once the duck makes its break. Duck can induce a bird to make magical pitches as once they commit themselves to making the next available water they speed away with great determination and good top end speed as they seldom put in unless water or rank vegetation is available.

The following ideas are based on my experiences with two African Peregrine females. I have flown two European/Brookei crosses and watched several Peregrinus/Peregrinus falcons as well but these sub species are more naturally inclined to take duck. African females which average about 650g are quite capable of holding Yellow Billed drakes (weighing up to 1200g) but often need a considerable amount of encouragement and good management to ensure sustained success at this comparatively large quarry.

I believe that if one wishes to hunt quackers it is advisable to enter your bird at duck and keep her on them. Both my African females showed less keenness on duck once they had been flown at the

odd francolin which is not too difficult for the falcon. They flush very easily and fly away in a straight line (usually low to the ground). Providing the falcon has enough pitch the francolin is often brought to bag unless it bails out. Once struck or bound to, most francolin species are dispatched by the falcons relatively easily with the possible exception of the large Swainsons cocks.

Duck however are a far more elusive quarry. Depending on the water size are not always easily flushed, they have the option of flushing in any direction and often occur and flush in large mixed flocks thus adding to the confusion. Once airborne they are very fast and, unlike the francolin, can maintain these speeds for extremely long distances. They often gain good altitude and have a variety of evasive manoeuvres open to them. Added to this they use water as refuge and this is obviously very discouraging to a young falcon. Once the falcon actually manages to secure a quacker (especially a Drake Yellow Bill) they are capable of putting up a good battle on the ground which further discourages a shy falcon.

Because duck are not an easy quarry one should nurse your falcon into them. Your falcon is more likely to refuse duck once she has been introduced to the easier francolin. After all, why go to the trouble of chasing a more manoeuvrable and stronger quarry once you know there are softer targets out there. I am not suggesting that one cannot get an African to take duck after she has killed francolin however if one wants to hunt

mainly duck it is advisable to wed your falcon to the more challenging quarry at the outset. Putting it simply, I have never seen a good African Peregrine that takes duck, refuse a francolin. However this does not work in reverse and many exceptionally good partridge hawks often refuse to fly the webbed foot.

## SOME TIPS ON ENTERING A YOUNG FALCON TO DUCK

1. Do not enter your young falcon on duck until she is properly fit and taking a semi decent pitch.
2. Make the first couple of kills as easy as possible. Find a small dam with one or two duck on it, with very little cover or other water around.
3. Preferably set out three or four bagged duck to induce a good response.
4. If your falcon has several chases at wild duck without catching one, serve another baggie.
5. Do not flog your bird. If she tries hard and misses, call her down and utilise the "môre is nog 'n dag boet" principle.
6. For sustained success good pointers or dogs that are tuned to flushing and duck hunting in general are an invaluable asset.

# Rehabilitation

Tom Davidson, Natal Falconry club

*Falconry pre-supposes fit and healthy hawks. Rehabilitation on the other hand initially pre-supposes sick or injured birds. How do we reconcile the two and what if any role is there for the Falconry fraternity in rehabilitation?*

It is not my intention to debate the pros and cons of this issue but to describe the rather unique arrangement that we have with the Centre for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife (CROW) here in Natal.

CROW is based in Durban and has been in operation since 1980. It is funded entirely from donations and most of the staff are volunteers. It is the only centre for rehabilitation that accepts all wildlife. 20% of the intake is made up of mammals and they have had lion and rhino come through the centre along with most of the smaller mammals.

The majority of the wildlife coming in is made up of birds of which the raptors form about 5%. This will tend to increase at the end of each breeding season when young birds are brought in for various reasons.

Prior to 1980 there was little if any contact between CROW and the NFC. In 1981 a number of individuals who had been practising falconry illegally caused the NFC a number of problems not the least of which was when a hawk was handed into CROW which was found in a garden hanging by its leash. There was a lot of rancour and eventually we met up with their Director. In the end it was all sorted out and this then became the start of a very good relationship between the two organisations.

There is very little we can do about badly injured birds. However when a diurnal raptor with minor injuries is brought in the NFC member who sits on the CROW Release Committee is advised immediately. They have the service of veterinarians and their clinical staff are first class so our input is from a falconry perspective ie identification, age, food, housing, jessing, etc. Of all the issues however the early release is of the most interest to CROW and the NFC.

If the bird can be used for falconry and is ready for release it might be given to a member who is looking for that particular species. Regardless of the species if it can be released we will arrange or advise on the release.

We will also arrange to hack back those raptors that can be released which have been with CROW for some time. Whilst we have had quite a lot of success there are some problems. They may be imprinted or we may not always have members who are willing to assist or who have suitable areas. In the last few years we have been very lucky as we have a number of members on the North Coast who have ideal areas for release / hacking.

The Release Committee meets once a month and it is at this meeting where the release or take over of various birds is confirmed. There are occasions mainly through changes in staff where the NFC member is unaware of birds that have come in but this is the exception. There are also occasions when a bird has to remain with CROW for nearly a year as is the case where the primaries have been cut with eyass birds.

These birds can be easily overlooked as time goes by but I think through familiarity with the birds and better records we have overcome the problem to large extent.

I am unsure of the numbers but over the years we have arranged for the release / hacking back of quite a number of raptors. This includes a Crowned Eagle, Wahlberg Eagles, a Long Crested Eagle, Black Sparrow Hawks, Lanners, African Goshawks, Lizard Buzzards, Jackal Buzzards, Yellow Billed Kites, a Brown Snake Eagle, a Hobby, A Greater Kestrel and Rock Kestrels. We occasionally assist with owls and on one occasion we were able to advise on the release of several hand reared owls that had to be introduced to hunting for themselves. They were subsequently successfully returned to the wild. Two owls are being collected next week for release in Zululand.

From CROW the club has received Wahlbergs, Black Sparrow Hawks, Lanners and African Goshawks all of which have been or still are being used for falconry. The Afgos is particularly popular amongst new or junior members. We also received a pair of injured Black Eagles which we used as an exchange for our first pair of Peregrines ex the UK. A number of hawks from CROW have been negotiated by the NFC on behalf of breeders in the Transvaal and the Free State. These include Black Sparrow Hawks, Afgos' and Yellow Billed Kites.

Rehabilitation in varying degrees of sophistication is undertaken by individual members. In the club we have a Veterinary Surgeon who has been involved in

rehabilitation on a number of occasions. Some of our members have joined the Raptor Working Group and through this organisation have been involved. At the time of writing a Long Crested Eagle ex CROW is being cared for by a member and another is hacking back a Crowned Eagle which came from the South Coast. A third member has two Lanners which are moulting out.

(What is interesting is that generally most of the rehabilitation work is undertaken by club members who are not all that active as falconers.) All our members assist where possible with the trapping and attempted re-location of rogue hawks. In some areas we have developed quite a good rapport with the caged bird and pigeon fraternity.

From the above it can be seen that this club is quite heavily involved with rehabilitation. At the same time however we are at pains to impress upon CROW and others that we do not like to keep injured bird for too long and certainly are not in favour of the general public seeing an injured bird alongside those that are used for falconry.

