

# The **Austringer**



**WELSH HAWKING CLUB**  
NEWS JOURNAL, 1988

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# **THE AUSTRINGER**

**The Official Journal Of The  
Welsh Hawking Club**



**Clwb Hebogwr Cymru**

**No.20  
1988**

# ADRIAN WILLIAMSON.

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of prey and owls are  
undertaken.

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# Editorial

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It hardly seems a few weeks ago that the last Austringer article was read and put aside, then here we are again with another flying season almost with us and a new Journal to read.

For the club it has been a busy and eventful year on a number of fronts, especially our Anniversary Field Meeting and all the work that entailed together with the activities of the breeding committee and club birds.

The field meeting in North Wales which is reported fully further on, illustrated the comradeship and sporting aspect of club membership, leaving pleasant and happy memories with the many foreign guests and associated falconry groups who attended. It is a credit to the club organisers, that everything ran so smoothly. We are pleased to be able to report that through the goodwill and spirit created by the club with the North Wales landowners, it is anticipated that this will now become an annual event, although on a smaller scale.

On the breeding front we can not claim to have improved our success

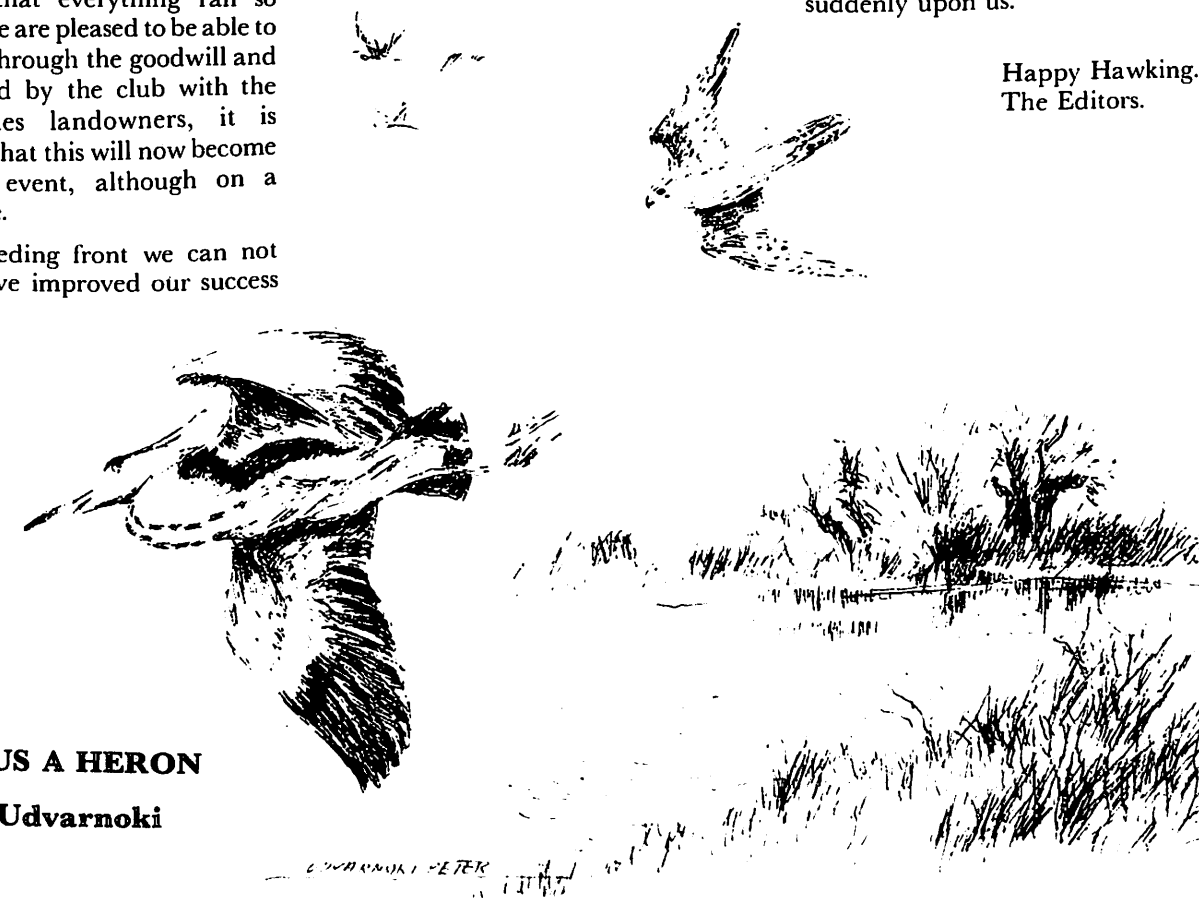
rate, but it is still early days. You may feel you have heard all this before but it must be remembered that up to now we have not had anything like the potential breeding stock that is now at our disposal, and the disruption of moving aviaries and birds from North Wales has not helped. In the past year the club has increased its breeding stock by a pair of Harris Hawks, three Peregrines and 12 Goshawks with a further twenty in the pipeline for 1988. These must be regarded as our best hope but do not be too expectant and impatient as these are all young birds and require good husbandry before yeilding results. The club is aware that to some extent, the survival of Falconry depends on its breeding success. The club was also involved with the Hawk Board,

Goshawk Seminar held earlier this year at the Birmingham University, both papers of which are reported for your information.

We hope that this edition of the Austringer comes up to your expectations. As first timers we are sure that there will be mistakes and errors, but please use this as your excuse to come forward with suggestions and constructive criticisms for the next one. We are grateful to all the members who have contributed, allowing us to share their hawking experiences.

As always, there is a last minute panic to meet production deadlines, when up to that point there always seemed so much time; rather like preparing for the next flying season - it's suddenly upon us.

Happy Hawking.  
The Editors.



**SAKER  
VERSUS A HERON**  
by Peter Udvarnoki

## Calling All Telemetry Wavelengths

It has been suggested that anyone in the club owning telemetry tracking receivers and who are willing to help other members with their lost hawks, might consider registering their names with the club secretary.

Many members are only able to afford transmitters, relying on others with receivers to help out. Sometimes,

these friends may live some considerable distance away when delay in getting the receiver means all the difference between success and failure. It might just be possible that there is someone living much nearer.

If you are a member, willing to be on a club list and owning a full telemetry kit, it would be a start towards

creating a club network of receivers. All the secretary would require is your telephone number and locality, together with make of equipment and receiver frequency. This could then be listed in a future Newsletter.

## Acknowledgements

We extend our gratitude to all who have helped in the preparation of the 'Austringer'. Our contributing artists at home and abroad, especially John Haywood for allowing us to produce his picture for the front cover. Also the various magazines and newspapers

for allowing us to reproduce their articles.

A special thanks to Tom Brydon here at work, who has taken time off his photographic duties and proved much better at spelling than myself.

The views and statements expressed in this magazine are not necessarily those held by The Welsh Hawking Club.

## ADULT PEREGRINE FALCON

by Peter Udvarnoki



## 25th Anniversary Field Meeting

by Bryan Paterson

October 6th 1987 saw the gathering of 150 members and guests of our Club for the 25th Anniversary Field Meeting. The meeting took place at Abersoch on the Llyn Peninsular, North Wales.

Twelve countries were represented, but because of the quarantine regulations only hawks from the British Isles were present, these included 1 Golden Eagle, many Goshawks and Harris Hawks, Redtail Hawks, Sparrow Hawks, 14 Peregrine Falcons, 1 Prairie Falcon, 2 Lanner Falcons and 1 Hybrid Falcon.

The Meeting was officially opened at the Harbour Hotel by Fred Taylor. The Local Mayor and several council members were present to see our President, Lorent de Bastyai presented with a set of cuff links and tie pin for his services to the Club as instigator and mentor over the past 25 years.

A group of locals turned up to see what a meeting of hawkers was going to entail, alas no secret trading, only the telling of (quite often exaggerated) stories of the prowess of the magnificent birds being carried by as mixed a crowd of men and women as has been seen at a falconry meeting for many a year.

The gathered crowd then moved off in serpentine convoy to Bodrill Hall, the beautiful home and craft centre of Garry Morris. This was to be the meeting place where many cups of coffee would be consumed as faces peered through the windows to see if the rain had stopped. One of the barns had been converted to a mews to house the many birds during the meeting, lawns had been freshly mowed to enable hawks to be put out to weather, Club members were



Action in thick cover on one of the coastal sites which produced excellent sport.

'Press Ganged' into volunteering their services for security watch day and night.

The weather over the four days was grim, with everything that North Wales could throw at the assembled party. They waited patiently and in good humour for the slightest chance to move off to the excellent hunting grounds provided by the local landowners and arranged by Garry Morris and Terry Large, what a splendid job they had done, pheasant and rabbits in abundance. Unfortunately no one had realised how many Falcons would be present, so that there was a shortage of Partridge and Grouse. A few frantic phone calls helped to secure some quarry and all birds were able to get a flight or two.

Abersoch Yacht Club provided an ideal venue for evening entertainment. Many old friendships were revived and new ones formed.

Kevin McCray from the Californian Hawking Club gave an interesting talk and slide show, and wives coaxed those present to part with their hard earned cash to buy a raffle ticket with the chance of winning one of the 29 prizes donated by friends and members of our Club. The first prize was a magnificent Cut Glass Whiskey Decanter engraved with the anniversary motif for the meeting.

Saturday evening found the crowd jammed back inside the Harbour Hotel for a buffet dinner. A few short speeches were followed by a surprise presentation to four long standing

members, Ken Mcleur, Larry Workman, John Buckner and Doug Morgans, goblets were presented to Garry Morris and Terry Large for all their efforts. Brian Keys, on behalf of the Northern Falconry Club presented a handsome Dartington glass decanter to the W.H.C.

Garry Morris and Hal Webster from the U.S.A. were then asked to become honorary members of the club. Tokens of appreciation were then presented to the ladies for their efforts selling raffle tickets and washing up piles of coffee cups.

The evening was concluded with the draw for the raffle. The first prize going to Garry Biddles from Essex. Many prizes were given back, to be auctioned by Roger James, in total approximately £500 was raised to go towards putting on one of the finest falconry meetings that most present could remember.

Now is the time to analyse this meeting, build on the many good points, improve the bad ones, so that THE WELSH HAWKING CLUB can look forward to the next 25 years with optimism.

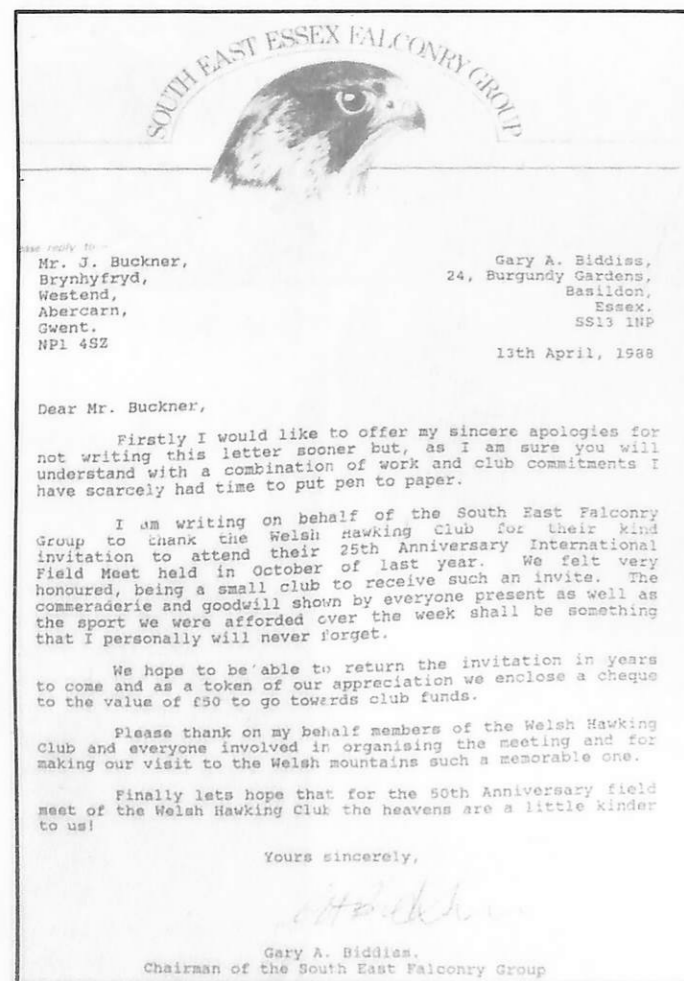


PRESENTED WITH GREAT AFFECTION TO  
LORANT DE BASTYAI  
PRESIDENT OF THE WELSH HAWKING CLUB  
25<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY 1962-1987

The specially commissioned silver tie pin and cuff links presented to our President.



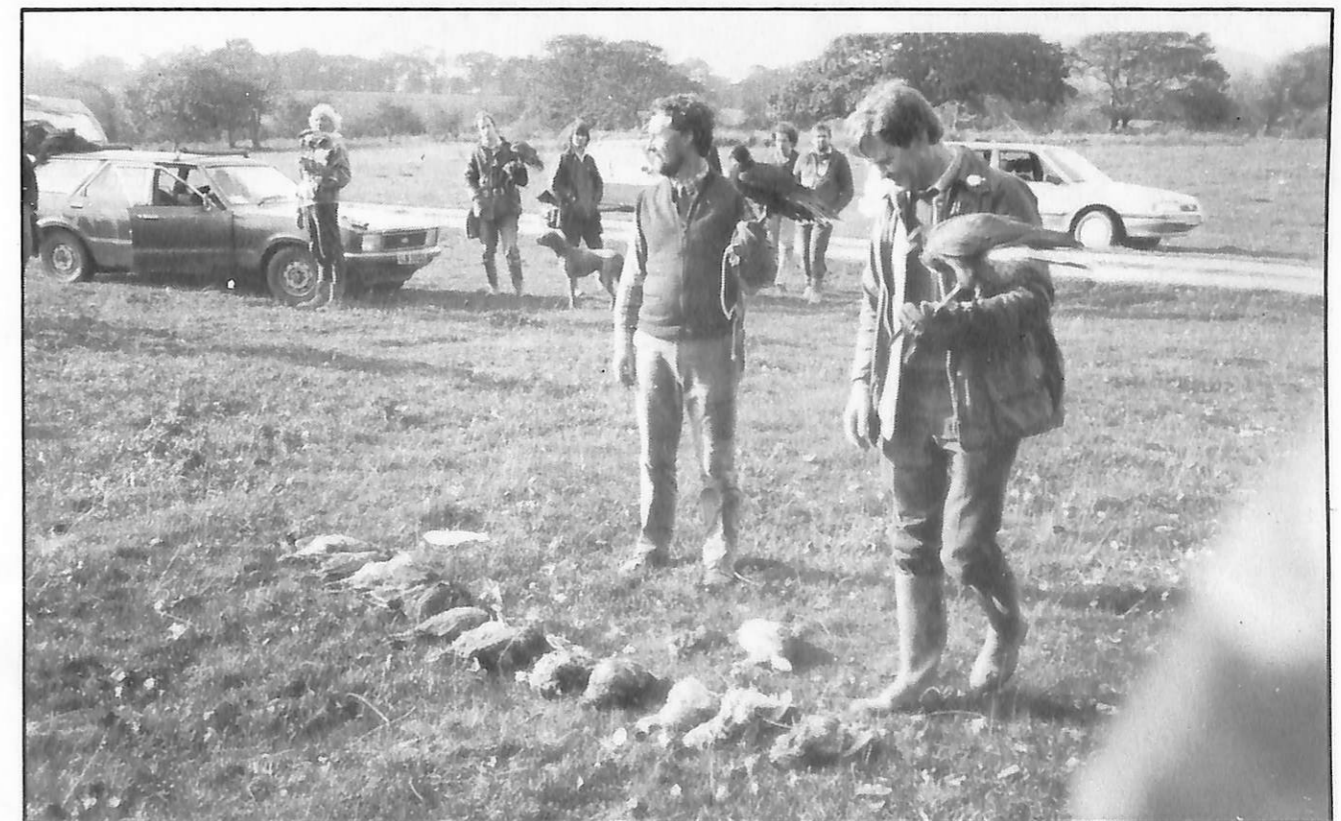
The gathering for the official opening in the Harbour Hotel car park



Letter from South East Essex Falconry Club with their generous donation.



