

The **Austringer**



The Welsh Hawking Club News Journal

No. 31 1999

Letter from the Editor

David Jones

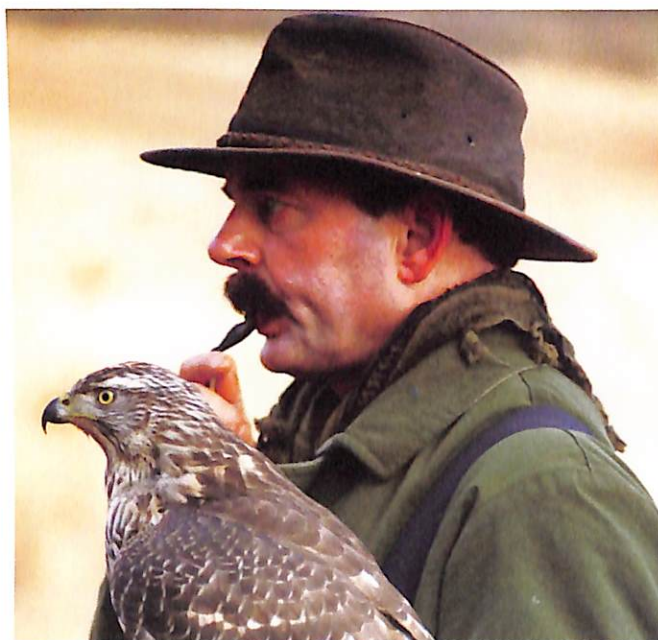
WHAT a great job this is! Talking and meeting interesting people that Fly, Breed, Film and Paint Raptors of all kinds. I would be lost without their input. Our advertisers, many of whom are club members and personal friends, support our club, our activities and this journal, so once again a big thank you from the committee and myself. Good news! The club's finances are healthy and memberships are growing at an alarming rate, it just shows what a good committee can do.

What have we achieved over the past year?

We have opened two new regions of the W.H.C. The Bath region and the Essex region are both well supported. We have accepted over 150 new members and organised more field events than ever before. The 'Family Fun in Falconry' party, held at Garlands Shooting grounds, was a huge success and will be repeated on 3rd and 4th July, so don't miss out on a great party.

We are now affiliated to The Cape Falconry Club of South Africa and they will be holding their annual field meet from 14th to 18th July and the W.H.C. members are welcome to attend.

Our good friends The California Hawking Club are also holding their main club meet on 12th to 14th January, 2000, and W.H.C. members are welcome.



Our web page is up and running, thanks to John Connors, and achieving its main aim to inform the falconry world that we are a progressive club with a long and solid history.

Where are we going this year?

Well, as you know we have the 'Big One', The Welsh Hawking Club International Field Meet. It will be held at Ruthin Castle in North Wales from the 9th to 12th November. The huge lawns will be awash with hawks, falcons and maybe an eagle or two.

Invitations are being sent out to falconry clubs around the world to attend, so don't miss this chance of being at the greatest meet of the year. All hunting will be on kept land, so get your hawk fit for some spectacular flying. The auction and raffle at the meet will be of mega proportions to the norm in quality and quantity of prizes. This is also your chance to stay in a magnificent castle.

Other field meetings: our field officer, Roger James, the committee and members have provisionally arranged seventeen field meets, and more are to be confirmed.

As you see I have managed to persuade falconers from around the globe to share some of their knowledge and stories that should keep us progressing and amused in the art of falconry.

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Front cover and centre pages by Andrew Ellis.

Frontispiece by Mark Upton.

Inside and outside back covers by Lindsay Graham.
Many thanks to these talented people for giving our readers so much pleasure.

Please send all articles and photos relating to Hawking, including Dogs, Ferrets, Book Reviews, innovations etc. and please keep a copy as we cannot return items.

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The Austringer 1999



The Austringer

The Official Journal of the Welsh Hawking Club
Clwb Heborgwr Cymru No. 31 1999

WELSH HAWKING CLUB MEMBER IAF, HAWK BOARD AFFILIATED TO BFSS BASC



Painting by Mark Upton.

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Rules of the Welsh Hawking Club

Name and Objects

1. The name of the club shall be The Welsh Hawking Club.
2. The objectives of the club shall be:
 - a. The promotion of Falconry;
 - b. The provision of advice and information for members and other interested parties;
 - c. The promotion and maintenance of the club Code of Conduct among members.

Constitution

The club shall consist of a President, Vice-Presidents, Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Honorary Secretary, Assistant Honorary Secretary, Honorary Treasurer, Editor, Press and Publicity Officer, Conservation Officer, Breeding Project Officer, Legislative Officer and a Field Officer. Each of these is entitled to attend the committee meetings and to one vote, except the Chairman, who does not have a vote. However, in the event of a vote resulting in a tie the Chairman shall then have the casting vote. Proxy and Postal votes will not be allowed at committee meetings. Only Full members are eligible for election to office. The business of the club will be conducted by the officers and committee (hereafter referred to simply as the committee), which will meet such times as it thinks fit. A quorum for a meeting shall be five members. No one with convictions for offences involving birds of prey shall hold office within the Welsh Hawking Club.

Elections

1. All members of the committee will be elected individually, annually at the AGM. Prior to the election the attendance record at committee meetings for the past year shall be given.
2. During the year should any committee member fail to attend committee meetings regularly then he or she may be asked to give an explanation. If the reason is of insufficient justification the committee may co-opt a member to fill the position. They may also co-opt any person to the committee if considered desirable.

Membership

1. Members of the club will be elected by the committee.
2. No person will be elected without application to the Secretary in writing.
3. The annual subscription rate shall be determined at the AGM each year.
4. Any member whose subscription is unpaid by March of any year shall cease to be a member, but shall be eligible for election as for new members.
5. Should the committee have reason to believe that a member has acted in a manner injurious to Falconry or the club then the member may be required to furnish a written explanation to the Secretary for the consideration of the committee or to appear in person before the committee. The member can claim a personal hearing if preferred. The Secretary must give the member at least 14 days' notice of the committee's requirements. Should the member refuse to comply the committee may terminate the membership. They may also terminate the membership should they decide that the member has acted in a way harmful to Falconry or the club.
6. No member must give talks, interviews or material relating to Falconry, domestic breeding etc. to the media, i.e. TV, radio, press etc., without advice from the committee and/or the Press and Publicity Officer. Any member giving such talks must make every effort to ensure their accuracy.
7. Any member wishing to dispose of a hawk obtained through the club must first offer the hawk back into the club.
8. Only Full members are eligible to vote on club affairs.
9. Proxy and Postal votes are not allowed.
10. Associate members wishing to obtain Full membership may apply in writing to the Secretary for the consideration of the committee. Prior to applying the applicant should normally have completed at least 12 months' membership. The application must give full details of hawk-related experience and should be countersigned by a Full member.

Meetings

1. The Annual General Meeting shall be held at the main Field Meeting each year.
2. Meetings shall be presided over by the President, Chairman or one of the other Officers as appropriate.
3. General meetings will normally be held monthly. Informal meetings will be held as required.

Alteration to Rules

Rules may only be altered by a vote taken at the AGM or at an EGM. Notices of motions for the AGM or EGM shall be sent to the Secretary in writing to arrive at least six weeks prior to these meetings. Any member wishing to call an EGM shall inform the Secretary in writing, stating the reason for such a meeting. The application must be countersigned by 20 Full members.

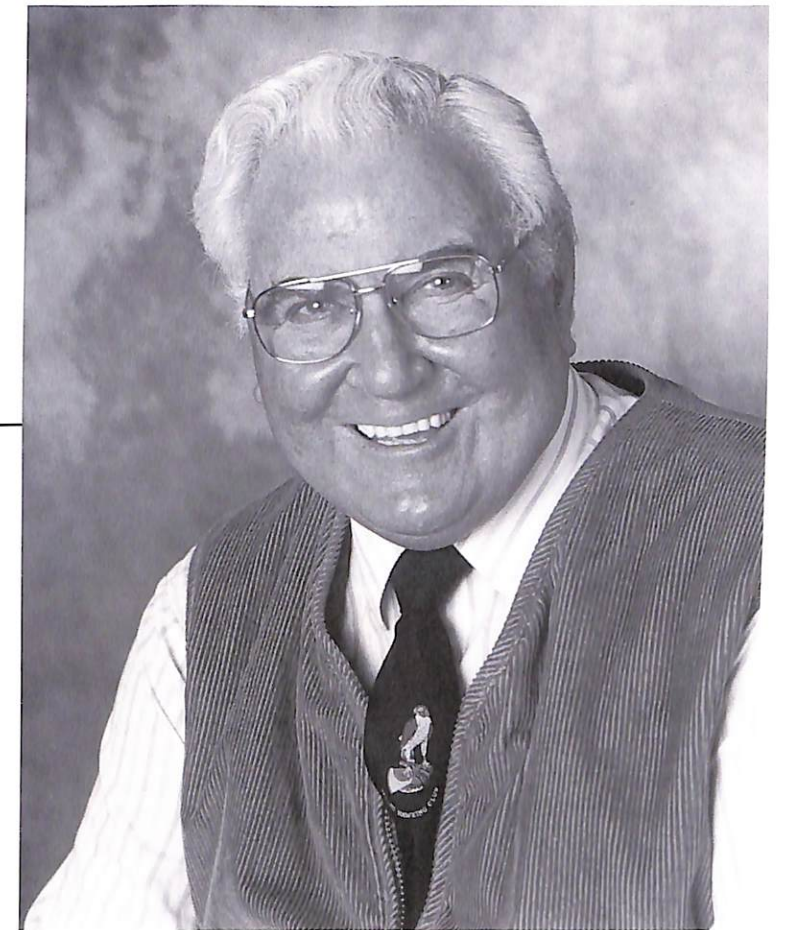
Code of Conduct

1. The well-being of all birds of prey, both domestic and wild, together with the continuation of Falconry, must be the aim of all members.
2. Falconry is the flying of trained birds of prey and owls at suitable quarry found in the natural state. No action must bring this into disrepute.
3. Every hawk must be properly manned and equipped.
4. Every endeavour must be made to recover a lost hawk.
5. All hawks flown free should be equipped with field jesses, at least one bell and, if possible, a transmitter and the name and address of the owner. In the case of unentered or aggressive hawks, eagles, hybrids, exotics etc., special care must be taken to prevent loss.
6. Permission must be obtained before entering upon ground and it must be ascertained whether another falconer already has permission, in which case his/her permission must also be sought. Due respect must be given to landowners and their property.
7. Indigenous hawks that are no longer wanted must either be returned to the wild state in suitable country or passed to someone who will treat them in accordance with this code of conduct. Before a hawk is released the falconer must ensure that it is in good feather, in the highest possible condition, that it can kill for itself and is suitable for release. If there is any doubt that it is able to do so it should be hacked back.

Douglas Morgans

WHC Club President

by Ian Blanter



DOUGLAS, OR 'DOUGY' AS HE IS better known, is easily our longest serving member of the WHC, and still one of our most active members and supporter of the club, attending committee meetings now as our Club President. He is regularly to be seen at our South Wales monthly meetings, game fairs and field meetings, which are never the same if he is not present . . .

He is one of the founding members of the WHC, joining up with John Buckner, our late president Kenneth Macleure and Lawrence Workman soon after the club's formation. They were all members of the local wild fowling club and through a chance meeting with Lorant de Bastyai were introduced to falconry and were all immediately hooked. Douglas, along with the other members, knew little of falconry, although they all had vast experience in field sports but under Lorant's expert tuition and help soon learned the finer arts.

These were the early days of falconry, in the 60s, when falconry restrictions were non-existent and the movement of birds between fal-

coners in Europe was unrestricted. Things were easy in those days, no licences were required to take birds out or bring them back into the country. No such thing as quarantine, and at the end of these overseas meetings trappers would be present to sell wild caught goshawks. The top price for females was about £4 and often males would be given free. Dougy still regularly attends some of these international field meetings in the company of Mike Clowes, Gary Morris, Brian Paterson and other members of the club. Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Germany and Austria are all on the list of visits where Dougy is held in very high regard.