The whole issue of rehabilitation can be controversial and our approach is open to criticism. In general terms however we believe our policy is a good one with advantages accruing to both parties.

# HAWKING with captive-bred eyas and intermewed

## REDNECKED falcons in the HIGHVELD of SOUTH AFRICA

ER ROBINSON

The southern African race of the Rednecked Falcon (*Falco chicquera horsbrughii*) has not been used much for falconry to date in South Africa. Although breeding readily in captivity, their scarcity in the wild has restricted the numbers that have been available to falconers. Furthermore, passage and haggard birds have proved easier to lose than to keep, resulting in few birds being flown for a full season. With the successful captive breeding of Rednecked Falcons by Greg Jean-Jacques, a few birds have become available for training by falconers of the Transvaal Falconry Club. This article gives my experiences with two females of this species flown in the highveld grasslands of Gauteng.

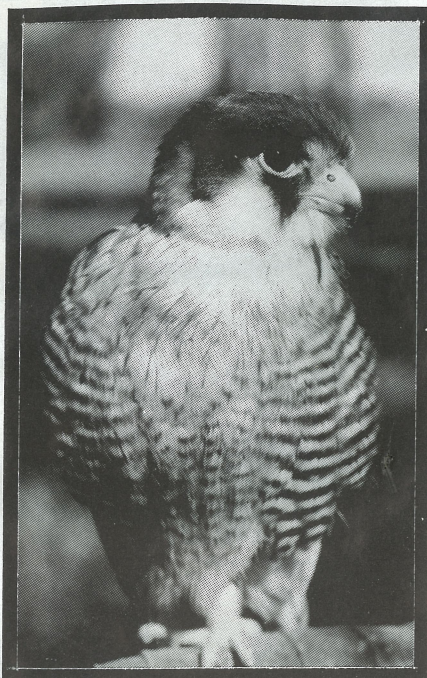
The birds were reared by their parents and apart from being observed through the feeding hatch, they had no contact with humans. They were taken up about one week before they were hardpenned, but after they had been flying around the pen for a few days. Manning and making them to the hood commenced immediately but mass was not reduced until after the shafts of the tail feathers had hardened. Manning was easy but both birds (and also the sibling tiercel trained by Alan Harvey) were (and still are) distinctly bad-tempered. In fact, they can be described as being totally relaxed about being bad-tempered and vicious!

On the first day after being jessed, the birds fed readily on the fist, and in 3 days they sat bareheaded on the glove indoors and outside while people were walking around and took no notice of dogs and other hawks.

Although our birds were made to the hood, they hated hoods, and after being moulted on the perch and fed daily on the glove, my bird absolutely refused to be hooded. Even in the first season, the trauma associated with hooding our birds resulted in their only being hooded for transport to the field. Once unhooded it was far better to carry them around bare-headed than to upset them by trying to re-hood after a flight. By the end of the season we had dispensed with hoods altogether as they were unnecessary irritations for the hawks and falconers.

Due to delays in delivery of telemetry equipment, initial training was deliberately slow and the falcons flew free only at 32 days after being taken up. Calling-off to the glove and lure was easily accomplished. Lureflying of these little hawks is easy and spectacular, and they are so fond of chasing anything that they will fly the lure avidly throughout a hunting career. Entering was to bagged sparrows, bishopbirds and Laughing Doves. As with entering to the lure, our captive-bred falcons began chasing quarry very easily. However, making the first kill on wild quarry was frustrating in the extreme because of the mode of hunting preferred by Rednecked Falcons.

Several hundreds of flights they have consistently shown a great preference for high-speed, straight-line pursuit. Even the captive-bred birds instinctively try to surprise prey into flight by flying fast and low over the ground and startling the prey into flight. Coupled with these ingrained habits, Rednecked Falcons have poor initial acceleration when compared with sparrowhawks, so under falconry conditions they are at a severe disadvantage until they are very fit. Both our females were flown for more than 300 days in their first season, and on most days they would have a couple of flights. Hunting flights were of 3 types:



REDNECKED FALCON

straight pursuit of birds flushed by the falconer, interception flights at prey on passage and self-hunting after a failed flight or when the hawk took stand and then saw prey that it could attack. Many of the latter flights were where the falcon missed the quarry it had initially been cast-off at and then attempted to flush from trees, small bushes or out of long grass by approaching the cover at high speed and flipping over it. Our Rednecked Falcons did not particularly like flights at quarry flushed at one's feet. Poor initial acceleration means that they seldom catch even sparrows in the first 20 metres, so only a small proportion of kills were made this way. Notable exceptions were when my bird caught the few francolin and young guinea fowl poult it managed to take. Although I had few flights at this large quarry, my falcon was quite willing to attack even Swainson's francolin, and her largest kill was a hen weighing 506 grams when she was at 218 grams herself! By far the most highly favoured slips are at birds which the falcon has seen flying along. Interception flights can be spectacular, especially at fast quarry such as Laughing Doves, Redfaced Mousebirds and Namaqua Doves. The falcons watch a bird approaching and when the quarry is judged to be within striking distance, the hawks take off. They fly low until close beneath the prey then make a climbing attack and strike from behind and below. In this way the quarry is cut off from cover, and because it is trying to maintain maximum speed and lift, it cannot dodge nearly as well as when attacked from above. These tactics are equally effective on small passerines, doves and even plovers.

In their first season our Rednecked Falcons were tenacious in these pursuit flights, with distance of 400 metres being commonplace. My personal record was where my falcon chased a Laughing Dove for a measured 1 400 metres before catching it. Willingness to keep following quarry once they were "locked onto" the prey is a major limitation to flying Rednecked Falcons where they can be lost from sight. Without telemetry we would have lost our birds time

and time again.

A combination of behaviour of available quarry and the preferences of our falcons produced very few ringing flights and minimal waiting-on. Of the 70-plus kills made by each falcon in their season hunting, no more than 10% were at the end of ringing flights. In part this is almost certainly because the only prey we encountered that attempts to ring-up outflew the falcons early in their careers and so both hawks became reluctant to chase this quarry. In part, though it seemed that our falcons preferred straight dashes rather than ringing pursuits. Even with Widowbirds ringed up, the falcons would try to make straight-line crossings of the circular path of the prey rather than to try and follow the circumference flown.

Weight control is fairly critical with birds about 220 g. We tried the "German method" of flying on a fluctuating weight - allowing the weight to drift to above flying weight then bring it down slowly to just below optimum weight and then gorge the bird and let it's weight rise. This did not work particularly well for us with these hawks. One could never predict how the bird would fly from one day to the next. The best policy, at least for my bird over her first season, was to maintain weight in a 2 - 4 gram band around optimum flying weight. As with the European Merlin being flown at skylarks, it was essential that the hawk had sufficient stamina to engage in up to 6 really long flights an afternoon. This meant that weight for flying quarry stylishly was on the heavy side of optimum flying weight rather than at or below optimum. In fact, when below optimum the hawks spent all their time on short rushes at low flying birds and declined really long chases.

By far the most exciting flights did not result in kills, since most kills were made when the quarry realised it was outgunned and tried to duck into cover. Here too the Redneckeds were unusual for falcons. They crash into thickets almost as readily as do African Goshawks when they are close on the tail feathers of prey.