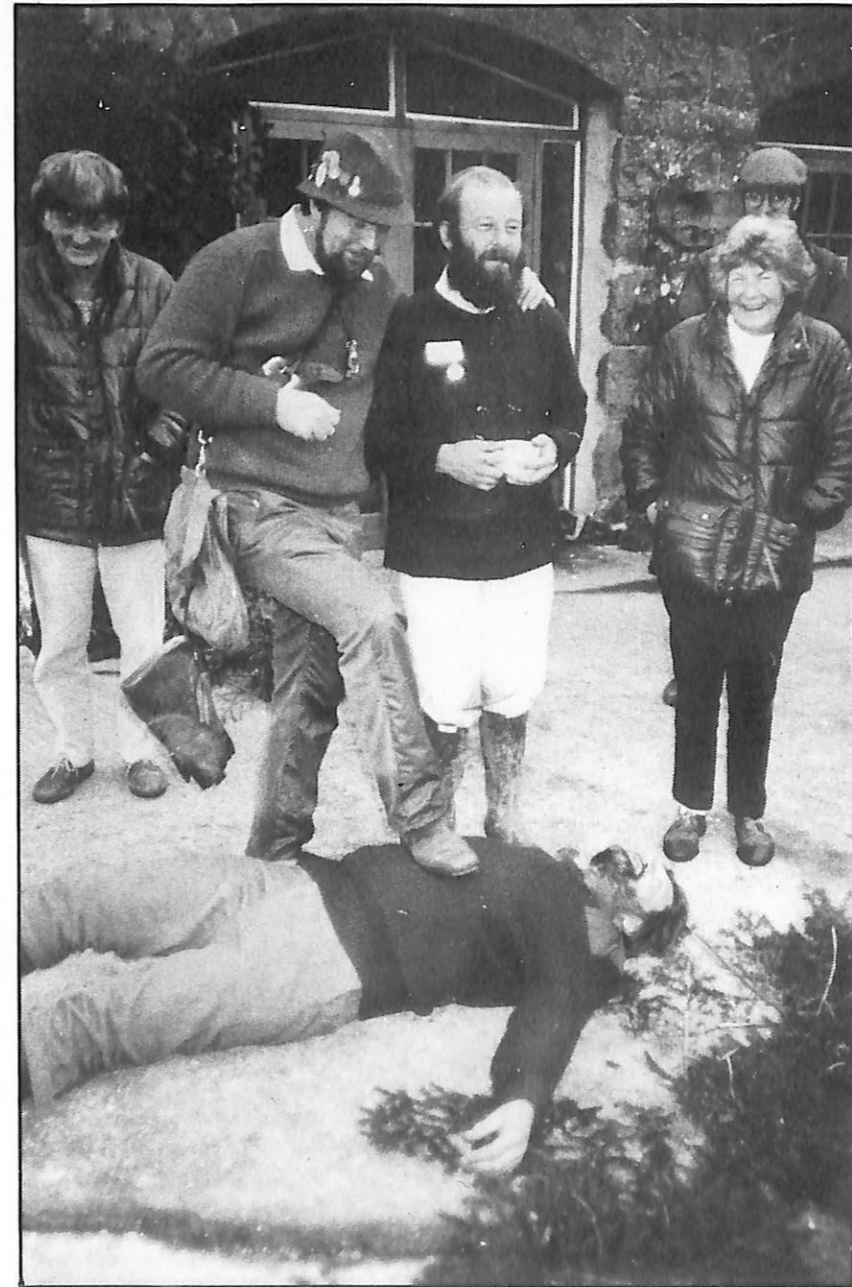
The changing face of Falconry, one of our youngest members Steve Dimond and his Redtail Buzzard, with one of the oldest members, Lorant de Bastyai.



The Harris Hawk Hunting Party with the days catch



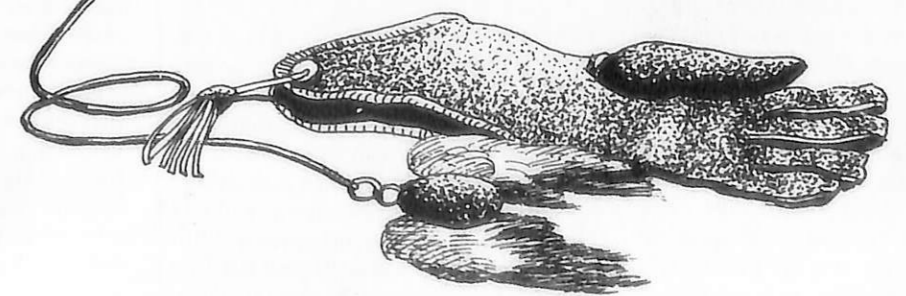
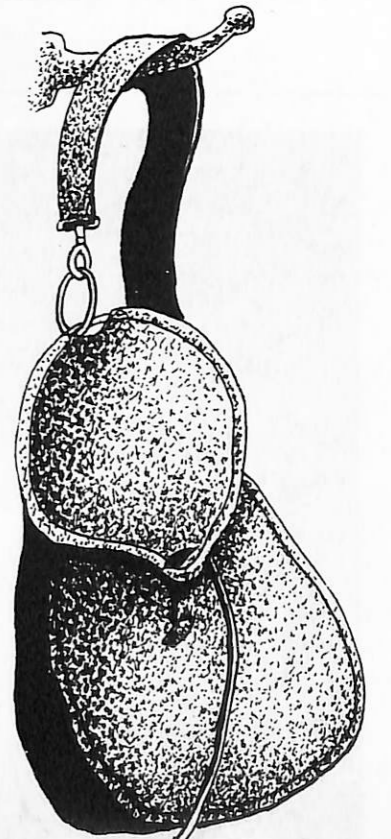
*The end of the meeting, Lawrence Workman having the last say*



*Garry Morris floored, under the pressure of work*



*The Mayor of Abersoch with Ronnie Moore and President Lorant*



# Peregrines Under Licence

By Ian Blantern



THE CLUB'S AIM - CAPTIVE BRED PEREGRINES

Most members will be aware, that over the past few years the Club have pursued the annual applications for taking Peregrines from the wild under licence. The quotas issued by the DOE have always been pitifully small, usually about seven for the whole of England, Wales and Scotland. These then have to be shared fairly between the three major Falconry Clubs whose membership probably exceeds a thousand and the Welsh Hawking Club have always pressed strongly for their fair share. This year was no exception, especially since we are led to believe that these are to be the last licences issued for the next three years, although the situation may be reviewed again in the future. With this in mind your Club applied for four birds which we

did not feel was unreasonable, especially since from the previous two year's total of four licences we only managed to fulfill one of these and then not without a great deal of effort. To say that for the club to get and be granted licences has been easy, is not far from the truth by comparison with the difficulty in actually taking the birds.

The criteria laid down by The DOE and The Nature Conservancy Council must be observed before any birds are taken. So many members have said to me that once granted a licence we should have an automatic, unhindered legal and moral right to these birds-true maybe in theory but most definitely not so in practice. To relate the problems, frustrations and

obstructions met during the last three years would make an article in itself but put in very simple terms, the licences are granted subject to the licensee being able to provide sites which (a) are on land where landowners written permission to take a bird has been obtained and (b) by necessity they have to be what is termed uncontentious sites i.e. areas not being monitored for scientific purposes, sites not being watched by 'conservationist', or nature bodies of which there always seemed so many. Even members of the general public keeping a casual watch on nest sites have a right of objection. I am not being vindictive by enclosing conservationist in inverted commas, but I did question the logic of some groups who monitored sites that were

regularly endangered by climbers, egg and chick thieves and some pigeon racing groups who through total frustration at regularly losing prized birds, threatened to shoot the feeding parents. It seemed perfectly logical to me that to legally obtain a bird from one of these sites was being completely conservationist. Just one objection from any of these groups effectively rendered useless the site for the benefit of gaining DOE licences. The one thing they or NCC seem paranoid about is the risk of adverse publicity that rocks the boat. The reason for this to my mind is the emotive mystique that has been built up around the Peregrine over the years. It is evident that those licences granted for Spars and Buzzards whilst still having to meet similar criteria, never create the same problems because these birds have not attracted the same sort of public attention.

Going back to (a) obtaining a landowners permission is not always as easy as it appears. Those members who regularly try and find new hunting ground will appreciate the difficulty in actually finding out and locating the owner who has in all probability leased or sub-let to tenants and does not live in the area anyway. Add to that the specialist sites that Peregrines inevitably seem to select such as quarries, coastal cliff areas (often owned by the Crown, Local Authorities, or The National Trust), woodlands owned by The Forestry Commission and many other sites similarly owned by bodies such as the Coal Board, Waterworks Authorities and Heritage Trusts. Trying to find a single person from these bodies who was willing to put signature to written permission was almost impossible, no one seemed prepared to take ultimate responsibility. I always got very excited when a contact appeared more than helpful on the telephone but who got more and more distant as and when final written permission became necessary. Add to all this the fact that site plans were required, together with the name of somebody to accompany you when taking the bird who had to be approved both by the NCC and the DOE and you can begin to imagine the military operation needed to meet not one but three licences this year.

It must be fair to say that there were many individual people who were more than helpful with advice, time and effort in working towards the

Club's ultimate goal both in the DOE, the Scottish Development Department, RSPB and the WHC, I should especially like to thank Malcolm Holland, Diana Durman-Walters, Dick Roxbrough, Austin Todd and Bob Crossman for the

Club's success. It is due to these and others unnamed that the Club now have as a basis for their breeding program, five Peregrines and it is now over to the Club Breeding Committee to further the hard work and efforts of others.



PICTURE FROM THE PAST

The founder of The Welsh Hawking Club in "juvenile plumage" when he was a professional falconer for Count Khuen in the Sudetenland (Austro-Czechoslovakian Border) in 1938. The picture was drawn by Pangrath, Governor-teacher to the Count's sons.

# Reclaiming a 'Mar-Hawk'

by Mike Gambold



was doing open) which swelled up so I could hardly talk.

The month of December was one of stagnation as regards training progress with myself and the dog becoming quite nervous, for, if I was quick enough to ward her off in one of her mad moments she'd strike the dog for sure. I carried this hawk every day, wet (and often I was) and shine, with the same result, bating and squeaking, she hated being tied to my hand so much, behaving at all times like a spoiled infant.

I sat down often and searched for an answer and it occurred to me that if I could find something she disliked more than me, I might be the sweeter alternative and at least that would be a start, and in a flash I saw the solution gurgling next to me. (Since becoming a keeper of this gos she has always refused a bath and I kept her plumage in order by use of a spray mist gun). I was sat on a rock by a chilly brook in mid-January and put her down ankle-deep into a fast noisy section and moved leash-length away ignoring her. She really hated this but I kept my hand hidden as she stamped about in temper for a full five minutes, when I offered her my ungarnished glove. She jumped on straight away and stood tight footed and tight feathered all of the half-mile home.

Now we all know that our birds are of primitive intellect and can not be physically impressed upon like a dog or a horse, but after a few days of calling-off, feeding and putting in the brook, this hawk would step with a bulging crop onto an unmeated fist and stay there without bating. No great event you say, but for me, a turning point and training and entering was complete in ten days.

Her first rabbit was grabbed well, after a short flight, I killed immediately and fed her on it.

Her second one I left to her, hoping it would struggle and squeak a bit, thus teaching her that they weren't all easy. This it did and when she shifted her feet it wriggled free and got away,

facied without constant bating) and only fed her in twilight and quietness.

It soon became clear to me that this bird has a personality problem, manning was to prove very difficult, she was extremely 'footy' and each meal was followed by furious bating.

This hawk did not love the fist.

I tried long carriage, medium carriage and short carriage, feeding before carriage, during and after always with the same result, bating, glaring and panting. One day she would tolerate open-top buses with faulty gearboxes filled with drunken incompetent pipers passing close by, the next, a man walking in a garden in the next village would send her into a near fit.

I discovered also that although improperly manned, this hawk had been partly trained, and with a reduction in weight would come readily to hand from ten yards, but — and here comes the bane — about one time in every ten she'd land on my fist, run up my arm and belt me on the head. I sustained some nasty facial cuts, a ripped ear, and later on when enticing her off a lure, a gashed palate. (God knows what my mouth

I picked up an adult female goshawk doe No. 72436 from Gordon Baston's place in October 1987, the history of which was very sketchy, all I knew was that it was a customs and excise seizure and that two or three club members had tried to train it and failed; I was, in fact, advised by other members not to go near it as it was marred. Anyway, birds being as scarce as they are and not now being one for quick results and bumper bags I decided to take it on as a winter project.

I took up the bird, a perfect specimen, fit, fat (3lb 3oz) and fine feathered, taped up her train to prevent damage and left her hooded in a darkened mews without food (she wouldn't take it) for four days; spending as much time as I could with her, talking, whispering to and touching her. On the fifth day I fed her a few morsels through the hood and took it off. She gave me a glare of unrefined hatred but carried on feeding followed by much bating.

Over the next three weeks I never took her out of the mews (partly due to the violent storms we had and partly to information I received that this bird would not weather bare-

making her very angry, I had to feed her up and take her home, the cold mole being poor consolation. The third rabbits head she squeezed so tightly its skull was pierced and I couldn't get it off her and I had to walk home through the village with it hanging from my hand, causing several un countrified immigrants to comment that I shouldn't be allowed blah, blah, etc. This hawk is wedded to rabbits with a passion and will bate at them two fields away.

Her first chase after a pheasant was of such heroic single mindedness (ask even the most infrequent visitor to the four pubs in Mynyddbach and Shirenewton) that I swear a tear trickled down my cheek (we finally lost the pheasant, but who cares).

We hawked at least twice a week till the end of March, missing more than

we caught but speaking for my half of the team, had a lot of fun.

In conclusion, I make no claims as to the correctness of my methods, or offer this as advice to anyone, nor for that matter claim success is due to anything other than God or good luck, but I know that I took up this bird that others had called useless and untrainable and have got it catching things, which at the end of the day is what it's all about.

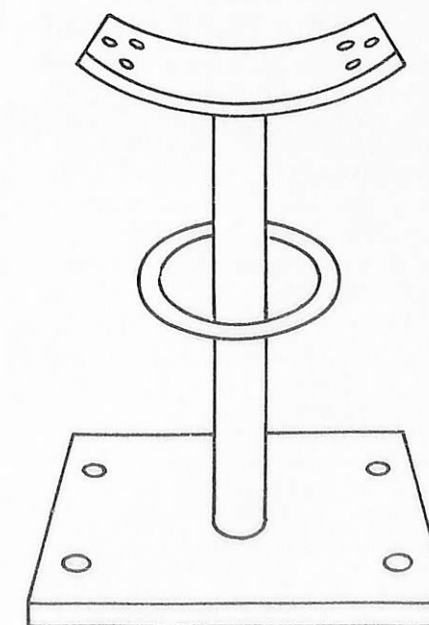
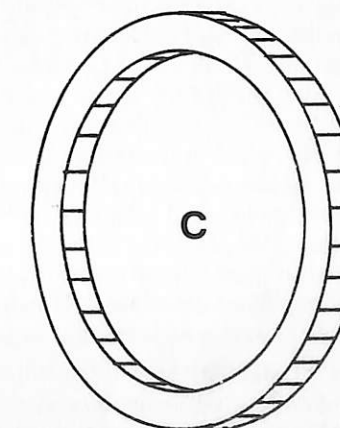
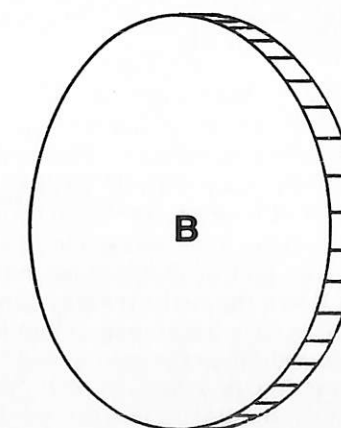
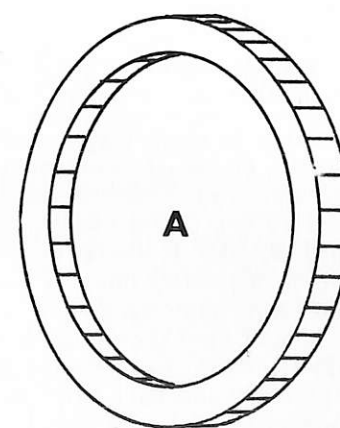
Looking back I cannot in truth say the bird was a mar-hawk (hence the inverted commas in the title) because by definition it would be totally spoiled; she will never be a perfect hunting hawk, she still tries to foot me in moments of pique, and still comes up my arm occasionally when lifting off a lure or quarry, but as I sit here in the garden writing this, watching her

plucking a pigeon with little sparrows at a respectful distance gathering feathers for nest linings -I am well pleased.