He regularly joined John Buckner's annual pilgrimage to Thrumpster in Caithness, along with many other WHC members, staying at Keeper's Cottage on Lady Harnsworth's estate. One year, on the occasion of Lady Harnsworth's birthday, Dougy, John and Lawrence were invited to her tea party and were privileged to meet and talk at length with her old

school friend The Queen Mother, who was resident at nearby Castle of Mey. Us other mortals there at the time could only envy their opportunity.

Dougy served with the Welsh Guards and saw service in Germany and Palestine. After demobilisation he became a maintenance engineer at Tredomen Engineering Works, associated with the National Coal Board, with whom he stayed until his retirement. I am told that many a good hawk perch was engineered from the Tredomen works. He is renowned for an unquenchable thirst and snuff blending capabilities, which he has now sadly had to give up (such a pity, as my main source of supply for his superior blend has now dried up). Always immaculately groomed and dressed, his admiration for the opposite sex is legend.

Dougy is a great servant and supporter of the club and I doubt he has been off the committee since he joined all those years ago in the early 1960s.



Black Sparrowhawks and European Goshawks — a comparison

by Dr. Adrian Lombard (Sec. Cape Falconry Club)

AS A YOUNGSTER, GROWING UP IN Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) more years ago than I care to remember, the available literature concentrated on northern hemisphere species. While I took my first kills with a Passage Lizard buzzard, I pored over the texts of Woodford and Mavrogordato. The reports of the Northern goshawk thrilled me and this seemed to be an unobtainable and awesome creature.

In time I graduated to flying a Hawk eagle at night on hares. Our hare is nocturnal and gives a highly entertaining flight, running and jinking in the spotlight. I joined Ron Hartley with his succession of fiery musket Black sparrowhawks. At this time I came in contact with my first European goshawk. She was a mature bird with an

obviously chequered career and was totally unresponsive. Later I was to read Beebe's reports of the spectacular performance of these birds and my desire to see these birds fly was rekindled.

In recent years our club was given two female German goshawks and I have had the good fortune to fly both. Magi, the younger, now five, has proved to be a successful but very independent hunter. She has a propensity to self-hunt and ignores her falconer at the first sign of failure. I recall one notable hunt when I slipped her at Yellowbilled duck, which made good their escape. She immediately switched on to a pair of Egyptian geese in a group of pines. When she failed to come to grips with these she refused my attempts to recover her

to the lure and took a stand in the pines, looking out into the lands where she could hear guineafowl calling. In desperation I went into the whet to flush them and some stunning action ensued, ending with the guineas pinned in thick cover. When trying to reflush them a cock Cape Francolin made the fatal error of breaking cover and the hunt finally ended. At the end of that season I handed her back to be flown by someone with more time and more open country. I had been thrilled by her performance but her independence was rapidly making me old.

The next year I flew the other bird, Su, who was in her eighth year. She is a real workhorse, who really understands the plan and fills the bag. She watches the dog to anticipate her flush and rapidly recovers to the glove when she misses, so as to be ready for the reflush. Flying at 900 to 950 grams, she has a wide range of quarry, from greywing francolin at 550g to Egyptian geese at over 2kg.

She is best matched to Cape Francolin, which are a large spurfowl, with hens weighing 750g and cocks weighing up to 1kg. They are wily birds that tend to run but can fly strongly and know their cover. With good management of the hunt spectacular flights can be obtained off points, but if the first flushes fail the hunt can degenerate into a 'rat hunt' through near impenetrable thickets and reed beds.

Guineafowl are common, but somewhat daunting as they congregate in noisy flocks and support one another when tackled by the hawk. Successful hunts involve breaking up the flocks and pursuing individual birds. I find Su to be unenthusiastic on guineafowl

early in the season and she will refuse them if her weight is too high.

It is duck flights that really switch her on. She makes a maximum effort, blasting off the first when duck are flushed close to her. This can provide some intensely exciting action occurring close to hand and leaving one literally weak-kneed. The paucity of duck kills reflects the difficulty I have in getting suitable slips. She has no hesitation at going into water and is a fairly relaxed swimmer but the water here can be pretty cold in winter and does your transmitter no favours.

Early in 1998 I received an Eyas female Black sparrowhawk, whom I named Lucy. She is the third Black sparrowhawk that I have hunted and she fulfils a long-time dream to fly a Black sparrowhawk and a European goshawk at the same time and compare their performance. In the event it proved to be a case of comparing apples and oranges in many ways, as Lucy was an utterly inexperienced eyas whose initial rearing had been somewhat less than optimal, resulting in mild rickets in one leg. She had spent the first five months of her life in an aviary in a bird sanctuary and had fairly severe feather damage. Under general anaesthetic we impied three primaries on one wing and two on the other.

She turned into a lovely bird with a relatively placid nature for a Black sparrowhawk. She flies between 700 and 750 grams and has learned to hunt with great courage and determination. Her range of quarry is smaller than that of the European goshawk as she will only take game birds ranging from greywing francolin to guineafowl. Despite her significantly smaller size, her performance on guineafowl matches that of the European goshawk. She will fly with great determination into a flock of guineas, often taking very long slips, and tries to cut out one of their number. Her weak leg puts her at a marked disadvantage as she often loses the birds she has bound to, a situation seldom seen with European goshawks. She, in



Adrian and Su, the European goshawk.

common with other black sparrowhawks that I have flown, shows absolutely no interest in waterfowl and will not even pursue Dikkop (thick knee plover).

Her season ended somewhat prematurely when she preened out three impied primaries on one wing. She continued hunting despite this with sheer determination. I called off her hunting when I found her, at the end of a long chase on a cape francolin, sitting next to her quarry too exhausted to come to conclusions. She has moulted into a stunning melanistic bird, pitch black with a few white spots on her breast. It has taken very little effort to get her back among the guineas this season, in feather perfect condition.

Certainly there are very significant differences between the European goshawk and the Black sparrowhawk. The obvious differences are borne out in their names: one is a powerful robust goshawk, the other a lighter, somewhat more fragile sparrowhawk. The slow metabolism of the goshawk, which allows it to survive the northern winters, probably accounts for its phlegmatic disposition and relative independence. It probably also helps to be the biggest kid on the block. The same evolutionary pressures, I presume, account for its explosive effort in the chase. The Black sparrowhawk, by comparison, has a much higher

metabolism and is much more responsive, recovering rapidly to the glove and lure. I believe that the initial acceleration of the Black sparrowhawk from the glove is less than that of the European goshawk but, nonetheless, is no slouch and shows great tenacity and determination in the hunt. Both birds have hair trigger responses and use their hearing when hunting. They both hunt well with the dog and watch its behaviour to cue their slips. The Black sparrowhawk will run about in cover with my lemon and white pointer, but has a hatred of black and white dogs, which almost prevents hunting with them. Both birds lack agility on the ground and can be side-stepped by guineas. In this respect the Harris hawks and Changing goshawks have the edge on them.

The Black sparrowhawk is far less robust than the European goshawk and is more exacting to keep in good health. They have much more fragile feathers, particularly in the train, and are prone to leg scale damage. One must watch their weight carefully and be alert for changes in health.

It has been my privilege to fly two superb large accipiters during the past season. It has been a thoroughly thrilling and rewarding experience, although I must admit I was ready to hang up my boots at the end of the season and take a rest.



Adrian Lombard with Lucy, eyas female black sparrowhawk, holding her prize, a cape francolin.

From 26 days with the Hooper Hawk

by Richard Jones

THE TRIP TO THE AIRPORT WAS uneventful, only a one hour and ten minute drive filled with eyas anticipation.

Unable to stand but briefly and staring curiously with wide brown eyes, this twenty-six-day-old wonder was finally in my hands — just a great day in falconry.

The hawk's mother was an egg-laying human-imprinted Western Coopers hawk. The tiercel was a human imprinted semen-donating Harris.

But how this all came about can only be credited to Matt Mitchell of New Mexico. Matt was able to bring the Coopers into egg laying much sooner than naturally would have occurred by using artificial lights to extend her daylight time. This brought the egg laying of the Coopers to be co-ordinated with the semen donating timing of the Harris. Matt was then able to collect the semen then AI the Coopers. A great job by Matt.

At twenty-six days it was difficult to determine if this wonder would be a calm kick back Cooper on a feisty Harris, and would this mostly brown and down creation be as big as a Harris or small, like a Cooper?

Matt Mitchell, the breeder, had flown one and commented that these were a blend of both. There are two sizes, one flying near the 600 gram range, the other smaller, flying under 400 grams. Matt produced two that year, one of each size. I chose the smaller one.

It is always fun to raise an eyas and this proved to be no different. Down and Dandruff all about, with the copious mutes marking every explored territory in the house. Car rides were common, with a handful of towels at the ready to intercept a slice or two; we generally had a good time.

From twenty-six days old food was never openly given. Food was always discovered or placed in his sleeping box. Unable to tear food

at this age, huge amounts of cut-up good quality food was always present.

I've started calling the twenty-six-day-old eyas a male right from the start. No one knows for sure, but size might be a good indication so a name was created by putting the two parents' names together, the 'H' from the Harris, the 'ooper' from the Coopers, so 'Hooper' is his name.

Hooper was playful, enjoyed people and dogs and developed quickly into a long-legged runner. Head and tail straight out, running on legs that were no thicker than a female Cooper's, maybe even smaller. Long toes and slender, also very Cooper-like. The head was big, hopefully more brains than a Cooper.

Hooper loved to sun, wings straight out exposing every feather, laying in the cool grass. Hooper would lay so long he would begin to pant and his feathers would feel warm to the touch. It never seemed to cause any stress so I let him determine his length of stay in the sun. Shade was always nearby, provided by the overhead walnut trees and Hooper would move from sun to shade, then back to sun. Later this observation would have merit, because as Hooper developed into a beautiful Cooper-like brown hawk he was absent of the under insulating down feathers and simply would refuse to fly in cold weather — anything below about 40° — and Hooper would not fly, he would put down one foot then the other and stand solid on the glove.

Hooper's training progressed and he seemed to be playful with the live foot that was discovered during his romps about the yard. Now almost hard penned flight was possible, but for Hooper still not necessary. He enjoyed laying in your lap or standing on your knee. I was determined to keep his



The Hooper Hawk in juvenile plumage.

weight as high as possible for as long as possible. The discovered live food was increasing in size and supplied food was rationed.

No aggression was displayed towards people, in fact at times aggression was limited towards prey. All was okay. "Bring him along slowly," Matt Mitchell recommended, "much like you would a tiercel Harris."

As supplied food was eliminated and carrying Hooper to the live prey hampered in different locations around the five acres we call home, it was Hooper who determined when to fly and when weight reduction was necessary. Hooper had been hard penned for almost a month, despatching his own meals, and I had not yet called him to the fist or a lure.

This may sound odd to some, but a passage can be taught to respond to glove and lure, so again I decided to delay this training until Hooper made the decision.

And, wouldn't you know, it happened soon. Hooper was changing, no longer my little buddy he wanted to hunt. The live lure was used and training began. Weight reduction and the lure

were introduced, then brought to glove for small rewards.

Fairly good response at 380 grams, but not truly effective on wild quarry. Now to fine tune. Hunger, weather and weight, all variables, were used to finally bring Hooper around, warmer days lower weight, cooler days higher weight. Weight management proved to be much like that of a Cooper. Hooper's first wild catch was small, a sparrow, but an honest straight of the fist catch, no carrying, no aggression, but mantling was distinctly there.

Hooper had only seen feathers, taking starlings from the car window was good fun and pretty consistent.

But to challenge Hooper it was off to the fields. It was now evident that Hooper was fast.

Some flights were fast and direct. Some flights were just a circle off the fist, very Harris playful type. It was always great fun to watch Hooper power up to a pole much like a gos.

X-rays showed a break, a green break of the leg. No cast was required but it was wrapped with elastic 'vet wrap' and to restrict all unnecessary movement. "It was the cottontail he caught, I'm sure, because he wouldn't stand on that foot," I explained to the vet as we both looked at the x-rays.

The first furry creature that Hooper had seen, and it was fast and furious, only weighing 380 grams, he just didn't have enough head in his jeans to make the cottontail stick.

Healing time is always frustrating for both hawk and hawker. Hooper's weight increased some, but kept in check. No feeding from glove or lure, just diced provisions.