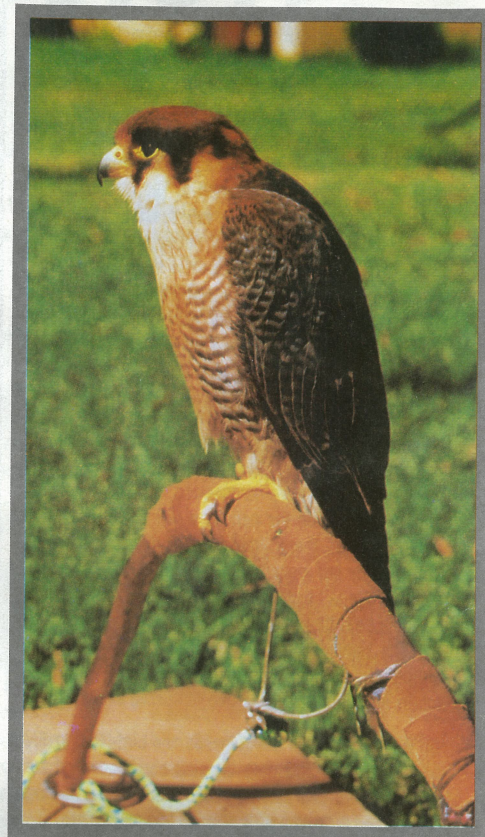
The second season with my intermewed bird was similar to the first. However, it was marred by my having much less time to fly the hawk than in her first season. She was therefore never as fit as she had been and so was less successful in long pursuit flights. However, she flew just as keenly as in the first year, and if anything, gave more trouble with self-hunting. Of a certainty, I spent more time tracking her to where she was sitting amongst a pile of feathers from a kill that I had seen no beginning, end or middle part of the hunt than was comfortable for me! In some ways I was a relief to put her into a breeding pen, as I was bound to lose her permanently if I had continued flying her for the whole of her second season.

In conclusion, Rednecked Falcons have the tenacity and docility at home of a Peregrine and the desire to hunt of an Ovambo Sparrowhawk. However, they are only viable falconry birds where one has very open country, abundant quarry in the early days of the season, regular flying and where close attention is paid to weight control. Telemetry is essential if one is to give them enough flying to produce stylish performance. Rednecked Falcons are absolutely superb for demonstration flying to the lure, since they chase a lure with gusto, can be flown in a tiny space and do not take any notice of bystanders.

# Birds at



Kobus's Lanner on a Yellow Throated Sandgrouse



Robbie's female Rednecked Falcon



Kenny's female Ovambo Sparrowhawk TFC



Howard's Pasage Tiercel Peregrin on Orange River Francolin

# *field meets*



Howard's male Little Sparrowhawk  
flying weight 96 grams



Clinton's Female Redbreasted Sparrowhawk



Juvenile Male Black Sparrowhawk



Juvenile Female African Goshawk

# MIGRANT FALCONS

## IN THE EASTERN CAPE PROVINCE

By Alan Stephenson

*Having lived in Grahamstown for the past 15 years and being a falconer and professional conservationist with an interest in raptors, the following observations may be of interest.*

### FIRSTLY THE PEREGRINE FALCON

In South Africa there is the resident Peregrine *Falco peregrinus minor* that is somewhat rare and localised in the Eastern Cape but not uncommon in the Western Cape. The African Peregrines are relatively small compared to the other subspecies of Peregrine. **White & Boyce (1988)** state that the African Peregrine is the fourth smallest Peregrine of the recognised nineteen subspecies throughout the world. The *peales* Peregrine *Falco peregrinus pealei* from Canada being the largest, with some females weighing up to 1500 grams, while the average African female weighs around 750 grams. Second largest to the *peales* is the *calidus* or Russian Peregrine *Falco peregrinus calidus* which visits us from the cold regions of the former U.S.S.R. Personal observations indicate that *calidus* Peregrines are far more common in the summer months than the African Peregrine, especially along the coastal areas and in towns. From 1987 till 1993 a mature male *calidus* arrived every year in Port Elizabeth and took up residence on the tall buildings. How does one determine it was a *calidus* and male? The answer to that is an excellent view of the falcon sitting on the window ledge through a window at a distance of 40 cm. The cleaner often complained about smudge on the glass. The earliest this bird was recorded as arriving was the second week in November and the latest date of departure was the last week in March.

Several other falcons have been observed hunting in towns during the summer months. How does one know whether they are African or migrant Peregrines? The answer is in the moult. Adult African Peregrines have gaps in the primaries up until the end of February for the females and often even later for the males. The adult birds seen hunting in towns are feather perfect which indicate a Northern Hemisphere moult. On several occasions Peregrines have been observed hunting over the Swartkops estuary.



A Stephenson, Beach survey Woody Cape, trapping Jan 96

In January 1995 a juvenile male Peregrine was trapped in the dunes at Woody Cape. The bird was extremely pale and surprisingly small for a *calidus*, 570 grams. This led to many questions as the colour and size indicated a *tundrius* Peregrine, a *calidus* bird according to the literature was much larger (Dementiev gives a range of 678-740 gms for 4 males). The possibility that it could be a *tundrius* Peregrine was unlikely (Cade, pers. comm.) due to geographical limitations and that it could possibly be an escaped falconry bird but this is also highly unlikely as many similar birds have been observed on the dunes and no jesses or rings were evident. Paillat (pers. comm.) working in Saudi Arabia on migrant Peregrines indicated that the sizes vary considerably, and at present have a huge female with a satellite transmitter in South Africa (January 1996). It weighs 1320 grams, passed through Kimberley on its way

south and ended up in Paarl where the transmitter signal was lost. In America Peregrines have already been tracked on the Autumn migration in 1993. Several birds were tracked to South America but one bird from Alaska went to Siberia and down the east coast to China.

This type of technology will answer all the questions we have had regarding the migration and origin of these birds. As a matter of interest these satellite transmitters weigh about 28 grams and

cost in the region of US\$ 5800 including satellite tracking time for the duration of the battery life, which can last for a year if adjusted to emit a signal for 8 hours every 7 days. It works off the ARGOS system of satellites which orbit at altitudes of 830 to 870 Kms. Frequency is very high at 401.650 Mhz.

Steyn (1982) states that the *calidus* race only extends down to Port Elizabeth, where several specimens were collected in past years by irate pigeon fanciers. In the Alexandria coastal dune fields, from Cannon Rocks in the East till Coega River mouth in the West many migrant Peregrines have been observed (pers. obs.). On one occasion no less than seven birds were seen perched on one sand dune.

As many as eleven different birds have been observed in a morning. The highest concentration appears to be in the vicinity of Perdevlei and the Krantz. Two adult birds have also been seen on the Krantz on a specific place on more than one occasion. After several trips to determine why the birds concentrated in this area the conclusion was that the falcons used the high bare dunes to hunt small birds and insects and as there was no cover the prey was extremely vulnerable and visible.