I have called this bird MALEISO THE MALEVOLENT ONE.

P.S. Experience with this hawk has shown me that for a bird which bates a lot at weathering, aylmeri anklets are not a good idea. She was fitted with these when I got her and I soon noticed that the sixpenny-bit sized brass eyelets were constantly being pressed onto the heel of the back toe, causing a corn. I have treated this and fitted with traditional, more giving jesses.

MINYDDBACH, MAY 1988



If you only have a small shed to house a short-wing - where using a bow perch where the tether ring goes from side to side enabling the hawks wings to scrape on the walls, try this design.

A & C are 1" thick plywood, 1" in diameter, 10" inside diameter, these are doweled and glued together with the disc B in between (B is 1/4 thick)

smooth round the edges, screw onto D which I have made from stainless steel and bolted to the floor.

This is a good wooden ring perch easy to scrub clean and halves the distance from the tethering ring to the walls, saving possible wear on wing-tips caused by bating.

M. G.

# Tom - 1987

## Parent Reared Male Harris Hawk

By Mark Williams

After several years of flying Gos's with limited success due to their premature and tragic demises - kidney failure, peritonitis and a fox, being the last three causes, I found myself without a bird or the funds to acquire one. If it were not for the generosity of a falconry friend I would be without one still.

1987 proved to be the turning point in my spate of bad luck. I had previously applied through the W.H.C. for a club Gos and to the D.O.E. for a licence to take a Spar. Hoping that I might be successful in one or the other venture, I was naturally knocked sideways when not only was I allocated a club Gos than the D.O.E. granted my licence but a good friend of mine, Ian Blantern offered me a Harris Hawk to fly, that he had just bred that year!

I was in the enviable position of having a choice. I decided to give up the privilege of a club Gos and try my hand at a Harris, the offer of which I will be eternally grateful. My work played a large part in making this decision as I only have two days a week in which to fly a bird, and I felt a Harris was better suited to this lifestyle.

Having had some previous experience with a kindly loaned male Harris that I flew for half a season with mediocre success, I was of the common opinion that whilst these birds were good, reliable weekend birds, they were however, second rate to Gos. Furthermore I felt I would be restricted in my intended quarry with a male. How very wrong I was to be.

It was Sunday 19th July when I drove to Bristol to collect 'Tom' - a name he was given which is another story. Being parent reared and left with his parents until that day, he was as wild as hell. After we caught him up, we weighed him. He topped the scales at 11lb 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ oz with no crop. Not a big bird, I thought to myself, especially as

some more weight would have to come off before I could enter him.

Tom's behaviour during his initial marning was more akin to a Gos, but unlike the Gos he was flying free within eight days, although a little over confidence on my part resulted in him going A.W.L. on the ninth night. His weight did not seem to be reduced much, in fact his flying weight was 11lb 4oz.

At 14 days from being taken from his parents, he made his first kill - a  $\frac{3}{4}$  grown cock pheasant. Although unintentional and not a stylish or long slip, he took it well on the ground and I was ecstatic. Tom was being flown every day and in the evenings after work. When the dark evenings came, I found it effective in getting him fit, by placing him on the ground and me standing on a chair to call him vertically up on to the fist for his reward. It may sound and look silly, but I found it worked.

Living in Dorset, I am very fortunate to have plenty of flying ground well stocked with pheasants and rabbits. Early on in the season these young pheasants were ideal in building up his confidence. Try as I did though he would not touch fur, much to my frustration as there were plenty above ground for the taking. Initially I tried him on easy mixy bunnies, but he would land beside them, open his wings and scorn as if it was a strange dog. At that point I thought - great, a hawk afraid of rabbits.

After I had had him a month, despite a few kills and no further weight reduction, Tom started to scream. It was so unexpected when I first heard it, I nearly jumped through the lounge window, thinking something must be attacking him. Much to my annoyance (and the neighbours) he only did this at home on his bow perch.

August came and my wife Ruth, and I made our annual journey to Caithness in Scotland on our Hawking Holiday organised by John Buckner. Each year it is as good as, if not better, than the last. We meet many friends old and new, some from as far afield as Europe and Scandinavia.

Scotland proved to be useful in Tom's development and while flying with other Harris Hawks he eventually caught his first, all be it young, rabbit.

Regrettably hawking ceased shortly afterwards for nearly four months while I was in the process of moving house. I fed Tom up and his fat weight reached 11lb 12oz. It was not until the beginning of January this year that I picked him up again. It was noticeable at once the change in his attitude, he was maturing and loosing his playful approach to game becoming more 'let me at 'em'. It was as if something had clicked inside, his hunting weight was now 11lb 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ oz.

The next 10 weeks or so were the most intensive hawking I have ever had, aided by the fact I had plenty of holiday time accrued, an abundance of quarry and a dog to assist. Tom's second rabbit was a full grown buck rabbit that I bolted with a ferret. He caught it after a 40-50 yard flight and it kicked and tossed him well into next week, but to my amazement he hung on until I got to him, panting with exertion (me and the bird) I gave him a bulging crop for his reward and I went to the pub for mine.

Practically all the pheasants he caught that I saw were either taken on the ground or more commonly later on in the season by following them to cover and taking them on the reflush. So far every pheasant he has attempted to pull down from the air he has ended with just a fist full of feathers, but I remain optimistic for next season.



One of the three pheasants he caught at a two day field meeting.

During the season I had some spectacular flights with Tom. Seeing him at the beginning of the season I would never of imagined having to use telemetry, but as the season progressed slips of 800 yards or more were not uncommon.

I fly him at rabbits on some excellent land which among other things has literally thousands of pheasants. The only problem is that on this particular piece of ground I was not supposed to take them. Being realistic about it and not wishing to jeopardise my rabbit hawking, I came to an agreement with the keeper that I would pay him £5.00 for any pheasant caught. This could be costly business, hence my wanting to stick to rabbits.



A hard pressed Rabbit (this one actually got away).

whizz over with a hawk hot on its tail. Surprisingly, despite all these witnesses no one could pin point where they had put in and if it were not for my telemetry I would never have found him either. He had taken the pheasant as it attempted to seek refuge in a hedge and he was so well stuffed under it, hidden by the long grass along side of it, you would not have thought to look there. Indeed I was stood almost three feet away with the needle on my receiver going off the scale looking up at the roof tops thinking - where the .... hell is he? Thank goodness for the tail bell. I located him frozen over the pheasant, fed him up on it, made my apologies and left. The flight was over 900 yards and by far the best fiver I had ever spent.



On one occasion, while walking through a mature conifer wood on the side of a hill, Tom flew a rabbit, but having been beaten to its hole, he threw up into a nearby tree. At this point a cock pheasant startled by his sudden appearance took off beneath him heading downhill out to the edge of the wood with Tom in hot pursuit.

Unknown to me at the time, while I was legging it down the side of the hill, looking for the familiar sight of a frustrated hawk sitting in a tree, the chase had continued across some fields into a small valley and into a village. Just my luck, most of its residents were out in their gardens on this sunny Sunday afternoon and most had witnessed this pheasant

Sadly the season was prematurely brought to an end when after a collision with a fence while riding the back end of a rabbit, Tom broke his main front talon. Next season all ready seems a life time away, however I can take time to make the necessary repairs to my hawking equipment.

I look back now at the end of the season and reflect on my experiences with Tom. My hawking diary helps remind me of the superb flights and great pleasure I have had with him.

I feel the secret of his success, if there is one, is in the physical conditioning together with plenty of exposure to game. I quickly learnt that unlike a Gos, a Harris as a rule, takes months before they begin to hunt seriously, but they are well worth the extra time put into them. My preference now, similar to a Gos, would be for a good male. They are not as powerful as a female but are far more stylish. Despite odd occasions when I wondered who was in control, I usually found no problem with taking pheasants or even the largest of buck rabbits.

Tom ended the season (even with the break in the middle) having had a respectable head of quarry - 21 pheasants - 19 rabbits - 5 moorhen and a cockrell! Next season I hope to include some duck in the bag and try some 'waiting on' flights.

I have certainly changed my naive opinion of the Harris even after only one season with Tom. Due to their flexibility and adaptability to varying circumstances on the field, I personally have found, if I may dare make the comparison, a Harris to be comparable, if not more effective than a Gos.

Although there is nothing like a Gos in screaming yarak chasing a pheasant to get the adrenalin going, I am quickly getting accustomed to the reliability of a Harris which I find makes my sport more rewarding and enjoyable - after all, that's what it's all about.. isn't it?

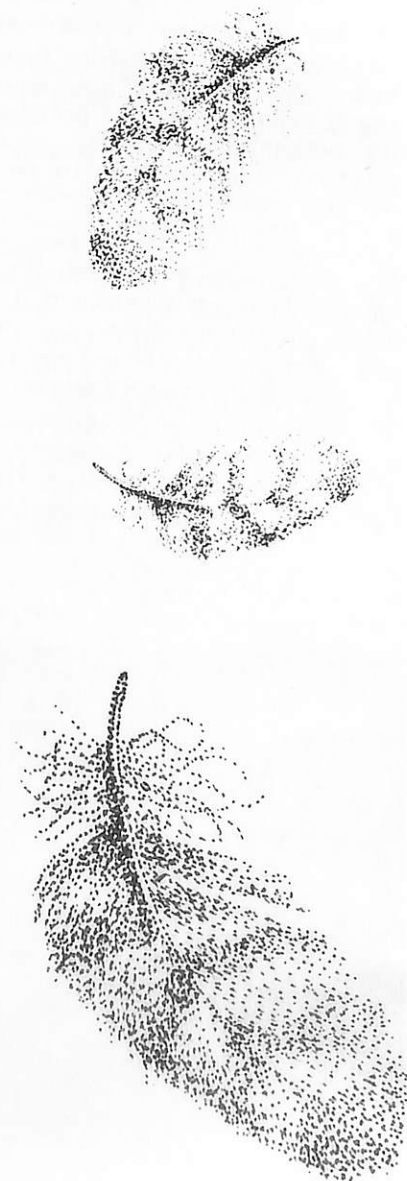


*A successful slip.*



*And to the victor his prize.*

*(Photo's: Mark Williams)*



## Sakers Nesting On An Electric Pylon

*Letter and photographs from Chalupa of Hungary  
Translated by L. de Bastyai*

Many thanks for your letter about the Sakers nesting on a high span electricity pylon. I am glad to know that this unusual occasion has reached over our borders and abroad as well.

On our district Spring control of bird of prey nesting sites, we noticed a very unusual nesting site of a pair of birds. On a highspan electric pylon about 22-24 metres high the birds were found to be a pair of Sakers. You can

imagine our delight at such an unusual find as to our knowledge nothing like this had been observed before in our Country. I had heard once before of a pair of Osprey nesting in similar circumstances in Finland.

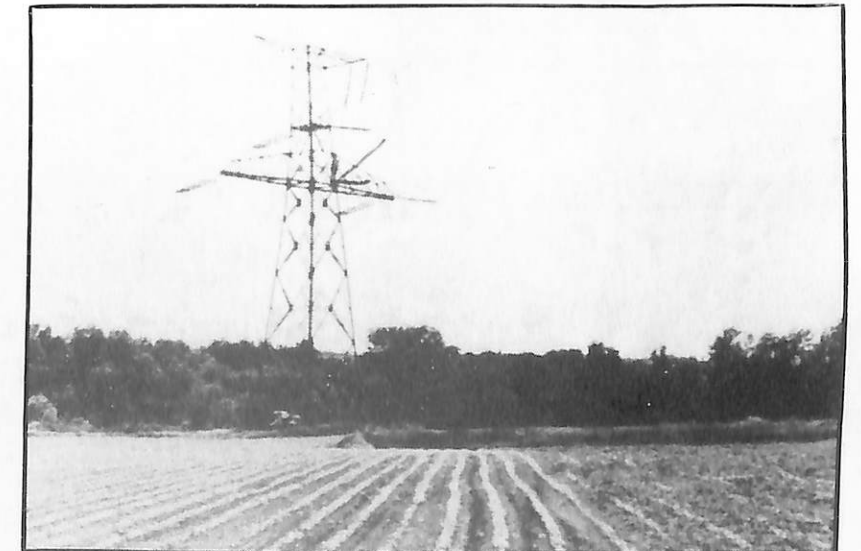
I climbed up to the nesting site where I found 2 14-16 day old chicks. They were the most beautiful blue legged young Sakers. Because I did not have a camera with a close up lens, I took some photographs from about 4-5

metres. The nest we felt was very secure, and therefore it needed no special guarding, but I asked my gamekeeper friend to keep his eye on the nest and to contact me if anything unusual happened.

A few weeks later came a telephone call that one of the young birds had jumped or fallen from the nest. The gamekeeper had found the bird on the ground about 40 metres away from the nest. I tried twice to return the



*Top right: Nest site  
Above: Brooding parent  
Bottom right: Parent with chicks*



young Saker to the nest but without success as on each occasion the bird jumped out again. Because of the danger of foxes at night I took the bird home and raised it by hand. When the young bird was fully grown, members of our association, Laszlo Harasztny and Janos Bagyura came and took the bird to a family of Sakers that had youngsters of the same age (branchers) and during the night put the youngster on a branch near the other young Sakers. The two falconers watched for several days and observed that all was well and only when they saw the old Sakers had adopted the youngster did they leave the nesting area, leaving behind a happy Saker family with the young adopted bird which was raised and taught as if one of their own.

I am enclosing some photographs about this wonderful bird and the nesting area. We believe that in the last year a pair of Ravens have taken over the nesting site.



*A wary hawk*

*With greetings, Laszlo Chalupa*

## 'Nimrod' in July 1987 & Entitled Uninvited Guests

*From the article published in the  
'Hungarian Hunting Magazine'*

It goes through a list of the unwelcomed visitors to the pheasant and chicken farms of Hungary; the fox, the polecat, the martin, the weasel, the stoat, the wildcat, stray dogs and lastly but of most importance, the GOSHAWK and in which it says:-

'A few years ago this winged noble was found only in the wooded areas of our country but now, due to its much increased numbers at the end of summer and in the autumn it is found in every part of the country. The pheasant and poultry farms are most attractive to these birds as every game farmer knows to his cost. In years gone by the cage trap has been very popular and is still used as the bird if trapped alive and is a good specimen is worth 10,000 forints (about £120) when sold to falconers. The Goshawk is protected by law from November to

July but around the pheasant and poultry farms it can be shot or trapped the whole year round. Some of the farms shoot or trap as many as 60 Goshawks a year and there are many hundreds of farms. Around the rearing places it is not easy to shoot as the Goshawk flies low and a shot could also kill the pheasants. However, the gamekeepers shout when the hawk is near and it stays in the air giving the chance of shooting it safely. The visiting time of the Goshawks to the pheasants is in the early morning hours but if the attack is not successful it will come again in the early afternoon.

In the southern part, one of the pheasant farms always shoot the marauders but never more than 10 per year. It was then decided to lay 3 cage traps during the rearing season with the result that 47 Goshawks

were trapped and with the exception of a few all were in juvenile plumage.

In the pheasant release areas it is found that the Goshawk is not satisfied with one kill but will eat the best meat from the first kill and then kill another one to fill its crop. It has been noted that often after the Goshawk will land in the release pen and chase the young pheasants on foot. On killing one it was noticed that the other pheasants took not the slightest notice and showed no fear of the Goshawk and sometimes also took part in the Goshawks meal, both feeding from the dead pheasant. These days it is said that the rearing of the pheasant is not difficult, but keeping them until shooting days has become far more difficult because of the 'Uninvited Guests'.