"What's happened to my happy go lucky hawk?"

After the healing of the broken leg Hooper acted much like an overweight Cooper. Working to the lure and glove with weight reduction brought Hooper back around. All was not the same. Weight management was critical for a successful hunt, but hunt he did and furry creatures were his priority. Small jack rabbits, cottontails and Richardson ground squirrels which weigh about a pound each. Hooper suffered several bites and, using large anklets with fringes helped a lot. There was never any infection from

the bites but I always wondered how such tiny toes could do so well.

Hooper also liked sparrows and mice and even lizards. All were taken in the swift style of the Cooper.

Hooper's flight style seemed to mostly resemble that of the Cooper, possibly because of his small size.

Hooper's wings looked to be Harris in shape, but diminutive. The tail was long and incredibly flexible. Never during his first year of flying was a tail feather bent or broken. Extremely flexible feathers were in the wing as well.

An early warm spring prompted me to put Hooper to moult, and no longer would Hooper be just a brown hawk. The moult was good, fast and complete, but upon taking Hooper up after the moult I realised I should have spent more time working him on the fist and lure, he was also a bit stand offish. Back to the basics for both of us. It was apparent that Hooper had changed. His actions and attitude seemed to be more Cooper-like with no aggression, — very tolerable however.

We entered this new season with more vigour than when we left off. Hooper was hot, taking game every outing. From small sparrows to wrestling with cock pheasants, Hooper was determined.

Hooper would still chase jacks, but now only pestered the big ones. Other problems developed during this second season. At times people in the field would cause Hooper to fly off and wait it out. No amount of luring would bring

him down.

At other times this same behaviour would come up if game was not found timely enough.

Weight management corrected it a little, but I've never liked stressing the hawk. I'd prefer to eliminate the exterior stress cause.

The NAFA meet in Utah was great fun. Hooper travelled well, but the cold was definitely not to his liking at all. Hooper loved the cottontail chases but wasn't able to learn to manoeuvre around the scrub and low growing trees. We normally hunted flat grasslands. Several people were able to see Hooper fly, but Hooper was never comfortable with that many people. We did get our game pin, thanks to a rancher who let us in his barn to chase sparrows that had come in from the cold.

The mature feathers were as durable as ever, never bending or breaking. Possibly, good imping feathers for a Cooper. The alternate bands on the tail are black and white, with the rest of the body resembling an immature Harris, really a striking hawk in colouration.

I've been fortunate to have two great seasons with Hooper and my captive breeding of Coopers has been successful. After much thought I retained the largest female from my Cooper clutch. This female is now with Hooper in a breeding chamber. Both hawks are compatible and there has been some nest activity.

Hopefully, Hooper is a male and is fertile. Maybe I'll soon be working with another twenty-six-day-old wonder.

VIDEO REVIEW

Rook Hawking

by Dr Nick Fox

I was asked to review the video on Rook Hawking by Dr Nick Fox. Now this I found difficult, as Nick is a friend of mine and I've been fortunate to be invited by the master of rooks himself, so I shall keep my golden thoughts in my head.

The way I approached the review was to pass the video around to four experienced falconers and wait for their comments.

Peter Bowyer's review . . .

The fitness of these falcons is remarkable, it just shows what can be done if you make and train a good hawk.

Mike Tucker's review . . .

Spectacular flying, if there's any video as good as this out there I would like to see it.

Tony Pizta's review (Cape Falconry Club) . . .

Fantastic! I have never seen this before. 'Excellent' — really putting the falcons through their paces.

Mark Hinge's review . . .

Excellent, entertaining and professional.

Commercialism (good or bad)

by Bryan Paterson

WE HAVE ALL HEARD THE SAYING 'YOU don't get two chances at giving a first impression'. How true this is.

Are we in the falconry world bothered about giving a good impression of what we do? Some of us are. The general public's perception of falconry is often what they have seen at a show, a so-called falconry display.

This, to most people, is acceptable and educational and should even be encouraged, especially if there is some talk about conservation and welfare thrown in. What would be their perception if falconry was portrayed as a sport, where those involved administered a closed shop and were only interested in seeing their hawks catching and killing birds and animals. How long would we last then?

Falconry displays have long

been a bone of contention within the falconry world. The old school level the lowering of standards at the display gives and, without doubt, in certain cases they are right. That, of course, is if you believe that standards were higher in the old days, which is not necessarily so. Undoubtedly, the increased interest in the keeping of raptors must be attributed in part to the fact that display presenters have introduced a lot more people to the sport. This obviously also applies to those writing articles in magazines. The other side of the coin is that the increase in numbers of people involved and the diversity of interests has given us a bit more political clout than we would have with smaller numbers.

Commercialism has also brought about the invention of a goodly amount of equipment, which

without doubt has led to an improvement in the husbandry of raptors. The increase in the number of people involved in our sport, and therefore the money available, has led to the development of specialised furniture. Tracking equipment has become one of the greatest assets for the welfare of our birds, enabling them to be flown at higher weights and therefore generally flying in better style, resulting in more pleasure for the trainer and onlookers and with fewer birds being lost and suffering, for whatever reason. Flying without telemetry on any species seems crazy to me when you consider the amount of time and effort that goes into breeding and training our birds.

I have written previously about using a bent nut stick as a bow perch when I first became involved

in the sport, very traditional and pleasing to the eye. Now I use stainless steel. Which is most beneficial for the welfare of the hawks? The same applies to the old Pakistani swivels we used to use, hopefully now all relegated to the museums.

Some of the criticism, however, is justified. Most of us have seen displays which leave a lot to be desired. The condition of some of the birds in the weathering area is inexcusable and often shows the inexperience or lack of care by the owner. We all know what imping means, or do we? Birds which look low in condition, mainly due to the display presenter not wanting to end up with egg on his or her face, end up sitting in a tree. Quite often the reason they sit in trees is because they are too low in condition.

Birds sitting out in bright sunlight without any effort being made to offer them shade is another strong criticism. Quite often the display presenters will say that the area they were allocated had no shade. What is to stop them taking their own? Some of us do. The lack of bathing facilities is also heavily criticised. I personally prefer to use a hand spray. I can control what is happening. Quite often timings for flying displays are changed by show organisers and this can be a problem if birds are given free access to baths. However, I do agree that the general public's perception of birds without the facility of water can be alarming. This now falls to the display presenter to provide adequate signs to explain the facts and to have suitably experienced staff on hand to deal with any concerns that the general public may have.

The involvement of the general public in displays, especially children, causes concern among some raptor keepers. Admittedly, care needs to be taken to ensure the safety of those participating and secondly to ensure that the impression is not given that raptors are easy to train and would make



Debbie entertaining the crowds.

good pets, especially for children. I would argue that, if breeders were more discerning as to how they sold birds to, instead of being more concerned about financial gain, the problem of unsuitable people obtaining birds would not arise in the first place. But, after saying that, I obviously realise that if breeders were restricted they would probably be dissuaded from putting in as much effort, which would eventually affect all of us. So where does that argument end? I believe that well presented displays can be an asset to our sport, providing the display presenters are well turned out in their appearance and that their commentary during the display and their dealings with the general public around the weather area, especially for the people who need reassurance as to the welfare of the birds, is of a high standard.

Unfortunately show organisers are controlled by finance and therefore smaller shows often choose cheaper display teams, some of which are only displaying on a part time basis. Many of these have limited experience working with the general public and, more often than not, have poor quality equipment and quite often do not have all the required display licences. In some cases they are not covered by public liability insurance, which is very risky. These display presenters are often the ones who make excuses for not flying their birds because it's too windy, too wet, too hot, too cold,

too confined, too many dogs, too many children, too much noise. I could go on.

Transporting numbers of birds can also lead to problems. It's quite common to see birds being transported in the back of vehicles, some of them hooded. This does not only apply to display presenters. The general public's perception of this is often alarming. How would you like to travel long distances with a bag over your head? A well constructed travelling box, giving the bird security from others and comfort in a confined space,

especially if there is also a dog on board, would seem to me to be better for everyone concerned. There is no worry about people gawping into the vehicle when we travel through a town, distracting other motorists when we are travelling along the motorway or finding lots of children looking into the vehicle when we come out of a pub after a well earned rest.

The old British Field Sports Society, now the Countryside Alliance, have their own list of approved display presenters. To get on to this list one has to agree to stick to strict guidelines, which are drawn up by the society's own falconry advisory committee. Some of the society's own local secretaries choose to ignore this list — which is not very encouraging for those of us who do make the effort.

If you are concerned at what you see at a show, express your concerns to the display presenter. There may be a good reason. If you get no joy, speak to the show secretary. Explain your concerns, based on facts and not just personal preferences. If you have good reason to believe that the law is being broken speak to someone in authority. But do remember, we live in a democratic society which encourages free enterprise. Just because there is something which we personally don't like doesn't make it wrong. However, we do need to ensure that things are done correctly to safeguard all of our interests.

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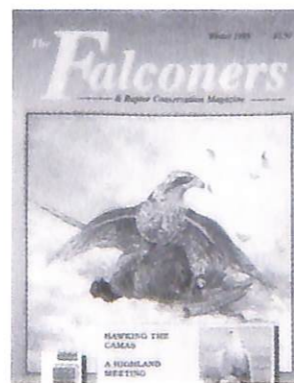
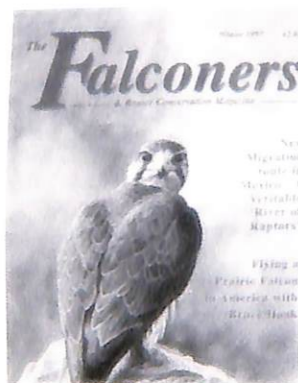
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Born to Fly

by Mark Upton

I FIND IT SURPRISING WHEN YOU LOOK at falconry displays today how few second generation falconers there are. Hopefully, with the increase in the popularity of the sport, this will change over the next few years.

One of my earliest memories is waking up next to my younger brother and looking up to see two pairs of dark eyes staring down on me. There were the deep brown eyes of two jack merlins on a makeshift screen perch. The night before we had arrived in Scotland with our mother, after a day's travel. We'd been met by a terrific thunderstorm and downpour which knocked out all the lights. I don't know why we had been put to bed with the merlins, presumably there was a lack of room. But this was my first hawking trip at the age of four and it was a start of an obsession with falconry and love for the purple grouse moors of Scotland, which has stayed with me till now.

To me a large part of the

enjoyment of my sport is the interaction between me and my father when we're hawking together. With the pressure on hawking ground and the cost of it these days most falconers are forced to hawking with friends to spread the costs. On the whole this adds to the sport, as hawking has always been a very social pastime and it's always nice to see friends' hawks fly and for them to watch yours. There is nothing nicer than sitting around with a drink in the evening discussing the day's sport, going through so and so's flight and giving advice to each other when asked. Hawking with one's father (and I hope with one's son) takes this a step further. Advice can be given without feeling it is criticism, which unfortunately is sometimes felt, even between the best of friends. Competition which sometimes rears its ugly head between friends is taken away as we are just as happy for each other's hawks to go well as we

handled these hawks all year and know them like our own. Often a hawk bred by me is flown by my father and vice versa, which adds to the interest. My good tiercel was bred by my father and he is just as excited by one of his flights as he is by one of his own peregrines or just as upset if things go wrong. The closeness of a father and son relationship adds another degree; we usually, with the odd mistake, know what the other is doing without saying and know when some help is needed with a flush or a falcon needs to be taken down quickly.

As a falconer I couldn't have been luckier than being born an Upton. My father, Roger Upton, was one of only a handful of falconers to be practising the sport in the fifties and sixties, along with his friend and teacher Stephen Frank, my godfather. I don't ever remember Steve lecturing me in religion or other things godfathers are supposed to teach their godchildren, but more importantly he has installed the hawking bug in me and helped me enormously, along with my father, and has been a great example of how the sport should be practised. Most of my early years grouse hawking were just summer holidays and not really considered as anything out of the ordinary. Although, without realising it, I must have been watching and learning from my father and the many falconers who he has flown hawks with. I was given a jack merlin, along with my brother, when I was about nine and I remember well flying them around the corridors of the house from fist to fist. As well as these indoor flights we had some great lark flights, with both merlins acquitting themselves well. Another advantage of being born an Upton is a family history of artistic ability, a gift that has been passed on to me. I have always painted, ever since I remember, and of course many of my works have been hawking orientated. After leaving school and taking a year off I attended art school, which was a great grounding.