The other conclusion was that many migrant waders cut across Algoa Bay at this point and far enough from the Beach were vulnerable from attack by the falcons. One falcon was observed to fly out over the ocean for about 800 meters and then stoop down onto a large black bird flying below it (Wagner, pers. com.).

The falcon then returned with its prey into the dune fields to feed. Unfortunately the prey could not be identified but it appeared to be either a Rock Pigeon *Columba guinea* or even an African Oystercatcher *Haematopus moquini*, although the former was probably more likely. Steyn (1982) refers to African Peregrines hunting speckled pigeons *C. guinea* over St Croix Island. Without a doubt it is the *calidus* birds that hunt these pigeons so far out to sea.

The main reason being that even the African female Peregrine, which is larger than the male, cannot carry a Rock Pigeon for any distance. Having trained and flown Peregrines under falconry conditions this can be substantiated. The juvenile male that was trapped on the beach regurgitated a casting overnight which was examined for possible prey identification. It consisted of several eye lens's from locusts as well as numerous small brown feathers which were identified as those of one of the warbler species *Acrocephalus spp.*

To make matters even more confusing the European Peregrine *Falco peregrinus peregrinus* also migrates to South Africa. It has a similar colouration of slightly paler than the African Peregrine but is somewhat larger. The give away is the moult or in this case the lack of moult in the summer months.

Both male and female of this sub species has been observed in the Eastern Cape.

An adult male was resident for several seasons on a building in Port Elizabeth, which caused some confusion as to its identity as it looked like an African Peregrine but never had a mate and also never moulted in November when first observed. A large adult female took up residence on the Cathedral in Grahamstown in November 1994. It moved on again in early April. After seeing this bird fly effortlessly with a rock pigeon on several occasions and noticing while it was soaring that no feathers had moulted, the conclusion was that it was also a European race.

This bird returned in November 1995 and is still here in February 1996. It has been observed hunting mostly Rock Pigeons *C. guinea* as well as Red-eyed dove *Streptopelia semitorquata*. On one occasion when it was disturbed it flew off carrying a red-eyed dove *S. semitorquata* only to be pursued by a Steppe Buzzard *Buteo buteo* which proceeded to chase the Peregrine from one end of town to the other. The determination of the buzzard and speed with which it flew was impressive.

Eventually the falcon, tired of this pursuit, dropped the dove which was promptly snatched by the buzzard. The falcon then went into a soar ignoring the buzzard. The determination shown by the buzzard indicates that it had pirated prey before in this method with good success.

Both raptors migrate at the same time and probably along the same routes so the buzzards have learnt to keep an eye on the falcons for an easy meal. During trips to the dune fields observations were made on other falcons that occurred. European Hobby falcons *Falco subbuteo* were not uncommon everywhere along the dunes, and in one stretch of 15 km between Van Stadens and Gamtoos River Mouth, no less than 74 Hobbies were observed.

On two occasions in January 1995 a larger dark falcon amongst the hobbies was observed in the Woody Cape dunes which can only be described as being an Eleonora's falcon *Falco eleonorae*. An Eleonora's falcon was also observed at Fish River Mouth and at Kinkelbos near Port Elizabeth (Vernon pers. comm.).

Several Sooty Falcons *Falco concolor* have been observed along the coast between Fish River mouth and Port Alfred. An adult male was also brought in for rehabilitation in 1992 with an injured wing. A solitary adult

Sooty was seen along the confluence of the Kap and Fish rivers in 1993 and 1994.

## References

Cade, T.J. Founding Chairman, The Peregrine Fund. 5666 West Flying Hawk Lane, Boise, Idaho 83709. U.S.A.

Maclean, G.L. 1985. Roberts Birds Of South Africa. 5th ed. John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town.

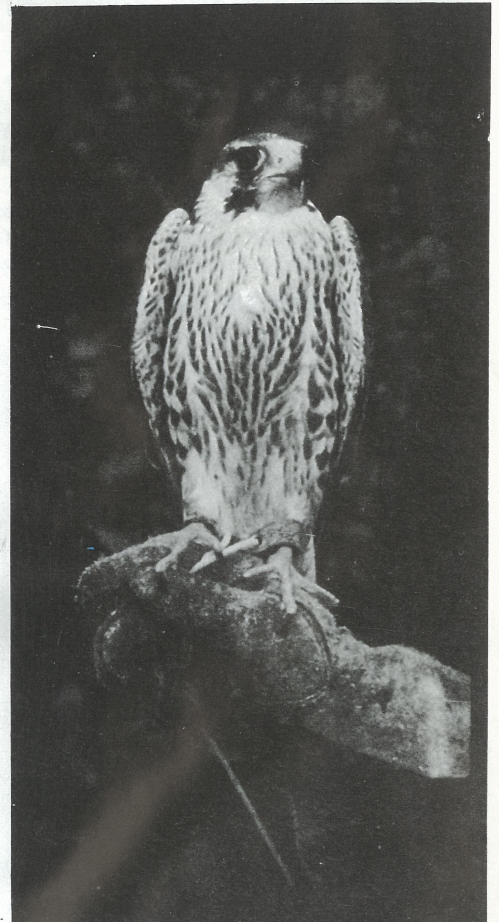
Paillat, P. Director, National Wildlife Research Centre. Post Box 1086, TAIFF, Saudi Arabia.

White, C.M. & Boyce, D. A. Jr. 1988. An Overview Of Peregrine Falcon Subspecies. In: Peregrine Falcon Populations. (eds.) T.J. Cade, J.H. Enderson, C.G. Thelander, & C.M. White. The Peregrine Fund, Idaho.

Steyn, P. 1982. Birds Of Prey Of Southern Africa. David Phillip, Cape Town & Johannesburg.

Vernon, C. East London Natural History Museum. P.O. Box 11021, Southernwood, East London 5213

Wagner, T. Chairman, Transvaal Falconry Club. P.O. Box 1701, Halfway House 1685.



Male Juvenile Peregrine trapped on beach, Jan '95 Woody Cape by A Stephenson

# DUCK DAYS

Approximately thirty minutes out of Durban I pull up at my favourite duck haunt. The afternoon is overcast and a mild 15 knot wind is blowing up the valley. The dogs are getting impatient as I attach the transmitter and gather the various falconry paraphernalia. My twice intermewed African Peregrines senses the dog's anticipation and tries to flick her hood. I gather the team and we head out through the pastures, we have to walk about 1,5 kilometres to the hunting waters and the dogs quarter through the veld burning off a bit of excess energy.

The falcon has hunted many times on this farm and knows the lay of the land well. There is a smallish dam 'en route' that occasionally renders a bonus duck, so I unhood "Sage" and she clips off into the cool breeze. Within minutes she has gained a respectable pitch and is waiting for myself and dogs to cover the 300m to the dam wall. It is late in the season and "Sage" is fully fit and is enjoying her flying in cool weather. Her cutting flying style is a pleasure to watch. One acquires a sixth sense after awhile and instinctively I know that the ducks are in for a rough time today.