*Translated by: L. de BASTYAI*

# Elsie

*By Adrian Williams & Geoff Llewellyn*

## Adrian

I began training Elsie my Spar in the Autumn of 1986 but found that she was difficult, and being partially imprinted before I had her, was aggressive when I tried to remove her from the lure or unpick her claws from the glove. At the same time I was flying a Hybrid Falcon, so I decided to stop flying Elsie and I put her in an aviary with an immature Musket. In the summer of 1987 she laid four eggs but they were infertile so I removed them. In the Autumn I often went out with a couple of lads with Spars; Geoff Llewellyn who'd set his heart on flying a Spar this year and was very enthusiastic; Mike Campsie who'd already done quite well with a Musket and was trying a female this year, and Craig Thomas who was trying an imprinted female. Unfortunately, during a Sunday afternoon meet in September Geoff's Spar was injured and it didn't look as though he'd be able to fly her for some time and certainly not at the W.H.C. International meeting at Abersoch, which he was very disappointed at. When I offered to lend Elsie to him until his own Spar was fit, at first he was reluctant to take her on knowing that he had only some three weeks to get a Spar ready for an International meeting after it had been untouched in a seclusion aviary for over 12 months. However, when I caught her up and showed her to him he thought about it long and hard for a quarter of a second and said 'Yes, I'll have her'. I was as surprised as Geoff to find how calm and well mannered Elsie was on the fist that day and subsequently. The previous year I hooded her and Geoff decided to do the same. On the following day, Tuesday 15th September, Elsie fed on the fist and by the Thursday she was jumping to the fist quite readily. On the Friday she was coming 12 feet instantly. A week later Geoff phoned me to say that he was ready to fly her loose and asked if I would like to accompany him. I invited him over to my house and off we went, prodding the hedgerows and bushes. The first blackbird that broke she flew well and



she slammed into the covert right behind it. You can imagine how chuffed we were, an excellent flight, first time loose and only 11 days out of the aviary! We went on to have another 10 flights, mostly at blackbirds, during the next 2 hours before having to pack up as we were both working in the afternoon. During the next week we didn't go out together, as I was quite busy flying Szara my Gos, but Geoff got some good flights each day, concentrating

on blackbirds as most do, but finding that working on his own was unable to have many re-flushes. Elsie also took on two good long flights at magpies during this time. She later was to take on magpies at any distance.

## Geoff

Then on the 1st October the breakthrough. Whilst beating a hedgerow at Pentwyn Farm a sparrow broke and she took it. She

didn't display any aggression nor mantling and acted like a Passage bird on this and every subsequent kill, so that we often pondered whether it might be worth keeping Hawks back purposely in the way she had been in order to see if they would turn out as pleasantly as this. On the following day there were 4 flights at blackbirds and 2 at magpies, again long slips. On Saturday 3rd October had a good magpie flight first and then later on one at a blackbird which was re-flushed twice before Elsie took it in the air. On Sunday 4th October went up to Eglwysilan, a high open moorland. Had a long flight at a magpie but it got to a copse and was lost. A pity because she flew it hard. Saw another 2 magpies and whilst stalking them along a dry stone wall we put up a blackbird which she narrowly missed. This disturbed the magpies and they took off so we turned back down the mountain. As we walked down, Elsie bated off at a flock of jackdaws about 300 yards away. Lost sight of her in the mêlée but found her 10 minutes later with a magpie in her feet! Fed her up on this but there is not a lot on a magpie and she was still ready to fly on the Monday. Went hawking near home at Penrhos. I had 3 long slips at magpies - she's really keen on them now. This was followed by a close slip - one came out of a tall hedge only 20 yards away, she saw it and was off and flew it out of sight over a hill. I raced over to see her 40 yards away with the magpie screaming but firmly held! So fed her up on magpie again. On Tuesday 6th October I drove up to Abersoch with Ade who was taking his Passage Gos Szara and Mark who was taking his Hybrid Falcon. We were tempted to slip Elsie out of the car window at the many magpies we saw but decided to get to Abersoch first and hoped to get a few flights in then. However by the time we arrived and sorted everything out there was only time to call off our respective Hawks before feeding up. On Wednesday 7th October the meeting opened with everyone in high hopes for the 25th Anniversary meet with Lorant giving us every encouragement and Fred Taylor officially opening up the meet. In the Spar party which for that day hawked the farms bordering Bodvell Hall, there were 5 Hawks although they weren't all in yarak. All the Spars had had a slip before Elsie was slipped at a moorhen near a stream. She flew it hard, but we lost sight of her and despite searching for about half an hour saw no sign of her.



Brian Wheeler headed back to Bodvell about a mile away to pick up the Club tracking gear. At first we couldn't get a signal but to our horror still couldn't when we were quite close to the place where she was last seen. We always check the transmitter before using it so we knew it should have been O.K. We then started to widen the search and after another hour during which it rained heavily we saw some crows mobbing around a tree about 200 yards from where we last saw Elsie. So we made for the tree and after a few minutes found Elsie with a very well plucked magpie! Both were absolutely drenched. Phew! What a relief at finding her but also elation at another magpie. On the following day due to very high winds no hawking was attempted, except by the foolhardy. On the Friday we were hawking at Auntie Nell's farm and made a good start although it was still a bit windy. - When Elsie's slip came she narrowly missed taking a wood pigeon then soon had a flight at a magpie but failed. Later whilst walking a hedgerow Elsie bated across the field landing on the far hedge. As she did 3 magpies got up from the far side, 2 making a break for it, the third landed about 15 yards off and turned to jeer, GAGAGAGAGA. But, he didn't have the last laugh. Magpie for Elsie's supper again. Saturday was the last day of the meeting and the weather was at its best for the week. Elsie had the first slip and almost took a wood pigeon. Later in the day she had a couple of flights at blackbirds but didn't take anything. Then in the

afternoon Mike Campsie and I inadvertently slipped at the same snipe resulting in the snipe being and the two Spars crabbing. There were no injuries and so we were able to carry on. Shortly, Mike had a flight at a starling which his Spar took well but unfortunately carried it into a tree. Eventually it was necessary to climb up and bring her down. Cyndy who was our Falken Meister, suggested we call it a day and make for Bodvell Hall. On Sunday morning the meeting was closed and we left intending to slip Elsie at any suitable quarry on the way home so we put the transmitter on before leaving. It had been found to be working alright now. We saw of course plenty of maggots on the way but we decided to wait until the best slip came up. At Tafolwern we saw two on fence posts on the road with about 200 yards downhill to covert. So we pulled up and slipped her out of the window. Although she flew them well they beat her to the covert, some bushes and a line of tall trees, and she lost them both. I ran down, picked her up and we drove on. As we approached Rhayader we spotted a magpie feeding in a field about 75 yards from the hedge. It was on the other side of the road so Ade passed it by 1/2 mile then came back slowly and I slipped her when we were 20 yards away. It just beat her to a hawthorn in the hedgerow but as we raced across the field to flush it she threw herself into the hawthorn and out it came and she took it instantly. We took a few photos and had a nip from the flask while she fed up. During the next couple of days despite

having plenty of good flights, almost exclusively at magpies now, Elsie didn't quite catch anything. Then on Saturday 17th October, whilst driving through the lanes at Rudry, had three good flights out of the car window. Then on the return-home spotted a magpie in a field. I got out of the car and threw her up over the high hedge. The magpie took off and flew into an oak tree on the far side of the field with Elsie right behind. The magpie flew out from the top of the tree and she took off after it, high and up wind. The magpie turned and flew down wind but Elsie hit it in the air after an 80 yard chase and only a few yards from the far hedgerow, landing in the garden of a house. The owner was in the garden and was pleased to have seen the flight and asked if he could take a photograph of her. On the Sunday I couldn't get out but on the Monday went over the fields locally and had 3 magpie flights which on re-flusing escaped each time. Then she caught one in the air as it came out of the top of a hawthorn. On Tuesday again I walked around the fields near home slipping her over the entrance gate, for straight away she bated and flew fast and low along the footpath for about 50 yards and then twisted sharply through a gap in some trees and I suddenly saw 5 magpies take off from the ground whilst she crashed into the nearest one binding to it. I fed her on the spot and was back home within half an hour of setting out. I missed the next two days due to heavy rain.

Then on Friday I decided again to go to the local fields and soon had a magpie flight. Elsie flew it towards the river but despite searching for 2 hours I couldn't find her. I went home and phoned Ade for the tracking gear. He came over and we soon had a signal which we tracked for 1/2 mile but by the time we found the tree it was quite dark. We heard no sound of bells from the tree but assumed she must be dead asleep so we decided to leave her and return in the morning. This may sound odd but in fact whilst in Abersoch all those who called at our cottage had remarked on how calm this Spar was. She would be dead asleep, whether hooded or not, in the lounge with up to 7 other Hawks in the room - 1 screamer, 4 dogs, and 8 people having dinner, all talking with the T.V. on! When we left to go out in the evening to the hotel to relive the days flights, I would pick her up from the bow perch and

put her down on the back of a chair in my bedroom without her stirring.

#### Adrian

But after waiting for dawn and not seeing or hearing her we found her tail mount with the transmitter and bell snagged up on a sheep fence running below the tree that we thought we'd tracked her to. The aerial probably caught and ripped the mount off as she flew the magpie. We soon had

other Falconers out helping but despite a lot of hard searching she's never been seen since.

Our thanks to all those who helped.

One sparrow, one blackbird and nine magpies between the 1st and 20th October 1987. Well at least we can be sure that she won't go hungry after giving us some marvellous sport.

## The Lover Compareth Himself To The Painful Falconer

The soaring hawk from fist that flies,  
Her Falconer doth constrain,  
Sometime to range the ground unknown,  
To find her out again  
And if by sight or sound of bell  
His falcon he may see  
Wo ho ho he cries with cheerful voice  
The gladdest man is he  
By lure then in finest sort  
He seeks to bring her in  
But if that she full gorged be  
He can not so her win  
Although her becks and bending eyes  
She many proffers makes  
Wo ho ho he cries away she flies  
And so her leave she takes  
This woeful man with weary limbs  
Runs wand'ring round about  
At length by noise of chattering pies  
His hawk again found out  
His heart was glad his eyes had seen  
His falcon swift of flight  
Wo ho ho he cries she empty gorged  
Upon his lure doth light  
How glad was then the falconer there  
No pen nor tongue can tell  
He swan in bliss that lately felt  
Like pains of cruel hell  
His hand sometime upon her train  
Sometime upon her breast  
Wo ho ho he cries with cheerful voice  
His heart was now at rest  
My dear, likewise behold thy love  
What pains he doth endure  
And now at length let pity move  
To stoop unto his lure  
A hood of silk and silver bells  
New gifts I promise thee  
Wo ho ho I cry, I come then say  
Make me as glad as he.

# The Hawk of May

Written by John M. McDougal



What has eyes like gold lira,  
Is majestically handsome,  
Makes a man neglect his work,  
And rides the wind?

For about an hour we tramped across the stony fields at the edge of the Forest of Darchichou, raising only dust and a few larks. No dogs were with us, so we walked loudly and quickly through the ripe winter wheat that in mid-May was ready for the harvester's scythe. We were trying to flush quail, if there were any quail, before they could run away. It was five in the afternoon on the Cap Bon peninsula of Tunisia, about 165 kilometers - 100 nautical miles - southeast of Marsala, Sicily, and my hunters concentration was waning from the unremitting beauty of the place. The wheat was gold, the caliche soil brick red. A rectangular minaret in the village of El Haouaria gleamed white in the setting sun. The azure Mediterranean was slowly turning gray as clouds crept in from the sea.

Aleya Samoud, my host from the nearby port of Kelibia, set the pace to my left. His nephew Chadli walked zigzags through the grain to my right, beating the stalks with his wooden staff.

Suddenly we heard that familiar breath-stopping, staccato thunder of quail, on the rise. Instincts take over at times like this; I picked out one of the two quail, raised my elbows, and my hands came up empty. I didn't have a gun. No one had a gun. The only gun was an ancient double barreled shotgun Aleya had left in the truck.

Instead, Aleya went through the moves of a javelin thrower and let fly

from his right fist a feathered missile. The foot long sparrow hawk locked on to one fleeing quail and matched him turn for turn. Before his low-flying quarry had gone 50 meters (150 feet), the hawk had seized the quail in his talons and gone to ground in a low hedge.

It was the first kill of the afternoon. We had found quail, but it was a day for hawks.

Whether one hunts with a goshawk in Europe, a Cooper's hawk in North America, or an eagle in Central Asia, employing a diurnal hunting bird of the zoological order Falconiformes is falconry. The strong and graceful peregrine falcon, *Falco peregrinus*, is the best known star of the sport, partly because it is found on all continents and large islands except Antarctica: The word *peregrine* itself means 'foreign'. Archeological evidence from ancient Sumeria attests to the enduring popularity of hunting with them.

But men hunt with many raptors besides the peregrine. In Europe there are goshawks. In Africa, there are harriers. And on both continents, as well as in Soviet Central Asia, there are Eurasian sparrow hawks, *Accipiter nisus*, the bird the Samouds and others use for hawking in northeastern Tunisia. It, too, has hunted with men for ages - no one seems to know how long - and can even boast of an archeological record: The ancient Egyptian gods Ra and Horus were depicted as humans with sparrow hawk heads, and the hieroglyph for

an individual's soul was often a sparrow hawk with a human face.

From Morocco to Afghanistan, the Middle Eastern countries are renowned for their devotion to falconry. Countless are the paintings and photographs of elegantly robed kings, amirs and shaykhs with their regal birds of prey held high. Though realistic, images such as these can leave a Western viewer with the impression that falconry in the Arab world is for the elite, that only the wealthy keep and hunt hawks.

Based on my experience in Tunisia, this is a mistaken impression, reinforced, perhaps, by European history and by our contemporary perceptions of falconry. Yes, it was the Arabs, most likely the Muslim military elite, who introduced (or reintroduced) falconry to Europe, but it was the European aristocracies who dominated the sport until it began to die out in the 16th century, when guns finally and irrevocably replaced hawks and the gunsmith supplanted the mews keeper.

When I went to Kelibia, a town of about 30,000, to meet falconers, I expected them to be wealthy, leisured, and a bit more enthusiastic about sport than about working for a living. My preconception of Tunisian falconry was of the North African equivalent of fox hunting in Virginia or of a wild boar hunt on a noble French estate.

I was wrong.

Kelibian hawkers run the gamut of

local income levels and occupations. Of the hunters I met at eight o'clock one Sunday morning in a rustic sidewalk cafe in the middle of town - the regular hour and locale for swapping hawking stories each spring - one was a small business-man who had for several years, organized the annual June hawking festival in El Haouaria; one was a retired medium acreage landowner, wearing a traditional *chechia* hat and *jebba* robe; and another was a self employed auto mechanic with a one room garage, too much work and not enough free time to hunt. Even the boy serving mint tea joined in the conversation about hawking. These men all shared a passion for falconry, and each insisted that his pursuit of the sport stemmed from family tradition, and not from his social or financial status, real or imagined.

Members of some 20 Kelibian families practice sparrow hawking each spring. They carry on a town tradition, the origins of which seem lost in a long and complex past. Floor tiles in a Roman villa unearthed in the town in the 1960's show a falcon and trophies of the hunt. And according to tradition, the *burj*, or citadel, of Kelibia was home to great aficionados of falconry. It was the Ottoman Turks who built the *burj*, atop an earlier Byzantine outpost, in the 16th century, and since the Turks were - and some would say still are - among the most avid falconers in the world, perhaps the local Kelibian passion for birds of prey can be traced to them, if not to earlier inhabitants.

The ontogeny of Kelibian falconry is intriguing because it seems that towns-people and villagers on the rest of the Cap Bon peninsula are not infected by the sport. Larbi Samoud, an active 84 year old hawker, has lived in Kelibia all his life. He says sparrow hawking is practiced only among people from Kelibia and El Haouaria, towns where Turkish strong holds once stood. 'Twelve kilometers (eight miles) to the south in Menzil Temime, or 30 kilometers (19 miles) to the west in Sidi Daoud, no one hunts with the *saf*', says Samoud.

*Saf* is Tunisian Arabic for sparrow hawk. 'In French, it's *épervier*, and in classical Arabic it's *baashaq*', Larbi Samoud told me. The *Saf* resembles the North American Coopers hawk, and the Levant sparrow hawk, found east of Tunisia, but is smaller than either of its cousins. Only a foot long, it has short, rounded wings and a long

tail, two body traits that give him great maneuverability. He commonly lives in woods near open fields, and hunts by cruising low over hedges and meadows in search of smaller birds and the occasional rodent. Like other hawks, the female sparrow hawk is larger than the male and makes a more determined hunter.