Dad, Steven Frank and me hawking in Dornoch, 1997.




Since then I have painted professionally, making it my full time career. That is between hawking trips. In fact the two things go very well together, which might explain why so many falconers are artists and vice versa. I was very aware when starting painting that it would be very easy to get a name as a bird of prey artist with the hawking connections I had, but I also saw that this was a very limited part of the art world and could end up rather restrictive. So I really concentrated on sporting art as a whole, specialising in racing, in which field I am now well known. Now I find that I'm getting more and more falconry

commissions and the hawk paintings are coming back to the fore.

Hawks, like horses and other animals, are very difficult to paint unless you really understand them, and this is achieved by years of being around them and handling them. That's why the best falconry artists, such as Lodge, Wolf and Reid-Henry, have been so good and loved by falconers who see the inadequacies of the artist that ordinary ornithologists rate highly.

Of course, another advantage of having a father as a falconer is that, in my case, he is very well known around the world through being in falconry for so long and writing

about the sport. This is a great advantage to me, both in my painting and in being able to travel nearly anywhere in the world and be welcomed as Roger Upton's son. This has been the greatest advantage in the Middle East, where there is great store set in the father-son relationship, as in families as a whole. This has meant that, from an early age, I have been taken on Houbara Hawking trips and treated by the Arabs as their own son and been able to glean a great deal of knowledge from their hawking methods and the flying of passagers and haggards, which is unfortunately impossible in the UK with present day restrictions. 



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Peruvian Falconry and the Meeting of Friends

by Martyn Paterson

FROM THE CHRONICLES OF THE SPANISH Conquistadors we know that a simple form of falconry was practised before and during the Inca Empire in Peru. Hunting scenes with domesticated birds of prey can be found on pottery from ancient Peruvian culture such as the 'Nazca culture'. After the Spanish conquest, Peruvian falconry died out for hundreds of years. It was not until the 1970s that Luis Bertochi and Oscar Beingolea started to practise falconry once again in Peru, and they have passed their knowledge down to a new generation of young Peruvian falconers. Today there are around twenty active falconers and around 100 bird of prey keepers in the country. The falconry revival began by using the traditional species of Western falconry — the peregrine — but slowly falconers began to take advantage of indigenous species, many of which were previously unknown in falconry, such as the

Aplomado falcon (*Falco femoralis*) and the Bicolored hawk (*Accipiter bicolor*). Harris hawks (*Parabuteo unicinctus*) also became popular. Around thirteen different species have now been flown at quarry in Peru. It took time and experimentation to find the best quarries and hunting grounds for these birds. The slopes of the High Andes are a favourite location for hunting trips but desert and swampy areas prove more accessible for everyday falconry.

In the summer of 1996, my introduction to Peruvian falconry took place — in Wales. Pedro Yrigoyen came to work with us in Carmarthen for three months. He had learned English from back copies of *Hawk Chalk*, and showed us photos of his beautiful female Bicolored hawk. In November 1998 I flew to Peru to spend ten days with Pedro and the remaining time touring the country. Unfortunately, no one was flying hawks seriously during my visit;

the main hunting season is from July to October, when the swamps are full of water and bird life. But desert areas can be used all year round.

On my first day in Peru I met two of Pedro's friends, Fernando Angulo Pratolongo and Denis Cisneros Alcazar. They had recently bred their first Aplomado falcon, only the third to be bred in Peru and the first by artificial incubation. The chick was about twenty days old when I saw it. The only other raptor species to be bred in Peru are peregrines (*F.p. cassini*) by Jose Antonio Otero in 1996.

Pedro lives in Chiclayo, a city about 600km north of the capital, Lima. He had driven down on his motorcycle to Lima a couple of days before I arrived. He had devised an ingenious method of transporting his female Bicolored hawk; he had attached shoulder straps made of car inner tubes to a strong cardboard box, made a door, fixed a perch inside . . . and

Martyn Paterson in the beautiful Andes.



Immature female Aplomado falcon (Falco femoralis).

then drove the whole way with the box on his back and the hawk inside!

We were picked up early on the second day by another of Pedro's friends, Jose Luis Gagliardi, who lived about 250km south of Lima, close to Pisco. As we travelled down to his farm, Jose Luis pointed out about ten peregrines sitting on radio masts or telegraph pillars. As much of the coastline of Peru is semi-desert with few trees or tall buildings, these artificial structures make the best vantage points for raptors. He showed us an area where we might be able to trap some peregrines the following day. Once we arrived at his farm he showed us his mews and aviaries, which were very well designed. Sitting on blocks on the weathering lawn were two female aplomados he had bred himself, along with a female *anatum* peregrine (*F.p. anatum*) and a male Bicolored hawk. He also had a pair of tiny Peruvian Harris hawks, and a beautiful male Orange-breasted falcon (*Falco deiroleucus*), which he had rescued from a parrot dealer in a market.

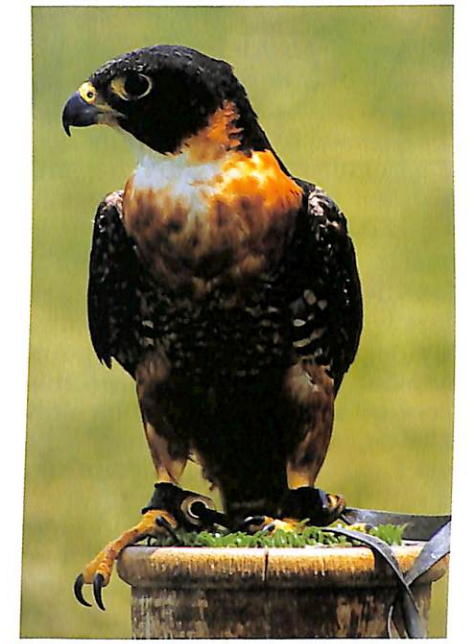
Late afternoon we took one of the young female Aplomados and the male Bicolored to an open area ten minutes' drive from the farm. Our quarry was small birds, such as Long-tailed mocking birds (*Mimus longicaudatus*), Red-breasted meadowlarks (*Sturnella bellicosa*) and Croaking ground

doves (*Columbina cruziana*). Unfortunately, neither bird was really in the correct hunting condition and after a number of unsuccessful flights we decided to call it a day. We spent the evening having a few beers, swapping stories and watching videos of more successful outings.

The following day we had an early rise and drove to the area Jose Luis had pointed out to us on the previous day. Three different peregrine subspecies are found in Peru; the resident *cassini* peregrine breeds on the western slopes of the Cordillera de los Andes from July to September, and young birds can be seen between September and December. They disappear after this date, probably migrating east to the Andes or south, their disappearance coinciding with the appearance of *anatum* and tundra peregrines (*F.p. anatum* and *F.p. tundrius*), which migrate down from North America between September and November. We had an excellent morning, trapping an adult male tundra, which we released, and an immature male tundra which Jose decided to keep and train to catch ducks. I have since heard that this bird is flying very well.

After saying our goodbyes we left that afternoon and caught a bus back to Lima. The following day we began a five day trip on two 600cc trail bikes, a trip that would take us right over the Andes and down into the jungle on the other side. It was a fantastic experience, breathing the thin, cold mountain air on remote mountain tracks before descending several days later into lush jungle. We saw a number of wild raptors on the journey, including a pair of Aplomados, and had some close

Male Orange-breasted falcon (Falco Deiroleucus).



Male Bi-coloured hawk (Accipiter bicolor). White-winged dove (Zenaida asiatica).

views of Andean condors. On our return I spent a few more days with Pedro in Lima before starting a tour travelling around much of southern Peru.

My time in Peru was a fascinating experience and gave me memories to treasure. It is always interesting to visit falconers in different countries and cultures and see how they view our sport. Raptors are still persecuted in Peru, and a variety of different species of raptors are routinely offered for sale to the public in local bird markets, usually in poor condition. Captive breeding is in its infancy in this country and it is encouraging to see how many falconers are set on breeding their own birds rather than taking them from the wild. I look forward to returning to Peru in the future, to these dedicated falconers and their birds once more.

A Challenge

by Ian Blantern

DON'T GIVE IN. I BELIEVE ALL LONGWINGS will go up eventually, although it has taken me a good number of years to come to this conclusion. I look back at the birds I have 'failed' with and which were used as rook hawks and I don't mean this in a derogatory way. I am quite sure they would have turned into good high mounting game hawks, if only I had not written them off so soon. I also honestly think that once birds are flown as rook hawks, they can never be turned into classic game hawks. They definitely can't be used for both disciplines. This is a personal point of view, and one that I might be taken to task over.

The first bird I had that really went up was a tiercel peregrine/saker. Some older members may remember this tiercel which I named Sid. This 'little bird' which flew at 1lb 8oz spoilt me and really did turn me into a converted game hawk and I have never turned or looked back since. I picked up this bird late in the season as an eyass and I took it and a falcon with me to Scotland, prepared merely to get it manned and at least coming to the lure. On his first free flight it shot off, heading in a straight line for the distant coastline causing me to wet myself and, with my heart in my mouth, I frantically shouted and swung my lure. To my relief it returned and to my amazed delight it came back over me whilst maintaining a pitch of 300ft. From that day on we never looked back and, I openly admit, the hawk made the falconer. I flew him for three seasons and eventually lost him to some evil shotgun moron.

My replacement was another peregrine/saker, but this time a female as I wanted to address Sid's only shortcoming, his refusal to take pheasant. I couldn't believe my good luck, for this bird flying at 2lb 1oz, similarly took to the wing and, although lacking in the style and perfect manners of the smaller tiercel, very quickly began mounting naturally once she was

fit. I also eventually lost this bird, but to have had the good fortune of two birds which both mounted as stylish game hawks was, as I was soon to discover, pure good fortune and luck. I should point out that the land we fly on is as flat as a pancake, so neither bird ever had the advantage of learning to gain lift from hills or mountains, they just seemed naturals.

It took me a long time to recover from these two losses, for in my wildest dreams I could never imagine I would ever repeat, let alone surpass, these two exceptional 'waiting on' birds. It's funny how time is a great healer and it wasn't long before I wanted to get going again and I managed to obtain a gyr/peregrine bred by Martin Jones from my rook falcon. I suppose the circus act that prevailed on collecting him should have prepared me for all that was to come. Hooding him for the journey home was a nightmare. He just wouldn't sit on the fist and lifting him to replace him on the glove only compounded the vicious circle. Spraying him with water temporarily overcame the immediate problem of getting him home in the car. Freshly taken up birds I always leave at least a week before I attempt anything, giving them fair chance to settle down and take in their new surroundings. It took weeks before I was able to get anywhere near him and essential things like weighing him were just one of the many major obstacles against progress. He would bate off the weighing machine the minute I just touched the jesses, bate from the fist even when hooded if I merely touched a feather, and day to day attempts at manning became an endless and fruitless battle. These conflicts continued relentlessly during early training and flying attempts.

The next problem came when he began flying free. Six feet seemed to be his pitch and he showed no inclination as to what turning for a return pass to the lure was about,

let alone going up. During those first few weeks of training (torment), I don't think there was one occasion when I didn't have to get the telemetry out to find him. Flying so low it was impossible to ascertain in which direction he had gone once he disappeared behind a hedge or wall line. It was either that or trying to get him back from a wall where he would just sit and take stand. Strangely enough, on being located he would come to the lure all right, albeit in his own good time. During this period, I found no endearing features to which I could relate with him. He was a horrible character and I loathed him. He wound me up so much I genuinely felt for his safety, since no other bird I had owned got anywhere near this avian delinquent — he just got to me. I didn't get much solace from friends in Canada and the USA who I contacted on the internet. They all laughed and said 'if I was mad enough to take on a gyr/pere then that was the price I had to pay'. Their problems seemed to mirror mine. The only consolation, if there was one, was the knowledge that it was not just me with a problem. It didn't help either when Martyn Paterson said all the ones they had bred and flown had been no trouble at all. I was completely at my wit's end and felt that if this was what I had endure, for my own piece of mind and his safety, I would pension him off to the security of an aviary.