As the dogs and I creep up behind the dam wall the adrenalin begins to flow freely. With a shout of "Hoy seek them out!" - the dogs and I explore over the dam wall. The senses tingle as the mind tries to absorb the whole scene in those split seconds. A coot paddles into the reeds and the dogs flush a pair of Egyptian geese but unfortunately there are no duck. The heart beat slows accordingly. The falcon realises that there is no action here and stoops off in the direction of the next dam. This is a well worn routine and I visualise her throwing up on to her favourite perch on the hillside which overlooks the bigger waters which always hold a good number of assorted duck species. When the dogs and I crest the next hill "Sage" is waiting in her normal spot.

The wind is blowing directly up the hill on top of which she is perched. The dams lie 200m below her on the valley floor. The wind will assist today's flying and once again the excitement and anticipation begins to mount. I find that my leisurely gate has speeded up. The dogs too want to get going and start wingeing to be let out of the "at heel" position. As "Sage" spots us moving towards the dams she leaves her perch and starts ridge soaring on the cool breeze. She gains pitch naturally and as we approach the next series of dams she leaves the ridge and



Tiercel Peregrine on Red Billed Teal. Painting by Ray Black 1996

positions herself over the waters. The sound of the White Faced duck calling confirm that there is quarry to be had and Sage and I are well pleased. These waters are difficult to kill over as there is a long thin dam with three smaller dams that run adjacent to it, thus providing ample refuge for the quackers. I send the dogs in and flocks of duck begin to leave the water. There are huge mixed flocks of Yellow Bill, White Faced, Teal, Coot and the odd Reed Comorant. These waterfowl have been hunted before and were reluctant to leave the haven of the dams below. The flocks circle the dams gaining height but staying above the water. Sage made several blistering stoops, trying to split a duck from the masses.

The ducks use each other as barriers and roll and evade the falcon maintaining their position over the water. Another four good stoops resulting in two brief aerial binds take place. Sage is not particularly strong and the Yellow Bill manage to break her hold on them if she binds to them up over the water.

The whole exhilarating spectacle is an extremely energetic game of aerial chess with the end result hopefully terminating in a position where one of the webbed footed clan does not get to "check his mate again". On this day it was to go our way. "Sage" was now drifting out of position, using the ridge lift to have a breather and taking time out to reassess the situation.

One misguided quacker misinterpreted this more laid back attitude and thought that Sage had retired for the day. The duck decided to leave the sanctuary of the flock to head out for calmer waters. Sage changed down a gear and pumped into position over the bill which was way below her.

The falcon then executed a beautiful wing over and came pumping down in a devastating stoop. Uncharacteristically of Sage (perhaps frustrated by her futile attempts at binding) she struck this hapless duck in a manner that any Prairie falcon would have been proud of. The falcon threw up again just in case another stoop was needed, but the quacker was already tumbling earthwards.

Sage nonchalantly circled around and claimed her well earned dinner. Sage is now entering her fourth season and is a pleasure to fly. However flights like these tend to make up for the early days of frustration and despair. One forgets about the number of times this same hawk refused to fly duck or raked off into the distance. Out of many flights and hunts Sage has only struck and killed four waterfowl in the air.

These are always aesthetically pleasing and make one year for a hard hitting Prairie or Prairie hybrid. As I conclude this article Sage is still in the moult but the winter chill is setting in and the promise of "duck days" to come is indeed a pleasant one.



# GREYWING HUNT

## in the southern Drakensburg

by ALAN HARVEY



We leave at 4 am with the bakkie fully loaded with camping equipment, food two pointers and two lanneretts. Halfway to our destination we have a blow-out. Luckily for once we have a spare. With the tyre changed we are on our way again and arrive at half past six. On arrival at the old farmhouse we are to stay in, it is swept out and the kit is packed away. The hawks are put out to weather while a fire is organised to keep us warm in the subzero temperatures. The first gusts of the icy west wind start to blow, boding well for hunting conditions

The sun rises late here at this isolated sheep farm right on top of the Drakensburg, and as it does so the house covey greets it with their wild whistling call. They are clearly visible on the ridge on the other side of the iced up stream. At ten, after a few warming cups of coffee, we load up the dogs and hawks and head for the area to be hunted today. This farms is ideal for falconry as it has a lot of flat ground intersected by gullies with fast flowing streams, surrounded by a ring of majestic peaks. No matter which way the wind blows, the hawks can find lift.

The vegetation is mostly mountain grassveld with patches of short bush on the rocky plates. This is good holding ground for geywing. There are a fair scattering of coveys, the location of which we know from previous hunts in this area. As we arrive at the fist area to be hunted, the bakkie is parked and the quivering dogs are let loose. I pick up the two lanners, check the gear, and send the dogs off.

The two english pointers cover ground quickly, working well as a brace.

Nika the black and white, makes long casts into the wind, while Ginny, the lemon, briskly covers the ground in between. We walk a good half a kilometre before we come over a rise and find Nika on point on the lee of a

patch of bush, with Ginny backing from 60 meters away. I steady the dogs and test the trans-mitter. As I raise my fist the haggard rouses once, then takes off, flying low over the dogs, then starts to mount with rapid wing beats. I call quietly to the dogs to keep them steady.

The hawk is now rapidly gaining height and as he

comes over at a pitch of about 80m, I run in past the dogs expecting the covey to flush at any moment.

Nothing happens and as the hawk is now out of position, I freeze waiting for the hawk to turn into position again. As I move the second time, the birds get up with a roar of wings and squealing loudly they turn downwind going like the clappers. I look up to see the haggard in full stoop closing rapidly. As the birds rise to clear a rocky outcrop, the lanner smashes through the hindmost grewing, throwing up a spray of feathers as the bird hints the ground with a thump. The hawk turns and binds to the greywing as it thrashes about. I come up slowly and help the haggard to break into his well deserved quarry.

The dogs in the meantime are still holding steady where the covey got up. I know the dogs will stay on as long as they can see me, so I pick up the haggard and feed up. After hooding him I put him down on the portable perch out of the wind in the lee of a boulder. As I cast off the passage he clowns around until he notices the dogs then he starts to mount but he is still way off to the side when

a single greywing flushes and streaks off downwind. The lanner tuns and pumps rapidly after the fast disappearing gamebird. They disappear down the valley with the gap staying the same. Suddenly, in the distance I see the hawk throwing up high into the air. I call the dogs and start running.

When we arrive the passage is in full hunt mode and a good 100m up. the dogs are reluctant to work in close and I have to do some ear tuning before they put there heads down and start to snuffle for the bird. Suddenly the rustling through the gwashe grass stops and the dogs are on. I get the hawk overhead by flapping the pigeon, and then charge into the prickly waist high grass. The bird gets up with difficulty through the long grass, but as soon as it is clear it heads on down the ravine. The hawk comes flashing down, levels out behind it, binds cleanly and lands in a patch of short grass. I make in and we return to camp for the rest of the day, happy with our success.