Eurasian sparrow hawks pair anew each year, nest in Euorpe in summer, and then, with their young, traverse the 140 kilometers (87 miles) of open sea between Sicily and Cap Bon, arriving in Tunisia in October. Some have travelled long distances by then. Larbi Samoud once trapped a hawk wearing a tag with strange writing on it that turned out to be Cyrillic: The hawk had been banded in the Soviet Union.

In March, the hawks reverse, direction, flying far on days when the north wind gives them added lift for soaring. It's in mid-March that Kelibia's falconers descend on the Forest of Darchichou to trap hawks for spring hunting.

Unlike falconers who raid nests to take eyases, or immature hawks, Kelibia's hawkers trap full grown hawks and train them for only two weeks before hunting them in April and May. They use two methods of capture. In one, nets measuring about 12 meters by four (39 by 13 feet) are erected near trees where hawks are likely to roost. If a hawk flies into the net, it collapses around him. In another, more time consuming but more reliable method, a blind is constructed behind foliage and a net trap is set up in a clearing. On a day with a northerly wind, the trap is baited with a live quail, dove or pigeon. When a cruising hawk approaches, the hunter in the blind jiggles a string tied to the feet of the bait bird, making it move enticingly. If the hawk plunges for the kill, the hunter tugs a separate line to spring the net.

The first objective in training a wild caught hawk, or haggard, is to get him to feed from the hunter's hand. The Samouds don't wear protective gloves, preferring instead to have direct tactile contact between man and bird. (The obvious results are the scratches that decorate the Samoud's arms and wrists each spring). Once a hawk has learned to cross a dark room to feed on the fist, the hunter begins to train him in a courtyard. Jesses, small silk and leather straps, are attached to his legs. They trail a light line of two

or three meters (6 to 10 feet) to keep the hawk from flying off unexpectedly. Finally, a feather light brass or silver bell is tied to the base of the hawk's tail to signal his location when he flies into brush or high grass.

Larbi Samoud's son Aleya and his grandnephew Chedli invited me on a hunt using two male haggards they had recently trained. The three - or five - of us set out for El Haouaria; Aleya held Chedli's hawk while his nephew drove. 'My *saf* is very high strung', he said, explaining why his own bird was confined to a cage in the back. 'If mine rode in the cab, he'd scratch our eyes out'.

While driving through the forest, Aleya sighted a peregrine falcon circling over a dense thicket. As we watched, the falcon stooped Stuka like toward an invisible target in the brush.

'The *borni* flies high and then plummets suddenly to the earth', said Aleya, using the Tunisian Arabic word for falcon. 'But our hawks, we throw them at the quail. You'll see'.

In a dive, a falcon can reach speeds above 160 kilometers an hour (100 mph). That ability allows it to capture quarry that can actually outfly the falcon in level flight. The sparrow hawk, on the other hand, relies on surprise, speed and agility to overtake its prey.

Near the new El Haouaria pumping station for the Algeria to Italy natural gas pipeline, Chedli pulled over on a dirt road. Though heavily cultivated, land in the peninsula is rarely fenced, so hunting access is easy. 'Some farmers a few years ago tried to ban hunting in much of Tunisia because they said it damaged their crops', Larbi Samoud had told me. 'But the agriculture ministry looked into the situation and determined it didn't hurt the crops, so the ban was lifted'.

Aleya breeched his shotgun, inserted two home loaded cartridges with light charges, and walked off in search of a lark. Young hawks should be fed twice a day, and care must be taken to see that they get enough sand, gravel or bone in their food for proper digestion: Giving the hawks fresh meat - from the hand of course - just before hunting is thought to stoke their raptorial instincts. Buy Aleya's powder charges are too light or his aim faulty: After two attempts to bring down the same irate meadowlark, he gave up. 'These hawks can hunt hungry,' he said.

After an hour we had little to show for our efforts but sore ankles and dusty shoes. Then, as we moved along the edge of a wheat field bordered by a patch of thistles, we flushed a small covey of quail that promptly scattered. First Aleya's bird took one. Then it took another. Then Chedli's hawk made a beautiful strike only three feet above the ground, and tumbled into a scrubby tree with his prize. We found him with the prey clutched in his talons, looking smug as his bell rang softly in the breeze.

Pride is as fleeting as frightened quail, however. On his next turn, Chedli's *saf* was in full throttle, low altitude aerial pursuit when it crossed paths with a singularly immobile donkey. The hawk pulled sharply upward, his jesses trailing straight down, and barely avoided the beast's long ears. The donkey didn't budge.

All in all, Aleya and Chedli took eight quail, losing only the one the donkey had blocked for. 'If you get four or five it's a good day', Aleya said, quickly adding that exercise and the joy of being outside were as important as taking home the makings of a feast.

'Fifteen years ago, two men and two hawks could go out and get 80 quail in a day if they wanted,' said Larbi Samoud when we returned. 'But today there aren't many game birds left, and there are fewer hawks, too'. Population pressure has reduced the

numbers of wildlife species in all of Tunisia. As more land is brought under cultivation, as more roads are built and as more cars roll on them, the natural habitat for game disappears. Worse, a growing threat exists from pesticides and herbicides. When toxic chemicals enter the food chain, it's the larger animals higher on the chain, like quail and hawks, that cumulate the poisons and suffer most.

Larbi Samoud, a poet as well as a falconer, likes to tell the story of 'Am 'Ali ben Nar, who so loved his *saf* that he kept and hunted it year after year, until finally the bird died at age 33. But 'Am 'Ali still couldn't give up his hawk, so he placed it lovingly in a lacquered box and buried it with honor in a wall of his house. Years later, a perplexed descendant, doubtless thinking of treasure, found the hawks coffin during a remodelling.

Scientists estimate that the normal life span of a hawk in the wild is only three years. In captivity, small falcons and hawks rarely live longer than a dozen years, even under favourable conditions, so the story of 'Am 'Ali ben Nar, like many, most, or all hunting stories, contains a healthy dash of exaggeration.

Nevertheless, the story shows how strong the attachment between a Kelibian falconer and his hawk can

become, just as the telling of the story - over cups of tea and an exchange of cigarettes in a small sidewalk cafe - shows how the man-bird relationship engenders a broader one among hunters themselves. In Kelibia, that broader relationship doesn't require a country club membership nor the formalities of say, tee times and score cards to reach fruition. In the end, falconry - perhaps all hunting - is a cultural act more than a sport.

Given the strong bond between man and bird, at least as perceived by men, it makes sense to expect that most Kelibian falconers would follow 'Am 'Ali's example and keep their hawks several years.

Sensible, perhaps, but incorrect. Each spring, once the quail are few, the wheat is cut, the days get hotter, and the hunters start remembering all the mundane tasks they've put off for two months, they take their hawks out to the little Forest of Darchichou one last time, untie their jesses and bells, and release them to the north wind.

*John M. McDougal, who holds degrees in Middle Eastern studies and journalism, writes on France and North Africa and is a contributing editor of 'Cairo Today'.*

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## The Beginning *By Elaine Paterson*

In the summer of 1976 we borrowed a tent and set forth on our first camping holiday. Little did I know how much it would change our whole way of life. The weather was beautiful and we set up camp on a site close to the beach at Saundersfoot.

First night over we were awakened early by a funny bearded Welshman residing in the next tent. Gun over one shoulder and several rabbits over the other. Ah thought Bryan, 'A man after my own heart'. From tent to tent all round the site trying to sell his wares. Rabbit stew to be menu of the day. They fell into conversation, Roger was his name, we couldn't get them apart. Shooting, fishing, taxidermy and FALCONRY, oh the dreaded beginning. Sometimes I rue the day we ever met that Roger James.

Into the bookshops, round the leather shops, endless discussions on... oh yes you've guessed. Bryan was hooked.

We came home, Bryan acquired a sparrow-hawk. Then it became worse, I have to **man** the bird. Book in one hand, bird on fist, IN MY LOUNGE. White streaks everywhere (it will wash off) watch what you're doing, don't walk so close, can't you leave that, you're upsetting the bird. Upsetting the bird, not half as much as it was upsetting me. I'm going for a walk with the bird, with the bird indeed. Then the first most exciting moment, 'I've caught my first quarry', (poor thing I thought) 'Yes a moth up by the lake'. Needless to say I fell about laughing.

'You think more of that bird than you do of me', 'No I don't, its just that you

can take care of yourself'. Well I can but I was beginning to think the bird was taking over.

Time went on, the Sparrowhawk and Bryan improved, they developed a bond. No time for D.I.Y. got to take the bird out. Hunting was the name of the game. Its got to have a hood, and I need a **good** falconry glove **and** I've seen some really nicely turned blocks **and** there's a new book out. 'What about the Gas bill'. 'That can wait, I **need** these things'.

And so its gone on and on, from one bird to another, to another to another. Is it an obsession? Maybe. This falconry, it gets under the skin, it makes the adrenalin flow, so I'm told, well it also makes the blood boil.

Roger has continued to be one of our closest and dearest friends, but sometimes the thought does cross my mind, Oh how I wish we'd gone to Bognor instead.

# SUCCESSFUL BREEDING OF INJURED KESTRELS

*By: Steven Bechtold, President of The Hungarian Falconry Association  
Translated by: L. de Bastyai*

On the afternoon of 17th July 1984 a member of our Falconry Association Dr. Laszlo Karpati brought to the Birds of Prey Rescue Centre a badly injured female kestrel, which had struck some high voltage cables.

The weight of the injured bird was only 150 grms. It had spent all its time lying on its stomach. The bird had to be force fed with pigeon breast meat in egg yolk and pigs heart. Her left wing was dry and hung from the injured joint. On the 19th July, she began feeding herself and by the 26th her weight had increased to 200 grms and steadily increased to 285 grms by 27th August.

On the 1st September the injured wing dropped off as did the last piece of injured toe.

During May 1986, the bird which we called 'Shope' after the town Shorion where she was found, layed four eggs. After a period she left the eggs which were naturally not fertile.

In February 1987 someone found a male Kestrel in my home town of Koszeg. The left wing which was broken and splintered could not be saved and had to be amputated by the local vet. We named the bird Balázs after 'Balázs Day' (a Hungarian holiday) which was the day he was found.

Although as injured birds they could not be put back into the wild, they still had a part to play in the bird world. I had put Shope and Balázs together in an aviary of adequate size. The breeding accommodation consisted of two boxes measuring 50 x 35 x 35 cms. On one box the entry was on the narrow side and on the other the wider side, and both bases were covered with a combination of river sand and wood shavings and the breeding boxes could be reached by a ladder. The aviary also contained two block perches and a bath.

Although according to the unwritten law, the male should be introduced first into the aviary, we had to introduce the female first whilst the

males wing healed. The male was finally introduced into the aviary on March 29th 1987.

To begin they seemed incompatible but after a month became much friendlier and even 'chatted' to each other. They frequently stoop near each other and very often Shope had spent the night on the ladder.

On April 1st, I noticed with delight that the male was passing food to Shope, surely a good sign. That night Shope spent the night on top of the breeding box and Balázs below on the ladder. On the 26th April I noticed that Shope spent alot of time inside the breeding box and Balázs very often by her side with a day old chick. This boded well for future breeding success.

On April 28th Shope laid the first egg in a groove which she scraped in the sand and woodchip base. On the next day Balázs was brooding on this egg and during the next 5 days a further 3 eggs were laid by Shope.

Both parents took turns in brooding the eggs. On the 6th and 8th May, 2 more eggs were laid. On several occasions the female left the nesting box, but only to feed, returning to brood. Sometimes she would also take a bath, taking back moisture for the eggs. When the incubation was reaching an advanced stage the female hardly left the eggs at all, but fed beside the nest on food brought by the tiercel. During this time they were given 3 day old chicks every day.

On 7th June both Kestrels brooded side by side, Shope apparently covering four eggs and the tiercel two. As I was watching very closely, I noticed the breast feathers of the female moving and then realized one of the eggs had hatched, I could not describe my happiness. On the afternoon of the 8th June, I found empty eggshells in the nest and when the tiercel lifted himself up I could see two chicks beneath him. My fears that such badly injured birds would be unable to mate were now proved to be

without foundation. Late that afternoon the female fed the chicks. It looked as if the female had chewed bits of mice before feeding it to the chicks. She would touch the edge of the chicks beaks, thus encouraging them to open. At this time two of the chicks were still wet from hatching. The femal would normally watch over the chicks and unhatched eggs, but in the evenings the brooding was done by both parents. It became apparent that the three remaining eggs were infertile because they did not hatch. At first the chicks were only fed by the female but after five days both took turns in feeding the youngsters. It sometimes happened that the female put food in the beak of the tiercel and he fed the chicks with the meat, but very often he would eat some of this himself.

After about a week I looked at the young birds and although two of them were developing very nicely the third chick was deformed with twisted feet, possibly caused during hatching. I decided that this chick would be unable to walk or stand and it was therefore put down.

During the following days I witnessed a nice little incident, one of the chicks 'walked' very close to the edge of the nesting box and was in danger of falling out. Before the chick got too close to the edge, Shope went after it and pulled the chick gently back to the groove of the nest by one of the feathers above its eyelid. By the time they were two weeks old they were eating five mice in the morning and four day old chicks in the afternoon. The mice and day old chicks were half skinned. The young birds were normally fed by the female, with frequent help by the tiercel. If the weather was cool, the chicks would keep warm beneath the brooding female, with the tiercel standing guard on top of the breeding box. When the young birds were sixteen to seventeen days old, they were standing quite a lot on their own.

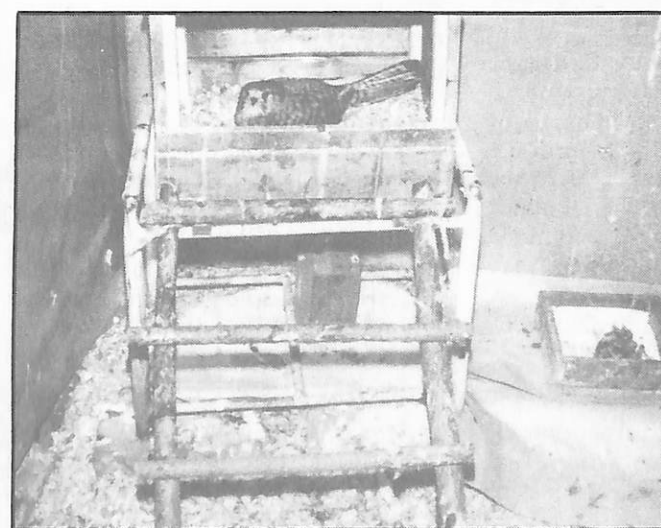
It was interesting to note that the

female youngsters stood with the mother and the male youngster with the father. When they reached twenty seven days old the young birds started feeding themselves and the following day left the nesting box. During the following days they spent most of the time out of the nesting box flapping and hopping about with their mother, but at night the whole family returned to the nesting box. Though the young birds were now feeding themselves. Shope still occasionally passed food into their beaks. At this time they were being given three or four mice in the morning and four chicks in the afternoon, but

sometimes one or two chicken legs were left on the floor from the afternoon feed. After thirty days had elapsed the whole family began to spend the nights on top of the breeding box and not in it, they stood very close together, the young birds laying down and the parents standing above them. On the thirty fourth day one of the young females took its first bath. Around this time Balázs became most active with the feeding, but he always fed the young male chick first, also at this time the parents had both moulted. When the chicks reached thirty six days old they began flying down for food from their night perch.

On the 2nd August 1987 I took the fifty five day old tiercel bird and gave it to my falconer friend Jáuros Toth who trained it to fly to the lure and we could all see this young kestrels marvellous stooping at our International Falconry meeting. I kept the young female for myself and by 8th August was flying it to the lure, watching it stooping magnificently.

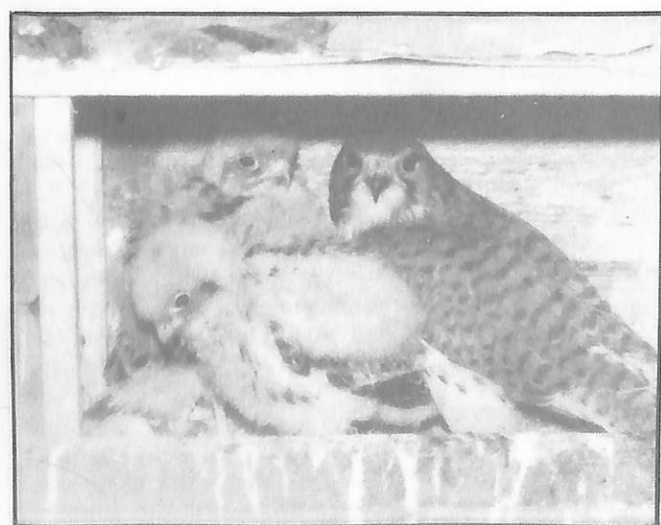
This episode proves that badly injured birds which could not survive in the wild, can produce completely healthy young birds.