Peregrine/sakers were my previous great love and success, so I began looking for a similar bird, the sort that I had empathy with and such great success before. No such luck, it was now so late in the season and there was just nothing available. By this time I had calmed down somewhat, managing to look at my problems with a little more objectivity. I decided to resolve the matter one way or another and try another slant to try and overcome my difficulties, so I took on the

challenge, I wasn't going to be beaten that easily. I began thinking about Delta kites and even made pre-purchase enquiries, but my resolve was to try flying him again but with a different approach. In any case I really couldn't come to terms with these Delta kites and all the disciplines and hassle in setting everything up. I resolved to fly him again but only if there was game present, and at whatever his pitch and position. I would then flush game even if he was only at 6ft. After all, he wasn't eventually named Challenge for nothing.

It was not too difficult to spot and locate game, and so began this rather bizarre exercise of either having the bird on a wall or someone's fist, me with the lure and the quarry somewhere in between us. I would call the bird, off he would go and so would I, charging the vague area of the located quarry, sometimes a single pheasant, sometimes a single or three or four partridge. The whole exercise was a complete donkey's breakfast and it must have appeared a real Fred Carno circus act. Although 10 feet was his height, the first positive sign was that he would at least chase everything that was put up and indeed he actually caught an unsuspecting partridge which unfortunately flew straight towards him. We did this for just four days and on the fifth day I decided I would delay the flush and see just what would happen, he might even turn and come round on the turn to see what it was all about. Lo and behold a miracle, he actually turned and was up to 20ft. I left him flying even longer and with another turn, saw him at 30ft at which point I felt a flush was imperative before he lost interest and was off again. Half a stoop and a tail chase but it was progress.

The most amazing feature of this week's exercise was that his whole character and demeanour changed as if at the click of the fingers. He was a TOTALLY different bird from the maniac I had picked up some month earlier. I can't even begin to describe the dramatic change. It's a fact we have never looked back since those few short days and it was only a little longer before he was at 200ft, then 300ft and finally when I was lucky and conditions were right, over 1000ft.

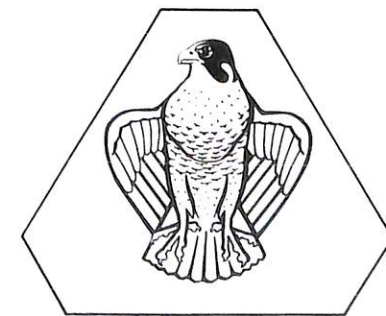
You surely can't forget the weather during 1998, it was atrocious and it became more and more difficult to get out for regular flying, but even so we finished off with something like thirty head of game. Considering that I always try and aim for the spectacular, rather than just any old flight, I was really excited with Challenge and my first season with him. If I tend to be choosy in wanting the right set-up it's only because I want the optimum challenge and spectacle. I need to be assured that there will be game to flush and, bearing in mind that a stoop would generally be from 600ft upwards, I also want to know that the land is open and free enough from fences and other hazards. What was especially gratifying was that he always seemed to put on a good show for the big occasions. Flights at our field meet in Wales, the moors of Scotland or on the Marlborough Downs when guests were present were breathtaking, even if on each occasion he failed to kill. This for me is what long wing flying and game hawking is always about, when those rigid disciplines finally

produce that one great stoop and the hairs on your neck just prickle and stand on end in awe at such sights.

I am getting carried away again. The point I began trying to make is not the methods I used because there are many others, but in the perseverance which I believed paid off. Years ago I might well have given up, believing that it was another low pitch, hopeless flyer that wasn't going anywhere and believing that it was always someone else who had the luck picking a natural high flyer. I am sure there are many out there, similar to me, who in the past have been a little too impetuous and impatient. Giving up too soon, when early results were not forthcoming, denies the door opening and uncovering all those untapped talents. Young birds especially need a lot of time to build on experience, and it may not even be in their first season before they switch on. A casual approach will not produce results but with clear aims, which need to be carefully planned and thought out, success will be rewarded. 🦅

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Winter 97 in Scotland

By Jeff McKnight

I HAD HEARD A LOT OF REALLY GOOD stories about this place in Scotland, where the blue hares run thick and fast and the rabbits outnumbered the human population at 5,000 to one. As a regular visitor to Scotland, I decided to ring, Bri Paterson, who was the main man, and go and see for myself this place called Lochindorb. Loading up my team of three Harris, Tasha my five-year-old female, Ty my three-year-old male, the newest member of the team, and my young female Harris, Amber, and last but not least Pepsi, my springer. On following the instructions given to me by Brian I found myself in (Devon) so I decided to turn around and head north. Sure enough near the top end of the A9 road I entered the realms of the true falconer and Austringer's delight — the Highlands of Scotland.

Scotland's Grantown-on-Spey is a small town with great pubs (I've always thought) and even better food. About five miles north through the town you'll see some of the most beautiful countryside in Britain. Turning off the A9 at Carrbridge I followed the signs for Lochindorb. After a short time, which seemed like forever down

twisting little roads, I came upon a sign for Lochindorb Lodge. The view from the road across the loch to Lochindorb Lodge is like an artist's picture come to life. With the moors surrounding you and the chattering of the grouse echoing across the loch, the Lodge is just visible, sitting in among a small clump of trees looking out across mysterious waters where a ruined castle is anchored to an island. As you drive through the gate to the Lodge you pass the keeper and caretaker's cottages, set within the grounds, Very important people, who supply you with a roaring fire and good food on the table after a hard day's hunting on the moors. Once there I was welcomed by the falconers of the previous weeks, and I listened to stories of the ones that got away, then found out where everything is. But for now it was time to check the birds. I put them out on the lawn overlooking the loch to stretch their wings after their long journey in their boxes. I then took the dog for a run and made time to relax. I had a quiet drink in front of a roaring log fire, met this weeks falconers and prepared myself for the hunting to come.

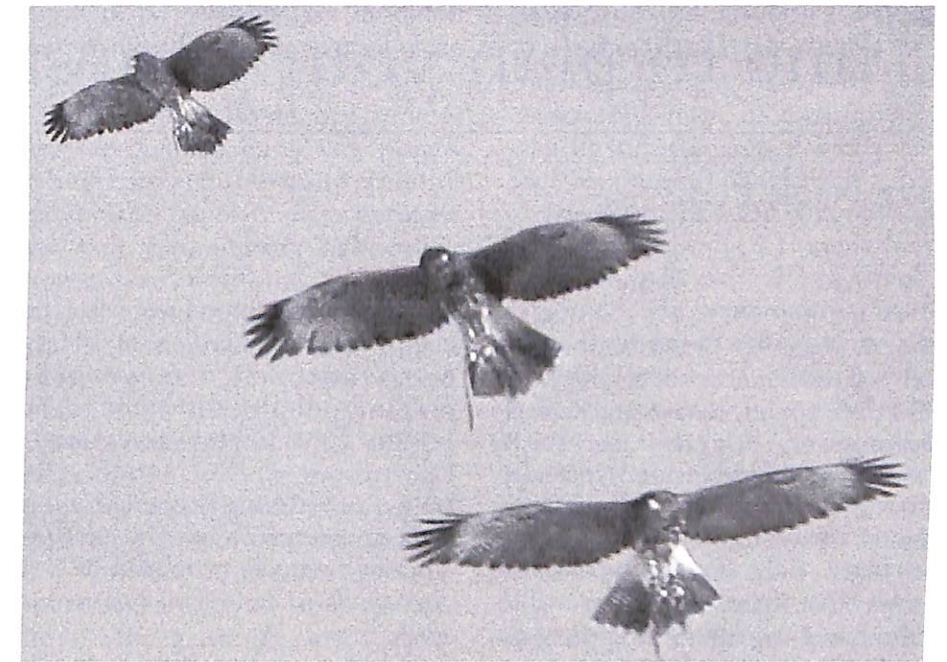
The next day I got up to a large

breakfast porridge (Scot's of course), egg, bacon, sausage, beans, tomatoes, fried bread, toast, jam or marmalade. I was full and ready for anything. It looked like I wouldn't be able to get up on the moor, so I joined the rest of the falconers and we split into groups, Harris, Redtails, Falcons and Goses. I decided to hunt the hill to see what my birds would think of the blue hares. After a short drive we arrived at the bottom of what looked like just an ordinary hillside. I got the birds ready and we started to climb the hill. I was flying three birds together so I split from the group and went up the hill from a different side. I usually carry two hawks and the old female follows on. As we got out of sight of the others I cast my Harris off. They fly together at home, so it didn't take long for them to get into the swing of things. Up they went. At this stage the only control I have over my hawks is my dog. By being able to control her the hawks know that she'll be where the quarry is. They follow her, and if I bring the dog back to heel the birds will land. As long as I keep the dog working the birds stay airborne. Ty usually climbs to about 100ft, Tasha about 150ft directly above Ty and the young bird, Amber, about 300ft above Tasha. The longest I've managed to keep them on the wing is 55 minutes; they were rewarded with a 7lb blue hare. Today it wouldn't be long before they spotted their first blue hare. Suddenly they came out of the sky like the red arrows. First the hare ran down the hill with Ty close behind the old female. Tasha held back and waited a while. Ty turned the hare up the hill, but this time the hare jinxed and Ty hit the heather. Tasha caught the hare on the back end and was kicked off. The hare set off up the hill, kicking his heels skyward. The young female Amber had been too high to join in. She had never seen a blue

Harris stacking up for the kill.



hare before, but as the hare climbed the hill Amber spotted him. She closed her wings and powered down. Ty was back on the wing and the young female didn't need any help as she took the hare clean around the head. The hare and bird went tumbling into the heather, her first blue hare. It didn't take long before Pepsi put up another; Amber this time didn't even get a chance. Ty took it clean on his own and Tasha just turned off and sat twenty or so feet away sulking. Amber came down to make sure that Ty wasn't going to let it go. By now it was in the bag and it looked like we were going to have a good day. We saw a lot of hares getting up and going over the top of the hill, but the birds stuck with Pepsi, watching her from above, using the wind to hold themselves directly above her and waiting for the hares to make a mistake. We were half way up the hill and it was starting to tell. This is when you're grateful for a good breakfast. The birds were now starting to get more height and to stop them from drifting over the hill I called Pepsi to heel. I then told her to go left on the smaller hill. This brought the birds back into the wind and above Pepsi and me. All we needed was a hare to break cover. As we moved around the hill the birds lost the wind and decided to go higher and, of course, that's when Pepsi flushed a pure white hare. The hare ran along and around the hill to the left. Ty, as usual, was the first to turn it. Straight up the hill and straight into Tasha, as he's done a hundred times before, Tasha taking the hare broadside on and rolling down the hill crashing into the heather. With all this going on I was running after them, trying to get in and help. From nowhere came Amber, bouncing into the ball of fur and feather that was struggling in the undergrowth. As I got there the hare must have decided that he didn't want to play any more and kicked Tasha off, with Amber hanging on to Tasha. They just sat there, probably wondering what had happened, as the hare was off like the wind over the hill and gone. I thought, for their first day, they'd had enough so I flew them on the lower part of the hill where there was less chance of seeing a blue hare. The



The team waiting for Jeff to flush.

hawks went up on the soar, learning how to perfect and control the wind to their best advantage. Once we got back to the Lodge I fed the birds and put them in one of the many sheds with Pepsi. On entering the lodge to a roaring fire with the smell of good cooking I

thought first it was time for the Radox in a nice relaxing bath. Timed to perfection the dinner gong rang. A glass of wine with a fantastic three-course meal and, of course, the stories of the ones that away.

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Time to plan your fitness programme

Dr Nick Fox

ONCE UPON A TIME, SO LONG AGO that it probably didn't happen at all, towards the end of a long dark Swedish winter, two neighbouring farmers got together for their annual drinking session. Normally shy, the drink started to get the better of them (some things don't change). They were both powerful men and they started to argue about who was the strongest.

One said: 'Look at these muscles—I could lift a sheep clean off the ground!'

The other, who was built like a bear, but whose head for drink was not so strong, said: "So what, that's nothing—I bet you I could lift a COW!'