The following morning we awake to -10 degree temperatures and a howling gale. The higher ground has a thin covering of windswept snow. The hawks are put out to weather in the lee of the house out of the wind where they sit puffed up enjoying the early morning sun. After breakfast we decide to give the house covey a go as we risk freezing on the open ground on the high tops. At eleven we have thawed somewhat, and dressed in several layers of clothing, we start walking from the house up the valley, our boots crunching on the frozen black soil. As we round the first bend we see a covey of birds running across the track and

hide in the grassy verge. I quickly cast off the haggard. He flies straight to the other side of the valley, catches the updraught and comes powering back at a good pitch. At the flush he singles out a laggard and binds to it as it tries to put in to a

large bramble bush. It proves quite a job to extricate him. The rest of the covey has gone down the valley so we continue on looking for fresh birds. After about a kilometre the valley opens up into a flatter area. The dogs work further out, their steady searching is a pleasure to watch. Ginney skids to a halt as she comes downwind on to a covey that gets up and flies a short distance over a rise and puts in.

This time the passager starts hunting flight straight away, obviously the previous days flight has taught him something. He climbs steadily, watching us over his shoulder on the turns. I call the dogs around to circle the rise. as the wind borne scent hits them, the dogs stiffen suddenly and draw in as though being pulled by an invisible thread. As the dogs reach the crest they stop with heads held high. the hawk is hanging steady

in the gale at a fantastic pitch, watching the proceedings intently. What a picture they make against the back-drop of snow capped peaks. In this rarefied air everything looks so crystal clear and larger than life.

As I come over the rise, the birds explode in all directions. One towers up, catches the wind with his short round wings and swings downwind at an incredible clip.

The passager comes down vertically, pumping all the way and clouts the bird solidly. It goes down, hits the ground and doesn't move. The hawk winnows down gently and starts plucking, pausing every now and again to scan the skyline. I lie in the grass next to him with the dogs enjoying the weak winter sun. That warm feeling of satisfaction and completeness understood only by falconers pervades the scene.

So ends a particularly successful and enjoyable week-end. We pack up reluctantly and head for home, tired but happy, already planning for the next trip.



Lanner Falcon

## SOME THOUGHTS ON MASS REGULATION OF EYAS BLACK SPARROWHAWKS

*ER Robinson*

In the 1994 issue of *The Transvaal Falconer*, Roger Neilson summarised some information from the German falconry literature on flying weight of European Goshawks. Howard Waller also presented notes on the flying weight of his Black Sparrowhawk. It is interesting resting to compare these articles and also to relate the flying weights given by these authors to those seen in many falconry books.

Over the past 2 seasons I have kept detailed records of performances and

flying weights of a male and a female eyas Black Sparrow-hawk, and would like to add my observations to those of Waller. My primary aim in doing so is to show how much the flying mass of eyas Black Sparrowhawks increases within the first season.

The musket was a rehabilitation bird that had fallen from a nest after being attacked by bees. He was about 21 days old when found with a broken leg beneath the nest. The leg was splintered until it healed, but because

it was crooked, veterinary surgeon attempted to re-break and in it. The bone had knitted so well that the leg could not be re-broken, so it was left as it had healed. The associated handling had made the hawk very suspicious of hands, and he was an extremely difficult bird to man.

He was only flown 33 days after being taken up and made his first kill 30 days later. By the time he had been in training for 20 weeks he had made 16 kills, mostly

CONTINUE P 17

Swainsons and Orange River francolin. The female was taken from the nest at 28 days of age for falconry and was reared in the same way as the musket, namely left free in a room in the house until she was hard-penned. In this way both birds were thoroughly socialised to humans and dogs but neither bird was a screamer.

Having had a relaxed upbringing, the female was a joy to train, flying free after 21 days and taking quarry only 5 days after flying free. By the time she had been in training for 20 weeks she had made 48 kills, almost all being guineafowls and only 5 being second-phase flights.

In figure 1 the masses of the birds are given as percentage of the mass when taken up. This mass was achieved by the birds being given enough food that they were leaving some at the end of each meal, so can be considered as the "fat weight" of eyasses at the point when they were just hard-penned.

The birds were weighed using a triple-beam balance accurate to 0,1g each day just before being flown. Both birds were reduced quite markedly in the first few days, by which time they began feeding on the first and stepping up to the glove for meals. Right from the start of training, mass fluctuated considerably from one day to the next. This was not solely because of difficulty in judging the optimum quantity to feed, but also because I do not like to keep a trained bird at an unchanging mass for too long.

I have been more successful by giving sparrowhawks a good feed often enough that he or she does not become accustomed to feeling hungry. If the bird gets a good feed every couple of days, it really feels the pinch when food is restricted on a particular day.

As can be seen, even the musket was allowed to regain mass early in the training. Being easier to man, the female was allowed to consistently increase mass sooner than the male.

The musket was reduced to 87% of initial mass on a number of occasions, whereas the female's mass has not been lower than 89% of initial mass. Of more interest are the maxima the birds have attained. The female reached 106% of initial mass when she was fed ad lib for a couple of days during bad weather. This quite clearly shows the extent of muscle build-up with hunting. Obviously, if one were to apply some "rule" such as "flying mass should be 10% below initial mass" then as the hawk gains muscle one would be flying it considerably lower than 10% below MAXIMUM mass.

Flying weight has increased as well as fluctuated through the weeks. Both birds hunted keenly when at more than 95% of initial mass.

The female has consistently made stylish kills of guineafowls and has even caught Orange River francolin when at the same mass as when she was taken up! At these high masses, the birds are strong and pursue very hard, whereas at lower mass they tended to break off pursuit.

When at his lowest mass, the male was not very interested in quarry that was flushed. Had I not had the detailed records, his behaviour would have suggested that he was OVER-WEIGHT when the reverse was true.

As far as keenness goes, both were found to be in yarak even when at maximum mass, with yarak being induced more by confidence and desire to hunt than hunger. Both birds have flown very well when rising in mass, at unchanging mass and when their mass is falling, so no pattern has been discerned in weight control.

These detailed records of mass of these two Black Sparrowhawks match data for male and female African goshawks I have flown.

They also seem to agree with observations of other austringers on Balck and Ovambo Sparrowhawks. Most important of all, the data confirm the impression that sparrowhawks are more often in too low conditon rather than too high.