In the highraised nesting box 'Shope' is brooding.



We love each other like this.



'Shope' with her 20 day old young.



The family together on top of the nesting box, in front is 'Shope' the female, at the back is the tiercel 'Balázs', on the left is the young female bird and on the right the young tiercel kestrel.

# Knock - Knock

by Adrian Williams

I've been an LRK since the scheme started under the Wildlife and Countryside Act although in common with most LRK's I was interested in the care of injured animals long before the DOE became involved.

Although that work is a serious subject on its own, over the years I've had quite a few humorous encounters when dealing with casualties and on recalling them it has been suggested that they might make an interesting article for the 'Australier'. So here are just a few of them.

One of the easiest mistakes for anyone to make is in identification and whilst I don't for one minute claim to be an expert in recognition some of the suggestions offered would make your wellies laugh.

People often pick up injured swifts and think that they are young Hawks. One afternoon a lady called who kept cage birds, finches etc., to announce that she had found a young Sparrowhawk. When I looked into the little cage that she carried I could see that the inmate was a swift not a Spar.

One evening last year I had a telephone call from the Police station at Aberdare. The WPC said, "Well, this man has found a Peregrine in his garden, it can't fly. Can you look after it?" I said I could and asked for his address adding that I doubted that it was a Peregrine. To which the WPC exclaimed, "Oh yes it is, we sent a PC to look, it's definitely a Peregrine!" I replied, "Fair enough, I'll be there in about half an hour."

Knock knock. "Ah, hello Mr. Thomas - I believe you found an injured bird. Shall I have a look at it?" Mr. Thomas asked me in saying, "Yes there it is in that box. It's a Peregrine." He was pointing at a child's shoe box so I said, "Mr. Thomas before I open that box I can tell you it's not a Peregrine." But he insisted "Yeah it is, the Police said it is." I said, "I'm sorry its not. The box is too small." At this Mr. Thomas smugly said, "Aah, it's a young one

see." (Thinking, got you). So I picked up the box. "OK let's have a look..... yes..... it's a swift." But Mr. Thomas wasn't happy. "No! It's a Peregrine - the Police said." I took it home but it soon died, a road victim.

Rule No. 1 People don't usually find anything common, they are always oddities, whether it's a swift becoming a Peregrine or a vole becoming a dormouse.

Most of the calls I get are like the last one, passed on by the Police who have been contacted first and aren't sure what to do, although some are redirected by the RSPB or RSPCA.

One evening a chap rang from Caerphilly, he'd found a Honey Buzzard. So of course I thought it was a Common. But he said, "No, the Hawking Centre had thought that but they were wrong."

Rule No. 2 If someone doesn't agree with you try elsewhere, you may get better luck.

Knock knock. "I'm Mr. Williams; I've come about the Buzzard." (Non committal just in case.) "Oh the Honey Buzzard" said Mr. Roberts, "Here it is. Now look in my book..... it's got the same tail feathers." I agreed they were similar. "Mmmm,.... but it also shows that the Honey Buzzard has yellow eyes. This is a Common Buzzard." "Are you sure?" asked Mr. Roberts. I said I was and pointed out how rare Honey Buzzards are and unlikely to be found in this part of the country whereas the Common Buzzard is just that, common.

This one was a youngster that had become soaked in a storm enabling Mr. Roberts to grab it on the ground. There was nothing actually wrong with it. I get a few like this every autumn. After drying off and maybe some food off they go.

"RSPB here, can you advise a man about a bird of prey he's found? It's quite near to you. I can give you his phone number." Apparently the man, a Mr. Cartwright had been to a

house in Pentyrch with a view to buying it and had found a 'kestrel' inside which he was afraid to approach. If people say that they've found a Hawk, nine out of ten times they're wrong. So I asked Mr. Cartwright if he could describe it. "Yes," said Mr. Cartwright. "It's yellow all over with brown blotches here and there." Yellow? I thought, but blotches, not a cockatoo then. Hooked beak? "Yes." Or is it a cockatoo? Size? "Huge, a massive thing." I wrote down some directions and agreed to meet him outside the house. When I arrived Mr. Cartwright had already solved the mystery of what it was. "It's a Red Kite, a passing farmer told me." I explained that almost all of the Red Kites are confined to a small area near Aberystwyth but occasionally one is seen elsewhere. "The farmer says there are loads of them around here." We went into the house and in the kitchen there sure enough was a massive, yellow, blotched,..... Little Owl. How it got into the house I don't know but it wasn't long before it had been checked over and then it was glad to be out and back on the wing.

Last summer a friend of mine called in to tell me that someone in the village who I knew vaguely had picked up a bird which he thought was a Night Heron. Would I call down as the finder didn't know what to feed it on and didn't know where I lived.

Knock knock. "Oh hello John. I hear you've found a Night Heron. I've never seen one." "Well I think so," said John. "Come on in and I'll just get it for you to see." When I told him it was a moorhen he was taken aback. "Uuh! Whaat? It's not a moorhen, I know what a flipping moorhen looks like." I felt a bit awkward but had to say "Well that's one, that's a moorhen." I felt worse when John said, "Don't be stupid it's not a moorhen, moorhens have got webbed feet for a start. Look at this things feet." "No they haven't," I said. "Course they have, they're in the water all the time," he retaliated. "I

know, but they haven't got webbed feet." But I couldn't convince him. "God! I thought you'd know what it was, you haven't got a clue." As I could see his patience was wearing thin I said, "Well I'm sorry but there you are. Do you want me to take it or not?" To which he replied, "Yeah if you will but I'm sure it's not a moorhen, what's that red thing on it's beak? I've never seen that on a moorhen." I said, "It's called a shield. Look, when I'm passing I'll call in with a book with photographs of moorhens showing the shield, OK?" I never did though.

Laurie Workman often passes calls on to me and I remember him telling me that a Kestrel had been found in Senghenydd and he asked if I could pick it up. This turned out to have been lost by a local hawk keeper. When I arrived at the house the Kestrel had been caged in a chicken ark with a laying box. I observed the Kestrel without lifting the ark whilst as usual the householders asked questions nineteen to the dozen. During 'question time' the subject of food cropped up and I pointed out what was suitable and what wasn't and then mentioned how people often think that bread and milk is the staple diet for all animals and how unsuitable is was for most of them especially raptors. The wife seemed to think that the suggestion that people

might offer such sop to Hawks quite ridiculous and burst into laughter. A few minutes later I said I'd have to be on my way so I lifted the ark to catch up the Kestrel when a dish of bread and milk slid out of the laying box. After another burst of ysterics from the wife the husband admitted that he'd put it there.

Some people seem to credit you with superhuman powers. Just a few days ago I was asked if I could catch and release a Tawny Owl that was trapped in the roof of a factory some ninety feet up. As the factory staff and local Police had no idea how to get up to the owl, could I? Luckily the 'trapped' owl managed to escape before I had to explain that I couldn't fly.

Another time, a lady phoned to ask if I could catch a duck on Roath Park lake because it looked ill. Several times people have phoned to say that they have budgies, parakeets, etc., flying around their neighbourhood and can I catch them? (As Elsie has been lost, no I can't).

Although not concerning a casualty, a few years ago I was out with my brother Paul, flying my Redtail Booboo, when we were apprehended by a farmworker who wanted to join us to watch a few flights (but I warned him that we were only out for the day, rabbits being so rare they are almost a

protected species here). During the next half hour he let us in on the fact that his employer had once shot a huge Buzzard despite knowing that it was a protected species. The explanation for shooting it was the fact that it was regularly taking farmyard chicks and the farmer was not prepared to tolerate it. Then came the statement that I'll never forget as long as I live. After it had been shot dead the wingspan of this enormous Buzzard was measured and it was found to be fourteen feet across! No amount of laughter from us, no rational argument and offers to prove him wrong would convince this man that he had made a slight miscalculation. It seems that because Buzzards look bigger when soaring than when on the fist most of us Falconers are familiar with the notion that non-falconers have that the ones round our way are much bigger; but fourteen feet? I suppose it's like those rats the size of cats. Everybody has seen one but no one has ever caught one.



SAKER FALCON ON GLOVE  
by Peter Udvarnoki

# Falconry

At The Raptor Rehabilitation & Propagation Project Inc.,  
Tyson Research Centre.

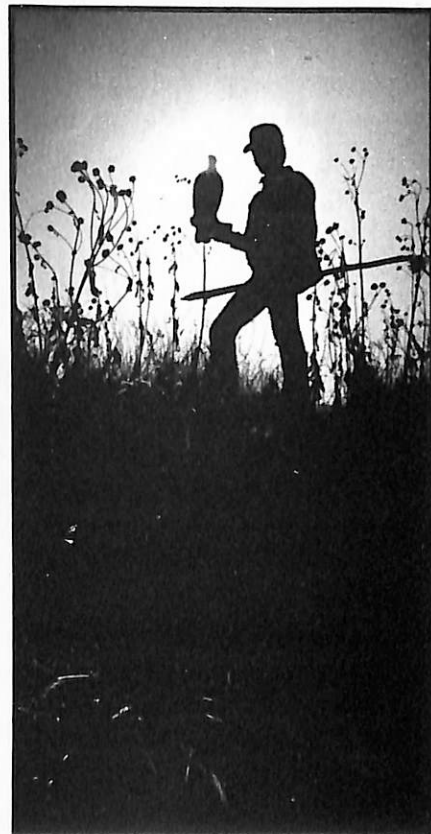
Reproduced from 'NEWS FROM THE MEWS'

Even in this rocket age of high technology, the methods of training birds of prey have changed little from centuries ago. It is written in the journals of Marco Polo that when Ghengis Khan went hunting, he took with him a thousand falcons and, of course a thousand handlers. The advent of gunpowder eliminated the necessity of augmenting an army's meat ration with game caught via talon. So falconry has risen to a form of sport, the traditions handed down orally. The rules governing etiquette and standards may vary but the equipment and techniques have remained the same.

Tom Cade, falconer and founder of Cornell University's Peregrine program, considers the sport of falconry the ultimate level of birdwatching. The fascination the falconer feels, watching the hunting hawk on wing, is the same sensation that captures the public's interest during RRPP's education programs. The birds, themselves, are spectacular visual aids, captivating the audience as they fly overhead.

By applying the techniques of falconry, the RRPP staff has trained the education birds to sit the fist and fly to the fist. Flying birds is a learned skill, as precise as it is individual. It requires knowing the metabolism and the exact daily weight of the individual raptor. No two birds are alike. It requires a consistent routine and eternal patience. It requires flexibility to adapt the raptor's surroundings to keep it content. Above all, it requires dedication. The RRPP staff who are responsible for managing the flying raptors have attained this level of expertise.

Falconry also has a role in the RRPP rehabilitation program. A hawk can suffer feather damage so severe that only the regrowth of new feathers will enable it to fly again. Waiting for the new feathers to grow in can take months. Such a raptor will be in need of a great deal of conditioning to ready it for release. An adult, wild bird can be trained for falconry, hunted, and when it has honed its skills, be released without risk to the bird. Four RRPP staff members are licensed falconers.



# Human Nature

## Strange Reports & Resurgent Raptors

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Rosamund Kidman Cox, Editor BBC WILDLIFE MAGAZINE

When Brian Rose of Bristol announced to the press a couple of months ago that he and other devotees of tipping - a sport for which pigeons are bred to stay in the air like skylarks until they drop from exhaustion - were considering attaching 'hawk' bombs to a few of their more expendable birds, the resulting furore obscured some rather good news: for the first time since the early fifties, peregrine falcons have returned to the capital of the West.

The Nature Conservancy Council has confirmed that, for the second year, a pair has been seen hunting over the city and is probably also prospecting for a nesting site. It might be these birds or it might be sparrowhawks that have been practising a rather merciful natural selection on the Bristol tippers, but the pigeon-fanciers have now been resoundingly advised that it is illegal, without a licence, to kill any bird of prey, and that no one can get a licence to kill a peregrine.

Under natural circumstances, peregrines should be fairly common, but they were the most severely affected by the 'Silent Spring' organochlorine pesticide catastrophes of the fifties and sixties, when the accumulation of poisons at their end of the food chain caused an epidemic of prematurely broken eggshells.

They were also traditional targets of gamekeepers and farmers, and during the war were shot routinely to protect carrier pigeons. Now, of course, gamekeepers and farmers are reluctant even to raise a fist at such a precious bird, and with the war over, the only domestic pigeons in the skies are there for purposes of various sports.

The most common of these is pigeon-racing, and there have, in fact been a few demands to the Department of Environment (DoE) that something be 'done' about both peregrines and sparrowhawks. Last year, the Welsh

Homing Pigeon Union tried to persuade the DoE to move the nest of a pair of peregrines that were prospering on the bloodstock of a club in Gwent (even if they could safely be moved, the department pointed out, the range would only be recolonised).

And the sport's national body, the Royal Pigeon Racing Association, is considering asking the Government to make it easier to kill sparrowhawks, whose population, according to the association's secretary, 'has grown out of all proportion'.

It is a classic conflict between conservation and animal based sport, but in this case - and for a change - the sport side has very little chance of getting its way. This is because what it is asking, essentially, is for dispensations that are denied to farmers and gamekeepers, people who often see birds of prey, rightly or wrongly, as threats to their livelihood, not just their fun. And by and large - and with the exception of the perennial poisoned Scottish eagles - the farmers and gamekeepers are tolerating the laws with a lot less complaint.

As for booby-trapping tippers, such a threat - besides giving the country a good laugh (the national newspapers made much of the kamikaze angle, with cartoons) - cannot really had done a lot for pigeon-fanciers' image. On *Points West*, the BBC regional television news, Brian Rose held a pigeon upside down and pointed at the place on its chest where the bomb would go. 'It would be a shame,' he said, 'but there again, when you think of a pigeon, it would be eaten alive... and surely that's more cruel than humanely blowing it up and getting rid of it'. Something had to be done, or more people would have to leave the sport - and maybe even he would, as if this was the worst possibility in the world.

In fact, tipping, to a non-tippler, sounds slightly unsavoury, and its

practitioners might do better to avoid publicity altogether. Somehow, genetic manipulation seems to have been taken too far when it involves warping a creature's brain to such an extent, instilling it with a sort of masochistic insanity. And with the birds flapping around in more or less the same spot in the sky for hours on end, it is obvious that the sport cannot be practised within miles of a pigeon-eating bird of prey. It makes you wonder how it ever got started, unless any raptors to appear on the scene were summarily shot.

Altogether, pigeon-fancying includes some of the weirdest extremes of the breeding art. For showing, there are pigeons with grotesquely large crops and barely usable beaks, or with Elizabethan-looking feather collars or with lacy and unpreenable feathers, or with bare necks, or with no feathers at all.

For recreation, there are pigeons called 'rollers', which can't fly but, when gently bowled across the floor or the ground, have something like a series of epileptic fits and flop over and flop over and keep flopping over for championship distances measured in scores of yards.

There are 'tumblers', whose owners get together and release them as a flock, watching them climb high and then apparently lose control of themselves and plunge earthwards in various cartwheels, spirals and somersaults, occasionally costing their owners' money by failing to come out the dive in time.

And there are tippers. And the tipping folk might do well to realise that more people care about the return of the peregrine than how long it takes for a demented pigeon to wear itself out.

DAVID HELTON

# Durak & Pacal

Lorant de Bastyai recounts a story of perfect harmony  
Between a Goshawk and a Hungarian pointer.

After the Second World War, when I left the Hungarian Army and returned to my country home, I found the empty house in an appalling condition. The furniture was broken and smashed and my books were scattered around the rooms. There was no sign of my hawks and my Hungarian pointer had also disappeared. After learning from my friends in the neighbourhood that they had given my birds their freedom as there was a shortage of meat, I asked 'How about my dog?' The sad answer came; 'Perhaps he's retrieving pheasants or partridges on the Russian plains or in the German woods'.

Every 'normal' person, after tidying the house, would start to get new furniture, curtains and so on. But not me. After I had put the broken furniture on a bonfire in the garden, my first thoughts were to get hawks and dog again.