The next morning, somewhat the worse for wear, vague memories came back to him about his rash bet. The honour of his family was at stake. How could he possibly lift a cow? The winter was nearing its end but the cows were still indoors. Most were dry now but some were already calving. Although they were just the small old-fashioned Swedish cows, they were still extremely heavy. There was no way he could lift one. Then his gaze fell on a calf. That was no problem to lift when he needed to move it to milk its mother. Then he had an idea, every morning he would come out to the shed and lift up this calf. If he managed to do it every day, by the next winter he would win his bet!

The rest, as they say, is history . . .

As a fitness programme his idea had everything going for it. Make it easy to start with, make steady progress, have a planned programme to reach your target.

Of course as falconers, fitness does not just apply to our hawks. First we must attend to our own fitness. Sometimes we get people

coming for job interviews who are clearly unfit. My wife says: "He's not a falconer!" So we only employ people with that lean, hungry look (if they have mad, staring eyes, so much the better . . .). Caring properly for the hawks requires a fit, active falconer who is prepared to put the needs of the hawk before his own.

The dogs also need to be fit. It is no use arriving on a grouse moor with a dog which appears to be 90% tongue. We would give our pointers about five miles road work per day through June and July, following the horses or car. By early August they would be in good running condition with hard pads and strong tendons. Such dogs, even if they become picky eaters during August and September, will work well and maintain their condition. They will also be capable of much longer days than kennel-kept unfit dogs which can scarcely manage an hour at a time.

The horses too are out on the steep fields in the summer, keeping up their basic fitness and working all their muscle groups. From May through July they do road work, being alternately ridden and led, to build their backs and strengthen their tendons. More jumping and schooling is introduced during July until by the opening meet in August they are fit enough to go all day and to maintain condition. It is the tired horse which stumbles and falls and that is the cause of the nastiest accidents.

For the falconer there is an additional problem. You can't actually sit on a hawk as you can a horse. Being free in the air it is able to rest or do its own thing. So it is harder to design a steady progressive programme. Also of

course is the little matter of getting the hawk back. A semi-fit falcon is quite capable of flying 100-200 miles in one day.

The cardinal rule in fitness training is to build muscle from food and fat. The hawk needs to be in slightly high condition so that she has bodily reserves to convert to muscle. The more exercise she does the more appetite she has and the more muscle she builds. If she is flown hard without these reserves she will be forced to burn up precious muscle, and you will see the bad effect the next day.

Slow steady exercise is good for any hawk. The simplest is to call her backwards and forwards between two falconers. With the crow falcons we place the people about 500 yards apart and the falcon does one stoop and pass before the falconer hides the lure and the other one shows his. This is also good for teaching a falcon to look out well and to come in well, from a distance. For a Harris the distances can be shorter, and of course, like the farmer with his cow, start off with shorter distances and work up.

High jumping is also good especially when daylight time or good weather is scarce. I have written in more detail about this in my book 'Understanding the Bird of Prey'.

In my opinion, in these days of unhacked domestic falcons, stooping to the lure is an essential element, regardless of the ultimate use of the falcon. It is vital that the falcon is confident in her turns, stoops and footwork. I have had an unhacked gyrfalcon misjudge his stoop and, hitting the ground, tumble 15 yards. That could easily be fatal. Until she is properly coordinated and skilled in these manoeuvres, do not expect her to

manage a full stoop with a neat strike. To the uninitiated she may appear to go up well and do a magnificent stoop—but miss. The reality is that she needed her basic flying skills built up step by step.

I have seen an unhacked peregrine, five years old, going up and stooping beautifully, but a terrible footer. Flown at grouse daily through a six week season, she had probably done around 5 x 50 = 250 stoops in her whole life. No wonder her footing was so bad! With such infrequent practice she had little chance to improve. If she had had 10 days stooping to a carefully swung lure as a youngster she would have done twice as many stoops and throw-ups, and at a formative age when she could really develop her skills.

Of course if the falconer has his brain in neutral and swings the lure too far in front of the falcon, and finishes by giving her the lure instead of letting her beat him, he will end up with an unmotivated, wide-swinging, low-flying, up-wind stooping, sneaking a quick rest, kind of a falcon. Just what you don't want.

Although we are very lucky to have access to domestic birds nowadays, it is a pity that many falconers just don't know what a passage or haggard falcon is capable of and thus don't know what standard to aspire to. Training regimes originally intended for wild-caught raptors,

have to be considerably modified for domestic ones to compensate for their naivety.

Kites and balloons are another way to give the hawk experience. They can also be quite good at giving the falconer an experience as well. I remember ballooning some gyrs in Nevada some years ago. Chasing the ones which went up high then went off at check was quite an interesting experience. Especially the ones which came down in Indian reservations. (Please mister, can I have my hawk back? And would you mind not pointing that at me?) For safe ballooning the ground must be as open as your normal hawking ground, and, like anything if it is overdone can become a fixation. The hawk must be transferred to real flying routines as soon as possible. Kites and balloons are subject to technical hitches and can also be very time consuming. They are useful in giving a falcon confidence to go into the 'upper air' but they do not teach those vital stooping and footing skills.

As a hawk gets more skilled and fit then she gets more confidence. She will get better and better. But if she is unfit she will lose confidence, and cutting her sharper will just make it worse. Many falconers, once the hawk is going well, make the opposite mistake and try to fly her in 'high' condition. This at best is de-

motivating and at worse can lead to the loss of the hawk. Even game hawks are best flown fit and reasonably sharp, otherwise when (not if) something goes wrong she will not come in promptly.

The moment I see a couple of non-hawking days coming I tank up the hawks then sharpen them again; this keeps them bright, with a good appetite. Although we are hawking every day through the season, we are not taking the same hawks out. Long runs of successful hawking days make a hawk jaded and can lead to her apparent flying weight going down. Better to give her a good blow out with clean meat and if necessary a dose of rangle than to go down the miserable slope chasing a falling flying weight.

Weight is an indication of (we hope) how much muscle is on the bird. Take it below her optimum and you are taking off muscle, making her weaker. Take it higher and beyond her proper individual size all you are adding is fat. Once you have found her optimum muscle mass then you must work with her appetite. The old rhyme sums it up neatly:

• • •

Washed meat and stones will cause a hawk to fly;

Long fasting and great casting will cause a hawk to die.

• • •

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The Millennium

by Roger Upton

ISN'T IT AMAZING THAT, AS WE approach the year 2000, we can still fly falcons and hawks in much the same way as our forefathers did.

Season after season I set out on my annual pilgrimage to Scotland, as Blaine did, and Fisher, St. Quintin and Col Thornton. I take it for granted that I should do so.

What memories of successes and failures over the years. Sometimes I dream about the perfect team of grouse hawks. If only one could load the cadge with those famous falcons and tiercels that have, over the seasons, excited all who saw them fly. Memories of 'Old Bitch', the property of Stephen Frank, who in 1968 surely killed more grouse (177) than any falcon before, or since or likely to in the future. 'Aurora', a very high flying passage falcon belonging to Geoffrey Pollard, with a style and professionalism all of her own; 'Elsevier', a tiny high flying Brookei falcon (Patrick Morel); 'Tremontana' (Fulco Tosti), another high flying Brookei falcon; and not to be forgotten, Umberto Caproni's exceptional captive bred jerkin, 'Dovre'.

'Naseem', a haggard tiercel, only flown for two seasons but rewarding me and my friends with sport of the highest class; 'Dharif', 'Dawn', equally good at rooks or grouse; and more recently 'Radio 2' and 'Oliver Twist', a tiercel still showing how it should and can be done.

Every falconer must have just such a list and probably also dream as I do.

Although we are fortunate enough to still practise our sport many changes have occurred over the years. When I started falconers just 'helped themselves' to hawks from the wild. Then came the Protection of Birds Act 1954-67.

Fortunately, although we were few in number, we were well represented by such as Pyllis Barclay Smith. We could still take hawks from the wild, under licence from the Home Office, and our sport was recognised in law. We could import anything we wished. However, before long the misuse of agricultural chemicals had a dramatic effect on wild hawk populations, greater restrictions were placed on the issue of licences and the clubs voluntarily stopped applying for peregrine licences.

Captive breeding certainly came along just in time, the breakthrough in breeding achieved by falconers in many parts of the world. But commercialism brought with it some doubts about the source of some young 'captive bred' stock. Now, fortunately, we have DNA to ensure fair play by all. Wild populations of most bird of prey species are now healthy, indeed peregrine populations are probably greater than ever before in recorded history. With the success of captive breeding we hardly need to lobby for a more tolerant attitude towards the taking of wild hawks, although it would be more 'honest' of the various conservation bodies such as the RSPB to stop using the emotive words 'endangered species' for peregrines when they are clearly far from endangered. It damages the use of these words in cases where species truly are endangered. At least America has the honesty to accept the changing situation and to practise a much more realistic attitude towards the use of wild taken hawks.

Despite all these changes and restrictions, nearing the millennium we can still practise falconry in these islands. However, to ensure that we may continue it is essential that we all practise our sport to the

highest standards possible. We must not forget that we practise a field sport, not a circus performance, and that we should practise this sport in a 'sporting' fashion, in the field, or on mountain or moorland, at truly wild quarry that should always be given a sporting chance.

If we all 'do' the sport well, and play it by the rules and code of conduct of our various clubs, then we have a greater chance of being able to go on 'following the bells'.

There are no short cuts to practising the sport, no artificial ways of teaching hawks to wait on, for instance, that are either necessary or in many cases legal.

Many falconers are individualists, some almost reclusive, but in certain aspects of our sport we cannot go it alone. With this thought in mind we must support our clubs, the IAF, The Hawk Board and the Campaign for Falconry, and of course the Countryside Alliance. By all means be critical, ask questions and demand answers, but support them, for with them lies our future, our chance to fight back before our backs are against the wall. 🦅

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Together we stand

By Marie-Louise Leschallas

WELL, HERE WE ARE A YEAR ON AND the Campaign For Falconry is still alive and gaining momentum.

More importantly, however, so is falconry itself, with fewer restrictions than last year. We falconers have a lot to congratulate ourselves on — over the past year we have rallied together and become a force to be reckoned with — we may be a minority but at least we are now not treated as such.

Falconers are gaining recognition. Falconers were represented at CITES, we now have a falconer elected on a working group (something the government hasn't achieved). We were represented at the Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime (PAW) open seminar. The Alliance worked tirelessly with us to get falconry reinstated on National Trust land and continues to do so on many other more current issues.

Only this time last year we were preparing to march on London — and we did — the CFF was there representing falconry at the Park Royal Tube Station, which was entertaining if exhausting, and bemusing, if you happened to be the London drunk who was trying to get a tube home first thing in the morning only to be confronted by a group of healthy, happy people suggesting he walked.

It all seems such a long time ago, but it was an important time — too many of our number failed to recognise the devastating effect the Foster Bill could have had on our ancient sport. Can you imagine going out hawking on land not your own and not being able to take your dog?

Then the issue of quarry licences was fought and we won a marvellous battle there. The news was broadcast during late August, and with a large number of

falconers spread across the country in far reaching places the first thing that became apparent was that mobile phones work better in urban areas. However, the news spread and I for one received my licence and was delighted.

Following hot on the heels of licences came the news that the National Trust had overturned their ban — it may require falconers to do a little bureaucratic style work in order to achieve their licence to fly NT land, but so what, we got there in the end.

All these successes have been marvellous and thanks to funding by falconers the Hawk Board has been able to do their job. Iain Timmins, the co-ordinator, has played a pivotal role in all these achievements and proved that a full time co-ordinator is vital to maintaining our future. Incidentally, Iain is passionate about the sport and flies a wonderful female goshawk, whom he talks to when

he thinks no one is listening.

We cannot afford to rest on our laurels. While things may appear quiet at the moment we have merely won a few battles, not the war. We need to continue to unite, to raise funds, to find opportunities and use the help that is available to us so that we can continue our way of life.

The CFF is hoping to raise sufficient funds to initiate scientific research which will include valuable data — all of which is one of the best means of defence in the current political climate and with your continued support we will be able to do this sooner rather than later.