Black Sparrow Hawk

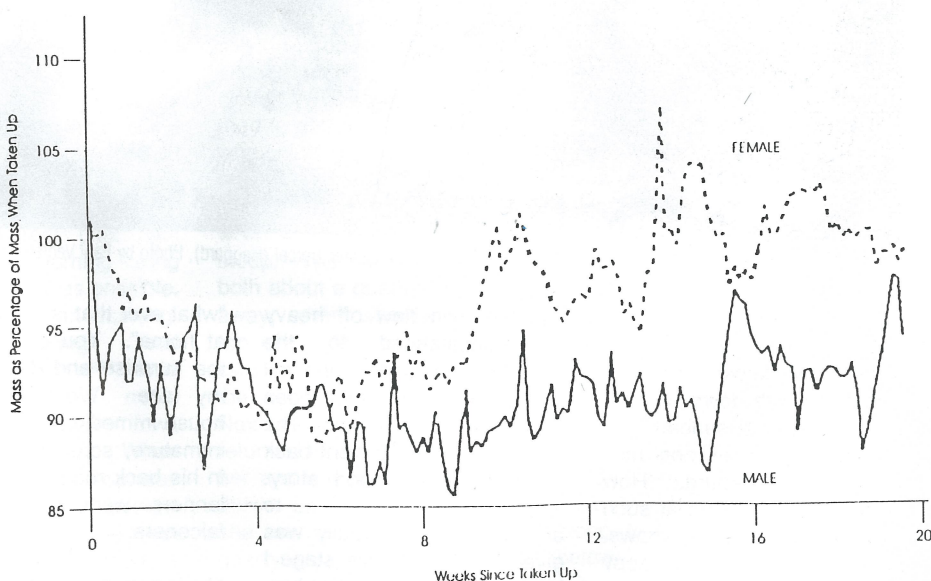


Figure 1: Mass of 2 Eyass Black Sparrowhawks over the first 20 weeks of training

*From the past ...*

## GAUNTLET AND LURE

NOVEMBER 1971

A falcon called Tobarra



"Tasso" Lanner Tiercel (Haggard), Photo by Paul Venter

During November 1970 two school boys found three lanners, two falcons and one tiercel still with down on their heads,, having a sunbathe on a sandbank about one mile south of Pietersburg. How these lanners arrived at such a place, only nature knows. Having arrived on this happy family scene the boys stopped to consider what to do, one suggested they run up to the birds and catch them, this they did, what a

surprise, two flew off heavy and unbalanced to the nearest thorn tree. One fell on its back with beak open and claws well extended. The boys caught it and went back to town with a good story. The falcon went from one to another, and eventually was given to me. At this stage I knew nothing of the other two. It was only sometime later that a salesman came to the house and saw the lanner on the block and remarked,

"what ever that is - I have two at home". You can imagine the surprise and disbelief on my face. We went to his house immediately to find two immature, screaming lanners in his back room. These two lanners went to Transvaal falconers.

My falcon flew well and took seven bagged pigeons. She had a good pitch and voice. Her screaming and mantling was something to see -

typical unhacked eyass lanner. I eventually released her as I could not put up with her screaming. She flew at hark for seven days then disappeared.

Paul Kruger, owner of one of the lanners, decided to move to Natal and could not take his falcon with him. The unhacked eyass came to me partly trained, screaming, mantling and attacking you when on the wing.

I kept it in the mews one week. I then decided that I was not going to put up with all its bad habits and subsequently turned it out to hack, here at the house. The date was 21st Jan. 1971. She was called to the lure to feed and had the freedom of flying all day to build up her flying powers. Somedays she would take the lure but did not show any interest in the food. I always used to take her on the glove when lured and released her again after the meal. Her perch at night was under the eaves on the pergola.

She was absent from the roost on several occasions and I would have given anything to know where she slept on these nights. The longest period of absence was four days. Philip (my "batu falconer") observed her several times chasing crows, pigeons and korhaan. One evening I saw her chase two rock pigeons out of sight. The date now the 12 Feb. 1971. She was at hack long enough and I decided to take her up.

On the 13th I lured her on an empty crop at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. She took the hood beautifully, although she was never hooded when at hack. The inscription in my hawking diary for this same day reads as follows:-

Philip, myself and Ember (English pointer from England's Embercombe kennels) went out. Ember pointed and "Tobarra" was released. She went up to approximately 200ft. We moved in and flushed two francolin. "Tobarra" stooped hard and put one into a bush. We flushed it again and was put in again.

The Swainsons francolin was taken on the next flush. "Tobarra" caught it above our heads and came down slowly right in front of us. It was great. I took colour slides although the light by this time was very poor.

A great start for a great falcon. I always maintained that the lanner was capable of being hunted successfully. I had several letters from falconers with comments like "it is just one in a thousand"

or "a fantastic lanner". Here I want to point out one simple fact. To fly the lanner or any falcon for that matter, you need, as Ronald Stevens put it so distinctly and accurately in his book "Observations on modern Falconry" page 75,

1. Suitable country
  2. Plenty of game
  3. A hawk that waits-on
  4. A setter and a spaniel (Good dog)
  5. Suitable weather,
- Even with all five to perfection you can still expect days of unsuccessful hawking. Of this I have many sweet memories.

The best team, as I would like it would be as follows:-  
Two falcons, two pointers and three markers.  
During the 1971 season my team consisted of, one falcon, one pointer and two markers. At the moment I am training another pointer for the 1972 season.

"Tobarra" well hacked and sitting on the glove like a haggard at a weight of 600 grams, was a pleasure to handle. All her bad habits dispersed of and ready for good hunting. as it is with all our falconers, time is always limited. I arranged at work to work five hours extra and take two hours off on Wednesdays for hunting. Therefore, I had Saturdays, Sundays and every Wednesday afternoon available.

"Tobarra's" program for a week went like this. Monday morning approx. 20 stoops at the lure. Tuesday morning as many stoops as she could manage. The most I could get out of her was 38 at a time. Wednesday hunting. Thursday a rest plus light meal. Friday morning luring exercise as many as possible. Saturday afternoon hunting. Sunday morning and afternoon hunting. Her food varied from beef neck, chickens, guinea fowl, francolin to pigeons. When worked hard a full crop was given especially when chicken was on the menu. One must be careful when pigeon is given. I normally gave pigeon when flying her on Wednesdays. The next day a light meal normally brought her weight back to normal for

luring on Friday morning. Never give a full crop of pigeon when hunting as this can put you out, as far as hunting goes, for a few days.

Tobarra flew quarry hard and with great zest. She successfully took Swainsons francolin and small birds. She flew guinea-fowl on several occasions but no kill. Other interesting flights I had were at crows, tickbirds, grassowls, ducks and korhaan. None successful. These flights were mostly on her own and not necessarily planned.

On 26th March, Peter Deetlefs and myself went hawking armed with Tobarra and his African Goshawk. Ember just could not find any game birds and I decided to fly Tobarra just to the lure. She always use to leave the glove with strong hard and fast wing beats. this soon placed her nicely above us. A seedeater was observed in a thorn bush nearby. I rushed up to flush it.

Tobarra was nicely placed and followed me directly above. In the same bush as the finch was a shrike in hiding. I crashed into the bush and out popped the shrike. Peter stood in a good position observing the modus operandi.

Tobarra closed up and came down like a brick. The shrike spotted Peter and made straight for him for cover, what a surprise when the African Goose was spotted sitting calmly on Peter's clove. What now! The shrike tried to get-over Peter's head, who up till now had not even moved his ears. It was about 24 inches above his head when Tobarra trussed it in full stoop. The stoop took them both about a quarter of a mile away, where she landed on top of an Acacia. I tried to climb the tree but gave up in the end. She was left out. Next morning early Tobarra returned to the house. I lured her and she was back in the mews again. At this stage she had taken eight head of quarry.

On another occasion Ember stood on a point in long thatch grass. Tobarra's breast cut the wind and up she climbed.

She waited on at approx. 500 - 600ft. Philip and I flushed, the francolin flew about 10 yards. and dropped into the long grass again. Tobarra did not even attempt to stoop. We flushed it again, by now the falcon was just a speck in the sky. I realised that at a height like that she would never be able to take the frankie successfully. The falcon then stooped away from us in a western direction. We drove home to find Tobarra sitting there waiting there for us. I lured her on the lawn and she was put in the mews.