It was spring, the right time to start training young hawks and I decided for a start I would get a Goshawk, so I sent letters to my forester friends asking for news of nests in their areas. Very soon the replies arrived, and I chose the Visegard district, 15 miles north of Budapest, because it is well known that the goshawks there are extremely big and strong.

When we arrived below the nest, which was in a tall birch tree, the young goshawks were already so big that they were standing around the edge of the nest, and as the boy climbing the tree got near them, all three flew out. But one of them was too weak to fly far and landed 200 yards away under a thorn bush. I ran quickly and as the thorns prevented the bird raising its wings to take off again, I jumped and caught it in the style of a goal-keeper. Now I do not really know whether I grabbed the young goshawk or she grabbed me, but her grip was much stronger than mine and her magnificent talons dug into my hands so that the blood flowed. It was quite painful and I

shouted, 'Oh you durak.' At this time the Hungarians had jokingly taken over several words from the Russians, and 'durak' was the Russian word for stupid, and also for a game of cards. My friends suggested that I call the bird Durak.

When I arrived home with the hawk I put her in a large room with soft river sand strewn on the floor, and around the walls lots of branches, some low, some high, where she could perch. After quite a short time, Durak felt at home, but was at first scared of me, but it only took a few visits for it to penetrate her brain that I was the one bringing her food, so that she then started looking forward to my going into her room.

I fed her at first by hand with little bits of meat and when she was used to this, I taught her to stand on my gloved hand and fed her there. In the meantime, I put soft leather jesses on her legs.

When Durak would stand on my fist without jumping about, I took her for a walk around the house and farmyard. With great interest, she

looked around at this strange new world, frightened only by the noise of a passing tractor, though she soon became accustomed to this as well.

I had my hawk but was still without a dog. But I did not have to wait long. One early summer afternoon, I was sitting in my drawing room, reading the daily post, and Durak on my fist. Suddenly the bird started behaving in an unusual way, giving a high pitched warning call, 'pitt-pitt-fitch!' All the doors and windows were open in the warm weather, and through one of the open doors a five month old Hungarian pointer walked, holding in its mouth a piece of meat. She came in as if this had always been her home, and on the end of her lead was one of my friends.

I was so surprised when I saw the dog entering with the meat that I said aloud, 'Where did you get that pacal?' This is the Hungarian word meaning 'tribe' and is pronounced 'putzol'. My friend told me she was a present for me, and we decided to call her Pacal.



"ANY SECOND NOW"

From that day Pacal had her basket in the same room as Durak, and in a very short time they were really good friends. They were fed at the same time, Durak standing and eating her meat ration from my fist while Pacal was by my feet, eating from her dish. They were both trained at the same time, too. First, I trained Durak to fly to my fist when called, while Pacal stood beside me. Then I would train Pacal to sit, lie down, and retrieve. Durak would carefully watch what her future hunting companion was doing.

The training went on for weeks until one evening I said to myself 'Tomorrow!!'

Next morning I slung my falconer's bag on my shoulder and went in to the hawk room. Durak jumped to my fist at the first call, and Pacal sprang happily from her basket. We left for a short walk in the woods in all their late summer beauty, the sun shining through the branches, colouring the leaves a golden red. Pacal sniffed the air, then put her nose down and started to go ahead in front of us. I removed the leash and swivel from Durak and let her fly up to the first branch over my head. I had trained her to follow us from branch to branch. Durak learned that I actually had nothing to do with the game - only Pacal did.

So she left me and started to follow Pacal. Although they were both quite free, they worked together in perfect harmony. I was enjoying the colourful picture of the woods in the early hours when Pacal stopped, standing with body tense, one front leg up, tail out straight, motionless, and pointing.

She looked like a bronze statue, with her golden yellow coat. Durak watched Pacal from a branch half way up the tree, keenly looking down with her orange eyes glowing. They were 20 yards in front of me when a dry branch cracked under my steps and frightened the rabbit Pacal had seen.

As the rabbit ran quickly off Durak turned as swiftly, dived down from the branch and, after a short and exciting chase, caught the rabbit just before it could reach the warren.

When I arrived at the scene Pacal was also there. She welcomed me with a happy tail-wagging and I could see on her 'smiling face' that she was saying to me, 'You see, dear master, how clever we two are together.'



Mumally 87

# A Good Days Hunt *by GOS*

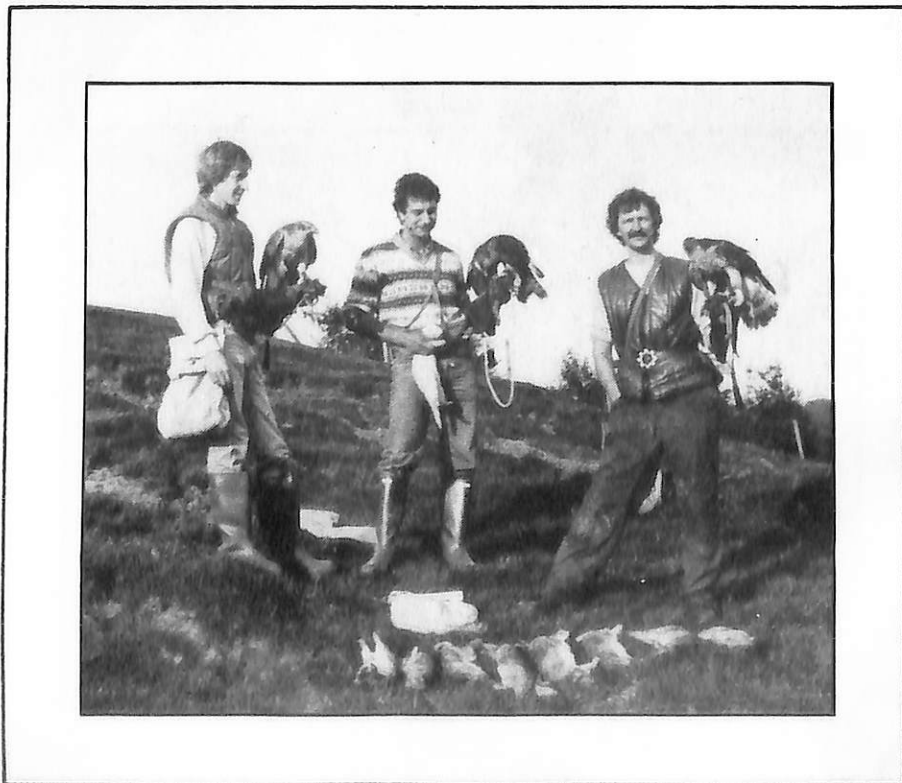
THE year 1985, the month October, the sun was shining and a clear blue sky. It was to be the last hottest day of the year. The farm, myself and three other falconer friends were on, was a farm I had not long acquired. The quarry was rabbits and our weapons were three female goshawks and a ferret. I knew we were going to have some good flights on this land, but what I did not know was that it was going to turn out to be one of the best days hunting we've had for a long time. In the first ten minutes a rabbit was in the bag. First flight first kill, with (MISSY), we didn't take a dog as there were some sheep on the land and with not having had the land very long I didn't want to impose on the land owner. On the few times I had been there by myself almost every patch of nettles produced a rabbit. So I was quite confident we didn't need one. After dispatching the rabbit from the gos we moved on up the hill and almost at once another rabbit was flushed and taken by (FAITH). The next flight was for myself and my gos. After a short walk through some long grass we were standing at the top of a hill, below us about six hundred yards was a river, from previous visits all you had to do was stand there and let the hawk have a look around, and she would spot her quarry. Sure enough her eyes were fixed on something, she stretched her neck as high as she could, we could not see what it was she was so interested in, I held her up to give her a better view, 'not that I needed to with her eyes', she bolted and she was away. Down she went gliding with just the odd flap of her wings, gliding further until she was almost by the river. At this point I began to worry a little because the river was a rather wide one with white water! and I could see myself stripping off, but as I watched her just before she went out of sight, a sudden flick of her tail and she was down. I ran down to assist her, for all I knew it could have been a hare and she could get knocked about, and the last thing I wanted was broken tail feathers, or a broken hawk.

When I got to her there was no need to worry, she was clamped tight on another rabbit, so we had all had a kill, I wasn't bothered if I didn't have another flight now. I made my way back to my friends who were still at the top of the hill and we moved on along by the side of the wood, suddenly from under our feet shot another rabbit. In an instant Missy was away and again a rabbit was bagged. Time for a drink. Out came the whisky flasks and a toast to our foe, who always show cunning in the field and to our hawks who also show equal cunning and determination when the chase is on. Time to move on as there was still some land to cover.

At the end of the wood just outside two rabbits were hopping about and my gos was away, when she was about half way the rabbits disappeared, the gos swung in, a few seconds later we could hear a squeal and yet another rabbit was taken. Up the field to a small spinney and a rabbit was spotted running through the undergrowth,

Faith was slipped. She flew up the field and landed up a tree looking for her bunny, but this one got away. We kicked through the bracken, but it was gone. Out came the lure and the gos was brought down, we then went on to cover most of the land. At the end of the day 7 rabbits were taken, and about the same managed to elude the hawks and made it to safety.

Several good flights were had by all, last but not least Alan, who came with the ferret, as it was we only used it once, and to top the day off, the final rabbit was bolted and taken by Missy making a total of eight. Time now to feed the hawks on some of the fresh meat, and ourselves on the remaining fire water. What an end to a perfect day, all the hawks were back, the late afternoon sun was still shining, and our bags were full, what more could a falconer wish for, than to be with his hawk on such a fine day. So for myself and all other falconers in the country, let's hope we can enjoy this ancient sport for many more years to come.



Two Reports Given By  
**THE WELSH HAWKING CLUB**  
at the Goshawk Workshop held at Birmingham University  
On February 13th 1988.

## Goshawk Breeding Scheme & Report

The Club was formed twenty five years ago by a small group of enthusiasts with the aim of practising falconry and enjoying hunting with all suitable hawks. This tradition has remained the main aim of the Club ever since.

However, as I am sure you are aware, The Welsh Hawking Club takes its responsibilities very seriously. These responsibilities we feel are to all the wild hawk populations not only in Wales but the world as a whole.

We feel a special responsibility towards Goshawks. This is so particularly because in the past up to 80% of the hawks kept by our members were in fact Goshawks. Very sadly, this percentage has now been completely reversed as only 20% or less Goshawks are now being kept by members. I must emphasise that this is not from choice, as the vast majority of our members would prefer to hunt with a Goshawk if they had the chance to obtain one.

It is with this fact uppermost in our minds that our Club has set up the current ambitious breeding scheme. Our target is to breed enough Goshawks to supply the entire needs of our Club members, and if successful, other hawking clubs and if God forbid there is another disaster as we experienced in the early sixties with the peregrine, we will not be found wanting in the case of the Goshawk. Although the Club has had a breeding programme for many years, with varying degrees of success, I feel that this concerted effort will bear much fruit. Enthusiasm and dedication, not to mention patience, skill and luck, are all required in this undertaking and I believe all these exist within our Club membership.

What the Welsh Hawking Club is doing now, and hoping to do in the future, is set out below. These plans and the facilities to carry them out are essential because, as I'm sure you will agree, breeding any hawks is essentially a long term project.

### AVIARIES

The Club owns ten enclosures of the Hurrell type in North Wales and eight in South Wales. Two of these enclosures in South Wales are built to a design which we believe are specifically suitable for Goshawks. In addition, there are also twenty-two enclosures available to the Club and owned by various Club Members.

### BROODING ROOMS

At our South Wales establishment, we have a brooding room, with the various tools of the trade - i.e.

- Still and forced air incubators
- Scales
- Heated brooding units
- Washing facilities
- Food preparation area.

We also have a quail breeding unit, which has been quite successful, and which we hope will very soon be capable of supporting not only the Club's breeding project's needs, but also the individual needs of the Club members.

In addition, we have a 42 cu.ft. capacity freezer which enables us to keep a good stock of hawk food. This includes - quail, rats, rabbits, hares, pigeons, day-old chicks.

That briefly covers what we have achieved so far, and I will now attempt to illustrate the keenness of our members, as displayed by their

willingness to part with considerable amounts of their hard-earned cash. This project is very close to their hearts and they are determined to put real efforts into it and not simply talk about it.

As I mentioned, we have eighteen aviaries, as well as thirty four hawks and various equipment. Add to this our annual food bill and our costs up to the end of 1987 totalled over £12,800. That alone I believe shows how seriously our Club takes its breeding project.

We have projected costs for 1988 of £9,000 of which £5,000 has already been allocated by the General Committee to the breeding project. This includes the purchase of a closed circuit television and video system, hopefully for recording our successes for showing at Club meetings etc.

The Welsh Hawking Club has to date raised £2,200 from various Raffles, Prize Draws, and the like, and this is especially earmarked for the breeding project. Also going towards this project is the £1,150 gained from Game Fair Flying Displays.

As I have said, the Goshawk is the favourite bird of the vast majority of our Club members. The reason for this is the Goshawk's unique and particular abilities of which you are doubtless aware. It is all the more unfortunate that it is also one of the most difficult birds to breed. For this reason, our Club has embarked upon a considerably more ambitious breeding programme than previously. To this end we have, over the past year, imported thirteen Goshawks from Hungary, especially for breeding. These birds were quarantined in the Club's own

quarantine quarters, which are capable of housing thirty hawks.

All of these Goshawks were passagers and had to be manned by members before being selected for pairing and put into breeding enclosures. It is the firm belief of the Welsh Hawking Club that we need a substantial pool of Goshawks to draw from to be able to obtain the numbers of 'in condition' hawks to form a viable breeding stock.

It is imperative that we appreciate that as we obtain these hawks from Hungary (where they are still being killed in large numbers) we are not unduly increasing the pressure on wild stock and in fact any successes we do achieve in the future can only be to the good of the Goshawk.

Finally I would suggest that all information obtained by all interested parties, and especially members of the various Hawking Club breeding projects, be pooled, to enable us all to achieve our aim and bring about the successful breeding of Goshawks. When all is said and done, what we must achieve to ensure our future as falconers, is to establish effective breeding of Goshawks in the enclosures of our Club members. This is not simply desirable, it is imperative. It is also essential that this project is taken on before it is too late and is managed as skillfully and with as much care as possible. I believe that our Club has the skill, care and motivation to achieve success.

*G. Baston*



## Individual Members Report *S. Wilkinson*

### Goshawks - Artificial Insemination - 1982



During the late 1970's, I became interested in the propagation of Birds of Prey, through artificial insemination. Until that time, my only A.I. experience had been with domestic fowls - the results of which were certainly encouraging.

In 1980, I was successful in my attempts at A.I. with a pair of imprint Sparrowhawks. These birds were housed singly, in 6ft cubes made from 3 sections (back and two sides) from 6ft square lap fencing - the front being constructed from 1' x 1' lengths of timber, including the door. The roof was partially open to the elements, and covered by 1/2' Norfine Plastic Netting with a 2ft x 2ft plywood board over one corner as shelter.

Both these birds were completely humanised, and would display to me through the slatted front of the aviary.

By late April, the Musket was copulating on the fist whenever I entered the aviary, and was constantly trying to pass quail to me - a habit I encouraged to strengthen 'our' pair bond.

When entering the female's cube with a plucked quail, she would snatch it from me, and then immediately solicit copulation by going into the horizontal position with much shaking of feathers and would allow me to place my hand on her back and around her vent.

Inseminations were carried out long before the first egg appeared and, time permitting, as often as possible.

A total of six eggs were laid, only two of which were fertile. These were placed under a small bantam - as I don't like incubators. One of these eggs hatched, and the chick which turned out to be a Musket, was hand-reared up to maturity. The Spar did not recycle.

Boosted by my small success with the Spars, I decided to try the same technique with Goshawks.

I already had a four year old imprint female, which came in from Finland as an Eyass and was able to borrow a friend's five year old Tiercel - also Finnish. These birds were housed separately in 8ft x 8ft x 10ft high, marine ply pens, again with slatted fronts. Interactions between myself and the two birds, followed the same pattern as for the Spars, and were almost identical in the way in which the birds responded.

Again, inseminations were carried out, long before any eggs were laid. Fine glass capillary tubes were again used, as for the Spars. These tubes were obtained from a hospital suppliers in Liverpool, and are very reliable. One end is coloured red and is fire-polished and, provided the fire-polished end and not the other much rougher end is inserted into the bird, it is perfectly safe.