The WHC has been unbelievably supportive from the very start and that has been hugely appreciated — we value every word you print, every kind word you say on our behalf and every criticism and query you pass our way — you have been brilliant. Thank you. 🦅



Less than eight months after its launch at the Falconers' Fair, the Campaign for Falconry has presented the Countryside Alliance with a cheque for £3,000. The money raised will be going towards the cost of employing Hawk Board Co-ordinator Iain Timmins.

A weekend in the life of a sparrowhawk

by Julian M Godfrey

IT ALL STARTED WHEN A FRIEND OF mine asked me if I would fly his spar. I jumped at the chance, having trained one from the wild at the tender age of thirteen; I have great respect and admiration for these amazing little birds. However, I was surprised to find her as wild and unpredictable as the one I had flown all those years ago, and it was clear that she was going to need some serious handling before I would be able to take her out. After a week, I had her flying at a good weight of 9oz, which improved, to 9½oz, and she was proving to be very responsive.

The last time I flew a spar it was all walking around from field to field trying to surprise some unsuspecting critter, but this was going to be different, now I could drive! (Well, sort of.) So no more foot slogging and shaking bushes, we were mobile! So a day's flying

was arranged with my good friend Dave, our editor, so we set out for some fun. And what a day! Firstly she tried to go after rabbits but soon lost interest as they quickly disappeared below ground when they heard us coming. She then set her sights on magpies — but they were far too clever for this novice, fast and furious as she might be, so it was on to pigeons. Pigeons proved to be remarkably easy and she was enjoying herself so much she decided to stay out all night! Deciding to leave her to her own devices, and the call of the pub being too much, we left her to it.

The following day, sure enough, there she was happily sitting and waiting for our return. A few swings of the lure and she was down, eager for another day's play and the opportunity to try out her newly acquired skills. So it was up to us to find her some sport — or

so we thought! She had other ideas and was soon off the fist after a cock pheasant she had spotted sauntering towards a hedge. She grabbed the cock bird by the neck and hung on. As the cock pheasant ran across the field trying to shake off this little monster they both crashed into the hedge. The hedge proved to be more of a problem than she bargained for — the pheasant emerged but she didn't! Ten out of ten for effort and determination. She soon spotted some hen pheasants and wasn't about to be cheated again. This time she was ready and twice achieved a kill. What next? Crows, rooks, lapwings (that I let go), green woodpecker (that I let go), wood pigeons, she had the lot! Time to go bigger.

So there we were, driving very slowly towards a herring gull. What the hell! In for a penny. To our dumbfounded awe and sheer disbelief she took off out of the window of the jeep and was soon firmly attached to the back end of this colossal monster! Dave and I were out of the jeep and already in hot pursuit. What a sight, this tiny bird (by comparison) putting up the fight of her life and winning! By the time we reached them the gull had given up and the spar, although triumphant, was obviously very pleased to see us and glad to be relieved of her enormous burden, and we in turn were happy to see her safe and in one piece!

Well, I was glad Dave was there to be my witness and I his, because I don't think either of us would have believed it if we had not seen it with our own eyes. What a bird! What a day! Sad to say I lost her on one of her famous flights (no telemetry on), but I know this fearsome female sparrowhawk will survive in the wild, and good luck to her.



Julian Godfrey, the herring gull and the monster sparrowhawk

Is it size that counts?

by Andy Hulme

THIS YEAR I WAS FORTUNATE TO BE allocated a club male goshawk. I picked up my twelve-day-old chick from Mark Richards and named him Kaiser.

The job then began of socially imprinting Kaiser to, hopefully, a goshawk that flew at a high weight, would be amiable and pretty bombproof with groups of people and dogs and any situation we came across.

Mark's breeding pair of goshawks are of Hungarian origin and this is what this article is about — Hungarian goshawks.

I've heard a lot of criticism of Hungarian male goshawks — they are too small, they can't hold rabbits, they can't hold cock pheasants and they are only good at partridge and moorhens.

Kaiser weighed 11lb 9½oz when he was hard penned and he started flying free to the lure at 11lb 4¼oz. By the end of November Kaiser was flying at 11lb 7oz.

His main prey has been pheasant and partridge, as here down south these are the main quarry species. We are lucky down south as game is in abundance and easily accessible. Ask Mike Tucker. Ha! ha!, sorry mate!

Even though his main quarry is game, he has taken eight rabbits

and still flies them now in January. He has flown two leverets, hitting them the first attempt and picking himself up to have another three attempts both times.

Kaiser has, up to early January, taken twenty-four pheasants, fourteen cocks and ten hens. Some he has taken on the rise, some on the reflush and the rest he has followed into cover and I've found him holding the bird with both feet in the neck and head.

He doesn't mind groups of people, but I'm lucky in the fact that he sees many people every day as I take him to work. He doesn't mind strange dogs and was introduced to dogs from day one, as I have an orange and

white Brittany, a black and white Brittany and a rough coated lurcher. Kaiser will work with any dog put in front of him and watches the dog at all times, waiting for a point and flush.

His only two bad points are that he hates tractors and will not take the hood, but that's my fault for not introducing it straight away.

My own thoughts on the key to successful goshawking is get out as much as possible. I go hawking four or five days a week and show them plenty. I use tirings when needed and feed the goshawk up

Kaiser's tally by 15th January:
 14 cock pheasants
 11 hen pheasants
 8 French partridges
 2 English partridges
 8 rabbits
 1 drake Mallard
 17 moorhen
 1 wood pigeon

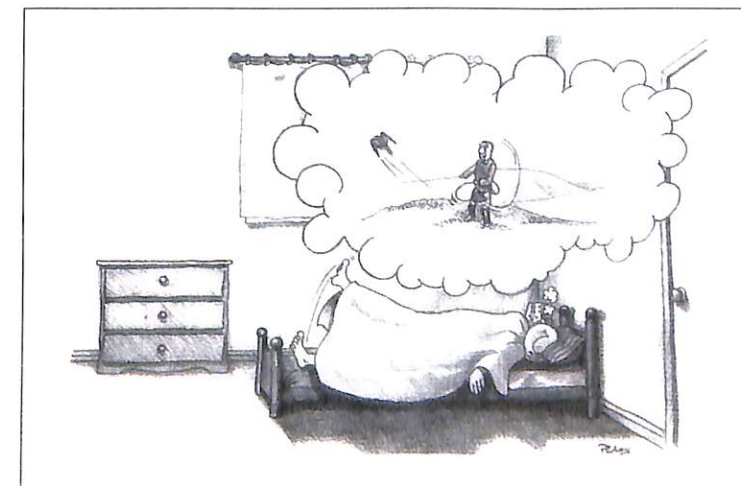
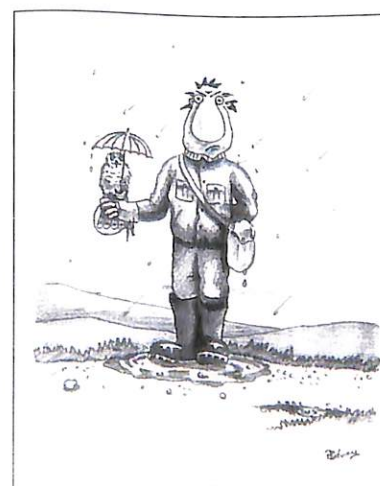


Andy Hulle partridge hawking with goshawk and Emma (Brittany).

on a well deserved kill.

I'd like to thank Steve Vaughan for many excellent days over Great Wigborough this season. Cheers, boy!

In the right hands Hungarian male goshawks are superb hunting birds.





Merlins food passing — Andrew Ellis



Sparrowhawk pursuing blackbird — Andrew Ellis



Immature Black Gyr Falcon — Andrew Ellis

Perspectives of European Falconry

by Hugo Clerens (Belgium)

EUROPE IS BECOMING A FACT ON ALL levels of society. Decision making will be made European-wise also on matters concerning falconry.

In most of the member states falconry is connected with hunting. In some member states falconry is not allowed, such as Denmark, Luxemburg, FE.

The United Kingdom is a falconer's Garden or Eden in the European context. The clubs unite a large number of falconers, they are well structured and have excellent bodies to deal with matters of falconry. Thanks to the clubs and the educational displays, falconry is widely socially accepted. The march on London showed the persistence of the field sports people and made a great impression on the continent.

The Belgian Situation

The title above is already inadequate. Belgium no longer exists on matters related with environment and hunting. These matters are dealt with on a regional basis.

This leads to typical Belgian situations. The woodcock FE cannot be hunted in Flanders because of full protection, while in Wallonia he is still game! If you realise that the border between the regions is sometimes a gully you can imagine the following. In the same hunting party the hunter walking on Flemish side holds his shot, while his ironically smiling hunting mate on the other side of the gully . . .

The situation in both regions on the field is quite different, while in politics there seemed to be a consensus. The traditional clubs, Mary of Burgundy and the BVVVH (Flanders) try to keep falconry on a very low profile. They reject every form of 'outing'. They refuse as members falconers dealing with display and professional involvement and reject falconers

who do not keep a silence towards the media etc. In Wallonia a falconer should be a member of Club Mary of Burgundy and a holder of a hunting licence. The licence can be obtained after a successful passing of an examination organised by the regional ministry. The licence costs about 1650 English pounds and has to be renewed every year.

In Flanders, up until this day, falconry is not greatly ruled by the government. We can safely say that the legislation on falconry and birds of prey is in complete chaos. With non-protected species such as Harris and redtail, anyone can hunt. To hunt with a protected species such as goshawk and peregrine, you need to have a special licence that can only be obtained through the clubs mentioned above. Note that the number of licences issued is limited to twenty-five! This inevitably opens the door to favouritism and bribery.

Hunting with a bird of prey in Flanders does not require a permit.

The protected (all European) birds of prey cannot be detained by a non-aggregated individuals or clubs. This means that a person who presents themselves at a falconer's house with an injured bird of prey picked up on a road would be sent away. The falconer is not allowed to deal with this bird, only non-specialised centres of nature protection organisations can. The reintroduction of fully fed birds of prey after months in a wired aviary is not very successful. In fact, following the letter of the law, no one is allowed to pick up protected animals and transport them. Maybe the government wants us to put the poor animal instantly to death! Although that is also forbidden I can imagine a judge may have some understanding.

Situation in other European countries

In The Netherlands a hunting permit is needed to hunt with a bird of prey. The only birds allowed as hunting birds are goshawk and peregrine. The falconer should pass an examination with a known falconers' club. You can keep Harris and others, but they are not accepted in the field. Don't even talk about hybrids!

In Germany an examination is required before hunting licence is granted. There were some rumours about the banning of exotic and hybrid birds, but up to now this has not yet been decided.

In France you need a hunting permit, but you can hunt with every legal bird you want. France even allows wild caught birds to be used by falconers, after a rigid procedure.

The Future

As you have noticed, most of the European countries are on a permit basis for falconers. In most of these countries clubs are dealing with education and examination.

Although Ian Timmings is doing a great job for the Hawk Board in defending British falconers on all levels, there might be a need for a well organised European structure dealing with matters of falconry which is powerful enough to lobby on decision making at the European level.

You, my dear friends, should take the lead. You are the most numerous and powerful falconers' clubs in the European community. There are only about 150 falconers in Belgium. Even if we work for ten, we cannot match your power. We can offer you all our support, but please do not forget us and do not leave us on an island, because it can get very lonely!

The Welsh National Assembly and Falconry into the Millennium

by Mark Hinge

I WRITE THIS ON NEW YEAR'S DAY, with a few months to go until the elections for the National Assembly in Wales. By the time you read this the campaigns would have come and gone, the papers would have run out of sleaze stories and the election result will now be a part of history; but a history that is both living and one that will affect the falconers in Wales and our fellow falconers across the border alike. In my role as press and publicity officer, I can give you a taster of what may come your way.

Politics is in a new era, irrespective of whatever government is in power, the Welsh Assembly is here to stay. It will have considerable powers to legislate on many diverse topics, but the bottom line to you and me is that the future of country sports is in their hands.

Parliament passes what is termed as primary legislation. Basically, this is sanctioned by both the House of Commons and the House of Lords, it is signed by the Queen. The Welsh Assembly will have secondary legislation. This doesn't mean secondary in power or effectiveness (legislation is legislation!) but it does mean that it can consider Acts of Parliament that are already in force and can amend, change, delete or revise those Acts passed to it under The Transfer of Functions Order. The Assembly can pass these under either a full scrutiny procedure or fast track them. In any case it does not need the approval of either the Commons or the Lords, or the Queen. As a side issue, and whether you like it or not, the Welsh Assembly can discuss parliamentary business and vote on private members' bills as if it were

speaking for the whole of Wales.