She soon found out that a high pitch is not necessary, when flying francolin, most of our earlier problems had been to get the francolin to fly long distances before putting in to cover. Tobarra after several misses, from a great height, adapted herself to the situation and waited on at heights which varied from 50ft. to 200 ft.

The intelligence of the lanner is something worth noting. It appears as though the lanner except man and likes to combine with him when hunting. Hunting parties have often reported wild lanners hunting flushed quarry. Willem Putter, my falconer friend with whom I spent many excellent hunting hours, and I one day flushed doves for a haggard lanneret. We had 18 beautiful, neckbreaking stoops from the wild lanneret, but it made only one mistake - waited on too high.

This could have been to the presence of the pointer and a hawking party of five. With francolin flying low and not far, a hawk has a better position at a height of approx. 100ft. directly above.

One afternoon we had an excellent point from Ember, and Tobarra was at a good pitch. Babara flushed the francolin and down came the falcon, she stooped below the quarry and in the upwards stoop took the frankie from below.

Tobarra's best was two francolins in one day.

*From my diary:*

20 May, 1971 (Thursday). Left house 7.10am. Saw francolin flying into open grassland, Ember eventually picked up one and pointed. Tobarra went up to approx. 100 ft. We tried to flush but the francolin refused to fly. I went down on my knees in the long grass and managed to flush it. Tobarra stooped into it from below and landed softly in the long grass. I made in. The frankie was playing very dead, I bent down with a tit-bit on my glove, Tobarra released her grip and jumped onto the glove, the presumed dead frankie got up and tried to run away. Tobarra left the glove with great speed and killed it on the ground.

20th May, 1971 (Thursday). Left the house 4.00pm. Party - Barbara, my wife, Philip, Juan and another bantu. Saw three francolin put in. Ember pointed. Tobarra went up. The frankie reached cover. Second flush it was missed by Tobarra, as the frankie utilized a barb-wire fence as cover. Ember pointed again and this time it was taken in the air. She killed it but did not brake into it. Weight of frankie 500 grams. She ended a successful day by almost catching a crow when I tried for a third kill."

Most definitely a day we will never forget. The heaviest frankie weighed 650 grams (taken 26.5.71). We used to drive with the L.D.V. along

mealie lands and watch for frankies. They normally fly for grass cover nearby. This is where markers come in handy. The pointer is worked to the spot and as soon as he goes on point up goes the falcon, then the flush and if there is no other good cover nearby it ended in a kill.

She was out of action at one stage for 14 days. I was exercising her to the lure early one morning. She threw up into the wind and put in a downwind stoop. Her judgement was out and she made contact with my ribs just under my arm. The impact of the stoop was heard by Barbara who was standing about 100 yds. away watching. I felt as though a

brick had hit me. The falcon ploughed into the grass. She injured her wing and could not fly for some time.

Due to pressure of work and the expiry of my keeping permit, Tobarra was released. I could have kept her longer if I wanted to, but lack of time made me decide to release her rather.

Her score:  
Swainsons francolin 22  
Small birds 4

Here I want to thank my wife Barbara and Philip for their great assistance when hunting with - "To Barbara" Tobarra successfully, without their able assistance it would have been impossible to fly game birds with the lanner.

# "BLACK FLIGHT"

G Mc Bey



In early 1992 whilst returning from an abortive camping trip at Spioenskop Dam I caught sight of a Black Eagle sitting in the grass about 130 m from the roadside. She was surrounded by "white fur" and was obviously in the process of having a late breakfast. We pulled over to have a closer look and saw the male Black Eagle sitting a short way off watching his wife pig out. I jumped the fence as I was keen to identify the quarry. As I approached she tried to get airborne with the rest of her meal but due to lack of wind and unsuitable terrain she was forced to head for the hills sans dessert. I was surprised to find that they had just despatched an adult Egyptian Goose. The goose had obviously just been killed as the meat was still bloody. It was an adult female and had an egg which was about to be laid. The kill was fairly close to a fence line and for the next half hour of the journey homeward I bored the hell out of my girlfriend with the various permutations of how Mrs Goose could have come to meet her Maker!

It was unlikely that the goose had been caught on the ground whilst feeding as the locality in which she was caught was far from suitable food source. I then dispensed with the theory that she could have struck the fence and become a statistic after injuring herself in this manner. After all, she was an adult goose in her own breeding territory and the flying weather was perfect. Hence it was concluded that the pair of Black Eagles had taken said goose in fair flight either by stooping at her or in level chase. The picture of a pair of Black Eagles stooping and killing a goose over the windswept themecca with the mountains and blue waters of the dam in the background has often tickled my warped falconer's brain since then. However the whole scenario was based on conjecture only. Then in March 1995 I received a telephone call from a rather excited Charles alias "The Duckless One" Couchman, who related the following saga to me. It was fairly late in the evening and said gentleman was on the way to check on his pigeon

loft when he caught sight of a pair of geese flying at about 100ft. We however, became somewhat suspicious when the one goose suddenly bound to the other.

A male Black Eagle had bound to a goose directly over his house. The goose was struggling and shouting the odds as was only right considering her predicament. The Black Eagle however realised that it was going to come to terra firma too close to "The Duckless One" and so released the goose which made a hasty retreat.

The eagle then did a u-turn and began ridge soaring on the mountains which overlook the Albert Falls Dam. Charles ran back to the house to give his missus a call and they both returned to watch the eagle ridging away in evening wind. They then spotted the female flying on another ridge about 300m across the valley and at a much greater pitch. Suddenly the male initiated on a group of 3 geese and was soon amongst them. The female then stooped from great height and struck a goose down, she then winged over and secured her supper!

Needless to say this must have been an amazing spectacle to have watched first hand and it lends credence to my speculation that the Spioenskop goose was taken in a similar fashion.

Next Question, "Can a falconer get these birds to take geese from a thermaling position?". I have written this article in part because the editor has pestered me like a Black Spar tails a moulting pigeon! and secondly, so that at the next meeting when you see "The Duckless one" with a 3 kg eagle which is perched on a pole somewhere in a barren mealie field, you know that he has not lost it completely, only that the eagle is not sharing his creative vision!!





*Painting by Ray Black*

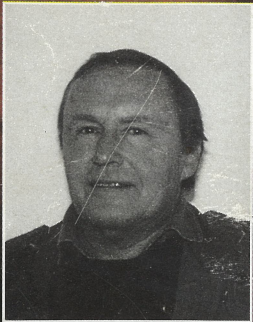
*Born in Aberdeen, Scotland, 5-9-39; Came to South Africa in 1945  
Completed Commercial Art & Industrial Design Diploma at Johannesburg Art School in 1959.*

*Falconry: Began falconry career in 1956, flying several hawk species including a Taita falcon. Flying in South Africa, Zambia as well as Zimbabwe.*

*Career: Worked in advertising as commercial artist, Museum artist and currently as museum Chief Taxidermist.*

*Major exhibitions: Bird artist of the world (Everard Read Gallery), two man exhibition with David Disby, Sladmore Gallery, World wilderness congress, Birds artists of the world (Everard Read Gallery) plus numerous other group exhibitions in Johannesburg.*

*Ray Black was also involved in illustrating several publications.*



*Ray Black*