Semen was drawn into the tube from the glove after copulation by the male, and transferred to the female's pen immediately.

Insemination was via the oviduct, which would evert quite alarmingly, when she was in a receptive mood. Eggs were removed from the tyre nest, as laid and surprisingly the female just went on and on - eleven eggs were laid altogether the last four being very small.

The whole clutch was incubated by a large Maran chicken, and after a fortnight of incubation, it was obvious through candling, that the four small eggs were all clear. The remaining seven normal eggs were all fertile and were in various stages of development.

Of these seven eggs, one failed during the last week of incubation, but the remaining six all hatched normally I must point out, that no chicken is allowed to hatch a raptor egg, and as soon as an egg pips, it is placed in a Horabator incubator to complete hatching.

Five out of the six Eyasses showed immediate problems when being fed by me. It seemed they were having great difficulty swallowing, and would throw their heads right back and would eventually fall right over onto their backs in order to get the food down. Vets were consulted, but no solution could be found to this malady which sadly became worse and ended with the death of the five. The remaining youngster was hand-reared with a group of six young Harris's of the same age and it seems that some of the Harris's easy going qualities rubbed off on to him, as he became extremely tame. He eventually went to a falconer, and gave good results as a hunting bird. No further attempts at A.I. with Goshawks took place as the male bird died a few months later and the female returned to her original owner.

In 1987 natural breeding was attempted with a pair W.H.C. birds. The female was an imported four year old Hungarian Passage bird and the Tiercel was a three year old bird, of we believe, Finnish origin, which had been seized by Customs in America.

As far as size was concerned the two birds were almost identical, and I feel that the small Hungarian females are not a threat to a Finnish male.

So the birds were housed together throughout their first year, without any show of aggression by either bird whatsoever.

Sadly these birds were completely out of synchrony with each other. The Tiercel came into breeding condition a full five weeks before the female and although copulation did take place towards the end of the period, I felt that the sperm count must have been extremely low as all eggs were infertile.

I do feel, however, that given time, these birds will synchronise, and will breed successfully.



*An aerial photograph showing the block of 8 Club Aviaries in South Wales, arrowed on the left-hand side.*

# THE HUNGARIAN LEGEND OF THE TURUL AND THE BOW & ARROW OF THE HUNGARIAN WARRIORS

by L. de Bastyaï



Our friend Allen Burrows standing on the sword below the wings of the legendary bird of the Hungarians - "THE TURUL", near the town Tatabánya in West Hungary

Some time ago I had a photograph from our friend Allan Burrows, (see illustration). As we can see Allan is standing below a large iron and bronze statue of an Eagle-like bird with a large sword in its feet. This big statue was sculptured by a Hungarian artist named Gyula Donath who lived in Hungary from 1850 to 1909. The statue stands on a hill near the Austrian border close to the town of

Tatabánya, which celebrates the foundation of Hungary's 1000 year history. The statue, because of its siting, is visible whether travelling from the Austrian border towards Hungary or from Hungary towards Austria.

Though many travellers admire this great eagle monument, few understand its historical background story. As the legend goes, an ancient hunter

named Nimrod had two sons named Hunor and Magor. Naturally both became very keen hunters and warriors. From Hunor originated the Huns and from Magor originated the Magyars, or the Hungarians. At that time Nimrod the ancient hunter, his family and his tribe were all living somewhere in Central or Southern Asia, perhaps around Turkestan or as the Hungarian legend says in Szitty-

afold. This means the home or country of the Szittyas where all the Hun and Magyar tribes originated.

In the legend, Emese the mother of the two boys had a dream in which she saw a great eagle flying towards her. It came closer and closer and finally swooped down and made love to her. The vast bird flew up again into the sky only to swoop down again to earth, grabbing a large flaming sword and flying off in the direction of the west. After Emese woke up from this dream she gave birth to Attila the Hun. After he had learnt all his skills in hunting and hawking he led the tribes and his warriors against the west countries, finally occupying nearly all of the west with his brother Magor. In his great battles he wore a shield on the front of which was a picture of the great bird Turul. The species of this big eagle like bird is still

a mystery. Could this bird be a kind of eagle like the Berkut or perhaps a goshawk, for in Central Asia there is still a hunting bird, not called Turul, but Toghrul which in some places is the term used for a goshawk. It could even be the enlarged size saker, the Altai gyrfalcon. These birds were nesting in the Altai Mountains and were the most loved hunting bird of the ancient tribes there. Could this large saker then be the Turul?

The legend says that the two sons of Ghengis Khan went wildfowling up in the north and returned with two camels loaded with swans and waterfowl as a gift to the hungry people of the town of Samarkand, a town that still exists to this day. The legend also relates that the battle shield of Attila was painted with a large hunting bird depicting feathers standing on top of its head, but

whether these were the ornate feathers of a hood or that of the upstanding crest feathers of this hunting bird can only be conjecture. Many Hungarian ornithologists and historians have studied this legend one of whom I know, Jacob Vonoczky-Schenk the director of the Hungarian Ornithological Institute, who corresponded in this matter with professor Dementiev, Director of Ornithology at Moscow University, one of the best known authorities on birds of prey and falconry. He also knew of the legend of the Turul but could not exactly be sure of the birds true species.



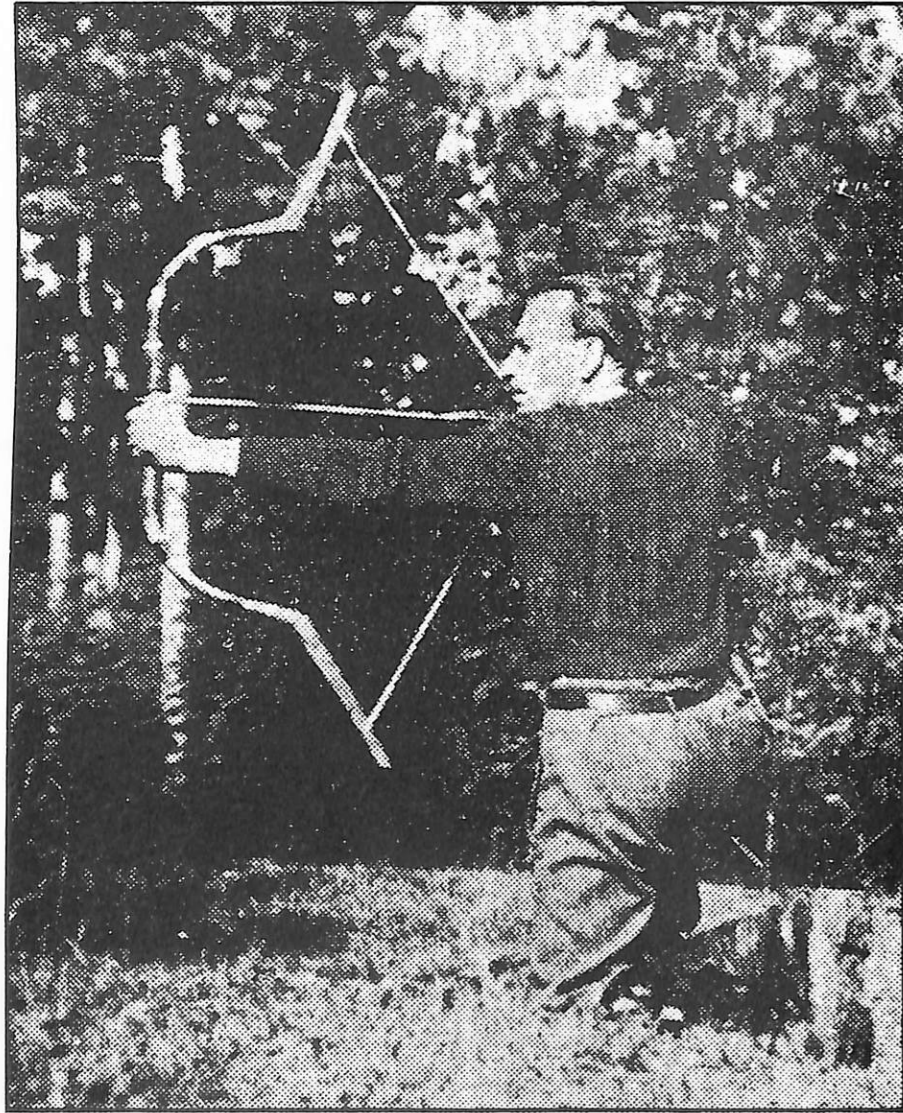
The other "TURUL", the Altai Gyr-Falcon (*Falco Altailus Menshieri*) on the fist of A. Khirgis, Falconer.

Photograph courtesy of: Prof. Dementiev

From the excavations of ancient graves in Southern Hungary, archeologists have found skeletons of warriors, their horses and an unidentified bird of prey, but these bones were much bigger than the present hunting birds found in Hungary today. By the side of these various bones were found buckles, horse bits and the remains of the ancient Hungarian bow and arrow.

This was the most effective weapon of the Hungarian warrior and from these remains the first attempt was made by my late friend, Dr. Gyula Fabian, Professor in Agriculture at Gubello University, to reconstruct this Mongolian bow and arrow.

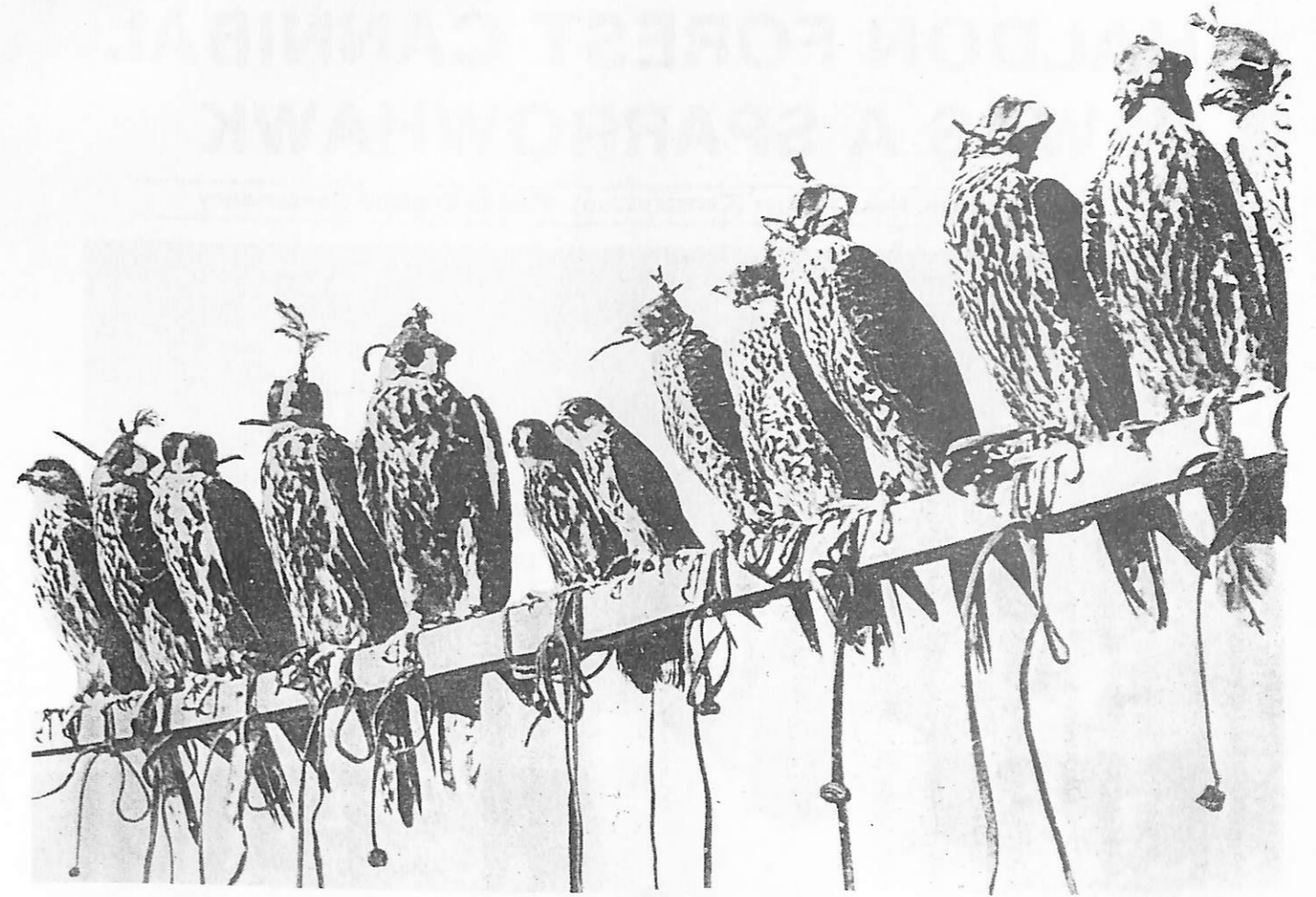
These bows were much shorter than those of the famous English longbows and were constructed from yew wood with each end containing shaped cowhorn with grooves through which horse sinew was positioned making them extremely strong. Dr. Fabian also reconstructed and made the arrows with turkey flight feathers. With this short but dangerous bow the warriors could shoot from horseback whilst travelling at high speed. Their trick was that while travelling at speed especially in retreat, they could turn round in the saddle firing at the pursuing enemy with great accuracy, turning a defensive position into one of attack. They must have been very accurate archers for there was a saying at that time, 'Oh God save us from the arrows of the Magyars'.



*Dr. Fabian using the Eastern short bow which he constructed after studying an ancient weapon found in the 800-year-old grave of a Hungarian warrior.*



*When Dr. Fabian visited the Welsh Hawking Club in Newport, at the foundation of the W.H.C. in 1962.*



*Falcons trained at the Birds of Prey and Falconry School in Gödöllő (back in Hungary)  
Left: Sakers, Middle: 2 Hobbies, Right: Peregrines.  
Photographed by Dr. Istvan Homoki-Nagy and printed with the permission of his widow, Mrs. Susannah Dr-Istvan Homoki-Nagy*

*A cartoon from the Chatsworth House Gamefair.  
Published in the Shooting Times, August 1969.*



**Lorant de Bastyai**

# HALDON FOREST CANNIBAL WAS A SPARROWHAWK

by Robin Khan, Head Ranger (Conservation), West of England Conservancy



Early one morning in June I was sitting with my back to a tree in Haldon Forest watching a fallow buck nibbling the tops off a sallow bush.

The alarm notes of wren, robin and coal-tits made me glance down the slope to my right and, through the trees, flying close to the ground I spotted a sparrowhawk coming towards me carrying a heavy-kill.

As I was partially screened by one or two conifers the sparrowhawk — a second-year female — landed on a low bank not twenty metres in front of me and after a few seconds she proceeded to pluck and eat her prey which I took at first to be a cuckoo.

Hardly daring to blink I watched as she stood with both feet on her prey, tearing at the feathers and flicking them off her beak. She suddenly became aware of my presence and stared hard at me for fully five seconds before leaping into the air and flying off down the slope trailing the kill in one foot.

Wandering over to the bank I examined the pile of feathers and droplets of blood scattered over the vegetation. Imagine my surprise on discovering that her kill was a second-year male sparrowhawk!

This is not the first time I have observed this type of sparrowhawk behaviour.

When living in Cornwall I discovered a sparrowhawk nest on the edge of a mature stand of larch. By climbing into a large beech tree higher up the hillside I was able to view into the nest which contained five young almost old enough to leave the site. During a watch lasting an hour or so the adult female suddenly appeared on the edge of the nest, deposited a partially plucked kill and left as quietly as she had appeared.

The three largest youngsters set about their meal, tugging at the feathers and tearing off lumps of meat.

Focusing my binoculars on the kill in order to identify the prey that was being brought to the nest I was more than surprised to see that it was an adult male sparrowhawk.

I wondered at the time if these young birds were devouring their father; it so happened that after more hours of watching, the adult male was not seen again.

It is worth noting that in both these examples of cannibalism there was never a shortage of the birds normal food.

Dr. Ian Newton, an authority on the sparrowhawk, makes reference to this behaviour in some length in his publications, but as someone who has a deep interest in birds of prey and their behaviour I would be most interested in any unusual observations of this kind.

*Note:*  
Any observations regarding this article will be passed on by the Editors.

*Reproduced from Slasher, Newspaper of the Forestry Commission, with their kind permission*