The Transfer Order is some 527 pages long and lists item by item every single Act that the Assembly can consider. This Order is in addition to the present powers that the Secretary of State for Wales currently has. 'So what?' I hear some cry! Well, when you sit down and start to look at some of the powers the Assembly will have you see that they will (for starters, I add) control The Countryside and Wildlife Act, Access to Common Ground and Open Spaces Act, National Trust Act, Hill Farming Act (heather burning), Pest Control Act, all agriculture Acts (including game therein), National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, Local Authorities (Land) Act, Forestry Act, Slaughter of Poultry act (including all birds other than domestic fowl), Planning and Land Act (Right of Ways), Animal Health Act (including welfare), Zoo Licensing Act (falconry centres) and so the list goes on. There will be scope to legislate with the facility of cross-border functions.

They will also have full control of DETR Quarry and associated licences. Simply, if an Act is amended and passed in Wales it will therefore open the door for the English parliament to do likewise.

So what can you do to safeguard falconry into the millennium? Simply, in every way possible, keep supporting both physically and financially your club, the Hawk Board and the country sports organisations who work tirelessly on your behalf. If you're asked by the WHC to 'rally to a cause', please participate in whatever way possible, and be prepared to do your part to ensure that we continue to enjoy a 4,000-year-old tradition that the 'antis' will attempt to 'ban' mainly through foul means. Long gone are the days of it'll never happen . . .

♦ ♦ ♦

Editor's note: Mark is now Political Officer for the Countryside Alliance within the Welsh Assembly.



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Tiercels are more fun!

by Mark Williams

IN RECENT YEARS I HAVE HAD A hankering for the challenge to hunt with a tiercel peregrine. Normally accustomed to the more powerful falcon of the any species I was increasingly impressed by the style and big heart that these little fellows showed. They displayed such a pretty flight by comparison and always appeared more aerial. Somehow, catching ducks (my main quarry) with a female was expected and often seemed a bit repetitive, but when a tiercel did it I always felt a sense of achievement for the little guy. Seeing Canadian falconers Bob Rafuse's anatum tiercel, Lucas, and ex-Brit John Campbell's peale's tiercel, Arrow, hunt and fly finally convinced me to try one. All too many times, as falconers, we buy into the concept that 'big is always better'. How many times have you

heard someone say males are too small for such and such quarry? I have done it and been proved wrong every time! When you think about it these little guys are the sole food provider for several weeks during the breeding season, so they have to be very competent hunters since they are hunting and catching food all day for their mate and young.

So, late in the summer of 1997 my tiercel anatum arrived from Paddy Thompson in Saskatchewan. These project birds were of pure Canadian anatum ancestry and my female peregrine, Molly, also came from there in 1993. She turned out to be a great hunting falcon and is now in a breeding arrangement with a local falconer friend and doing well. The new tiercel was given the name of GB, taking from the first names of my two children, Gareth and Becky.

I wanted this bird at around fifty days old and when he arrived, via Canadian Airlines, he was a beautiful looking bird in perfect feather, with just a few 'stars of childhood' on his head. After much bating, biting and screaming he was hooded and weighed. He weighed 650 grams, complete with jesses and swivel. When I compared him to Mike Person's eyas tiercel Peales, of similar age, that I was looking after at the time, the peales was only slightly heavier, by 70 grams, but was a much longer built bird and he had feet twice the size of my anatum. GB manned down nicely and his manners were impeccable and continued right through his entire hunting career.

Training was much the same as any other falcon, but on his fourth free flight and, quite unexpectedly, GB skied out above me. It was early September and I had just served him a bagged duck. In hindsight, being a call duck like a small mallard, it was a bit big so he pulled off it in the stoop and instead climbed out of sight. I thought he was gone for good but a telemetry signal showed him to be directly above me. I could not see him at first but eventually he came in and out of vision through the clouds. He stayed in the air above me for one hour and five minutes and all within a quarter section of land. This bird had lots of game fly beneath him in that time but chose not to stoop at any of them. He was either flying for the fun of it or didn't know how to come down! Eventually he came down by a pig farm, where some pigeons were flying around some outbuildings. I picked him up off the lure and took him home, much relieved and very impressed with his stamina and flying skills. Subsequent flights repeated this pitch and his obedience to the lure made him spectacular to call down and see his teardrop stoops. GB's flying weight was around 525 grams. I never had cause to use the balloons



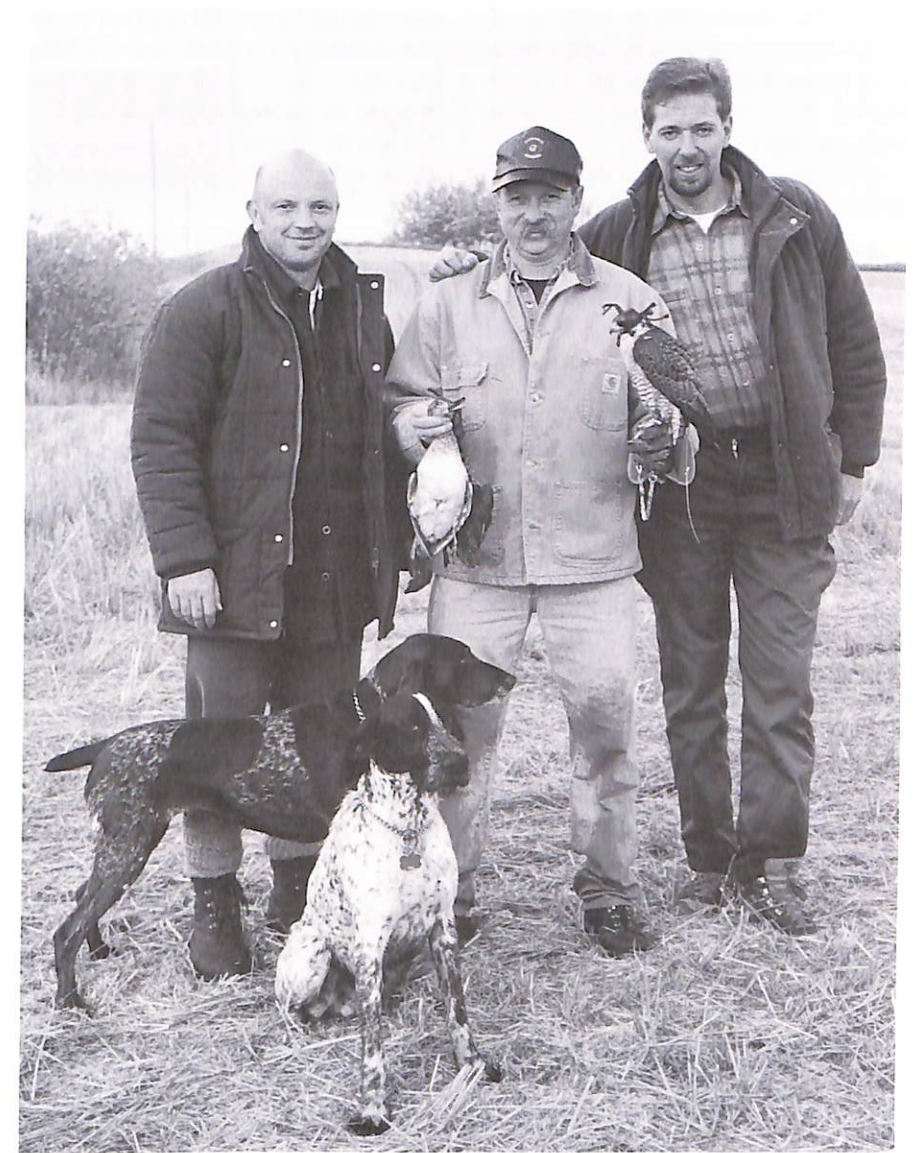
Author with GB and first mallard and chase with blue-winged teal.

or kite method to encourage pitch with him. From what I have heard, seen and experienced, it seems that tiercels are naturally aerial and have a tendency to go up with little encouragement. I believe they take a higher pitch due to their smaller size and subsequent lesser powers of flight compared to that of the female, which in turn gives them the advantage they need over their quarry. The results are spectacular pitches and stoops that rarely fail unless cover beats them.

Duck are our main quarry here and, as always, I try to give young birds easy setups at first to boost their confidence. One great little pond that I discovered by chance was in a basin at the bottom of a hill and was an ideal setup for starting a young bird which needed to learn from the benefit of pitch. Later during the season I took a few falconer friends with young birds to this pond to get their birds going. We later referred to it as GB's pond as he proceeded to take another seven ducks from it over his first season. His first kill was a green winged teal that he killed in the air. Subsequent kills in his first season were less dramatic and he used to get his duck by making it bail out following an intimidating stoop from way up high and a fake strike. He would then spin around and grab them on the ground. Although a very successful strategy for him, it used to frustrate the heck out of me. He ended his first season with sixteen ducks to his credit and probably one of the most enjoyable seasons for me in a long time.

Second Season

GB's second season started where he left off, except his flying weight eventually went up to 550 grams. His moult was slow and incomplete, but having such a relatively short hunting season, I started him anyway. He was naturally aerial, but he had matured somewhat in several subtle ways. He was a dynamic little bird who didn't hang around on the fist when unhooded. It was almost as if he hated the sight of me, but I like to think that it was his tiercel flighty nature. He was all business and would rouse, take one look at me and was gone, his snappy wing beat climbing with every stroke. This season I also had a new bird to train



From left: Steve Williams, UK; Mitch Roland, Alberta; and Mark Holder, UK. GB (tiercel) and a brace of teal caught in one flight.

in the form of another tiercel, this time a twenty-six-day-old gyr/peregrine from a very successful breeder, John Hitchmough of Victoria, British Columbia. It would be interesting comparing these two birds later in the season. The tiercel gyr/peales hybrid was more the build and size of the female peregrine and, from the start, showed immense powers of flight that I had never seen before in a pure peregrine or prairie of either sex.

GB went from strength to strength with his flying as the season progressed. His fitness and confidence improved and one day he took a hen mallard in a spectacular bind from a high stoop. I had to run around a large slough to catch up to them, but which time he had taken quite a beating. He let go

as I arrived and the sight of the mallard squaring off with him like two boxers in a ring was a sight to behold. The duck took the worst of the beating and ran into some long grass severely incapacitated. It was later retrieved by Coco, my German shorthaired pointer, and fed to GB as a reward. I figured that he would never do that again, but was proven wrong several times over the course of the season. He proceeded to take as many mallards as he did gadwall and teal during his second season. Not bad for a 550 gram tiercel! As for my tiercel hybrid, who we appropriately named 'Chase', he was a powerful flyer. He flew at around 830 grams. The wing beat was not as 'snappy' as the pure tiercel but very powerful. He would cover the sky far quicker than any falcon I had ever

flown. He would think nothing of flying a mile away to dog fight with a wild peregrine and then return over me ten minutes later for the flush, with no sign of fatigue. It became evident that his patience was not as good as my peregrines and if I did not serve him quickly he would go and find something himself! Hopefully, this behaviour will improve next season and he will mature and become somewhat steadier.

The Alberta and Canadian field meets were at the beginning of October. Tim Wagner and his girl friend Elise, from South Africa, together with old friends Mark Holder and Steve Williams from the UK, came over. The Alberta meet was well attended by its club members, with quality falconry being the norm. GB did me proud and caught two GW teal, one BW teal, a shoveler and a mallard at the meet. His best flight was on the last day, when he killed two duck in one flight. He went up very high in a clear blue sky and did a perfect teardrop stoop and smacked a green winged teal into the long grass reeds. Not being able to locate it, he went right back up almost as high as before and did it again, this time knocking one down into the stubble. We found the first duck in the reeds, thanks to my dog.

Chase, my hybrid, was less predictable. He was certainly more like a gyr in his playful behaviour. He would catch a duck and then, to my frustration, step off it and then try to catch it again. As with my children, I hate it when they play with their food! This led to my experimenting with his weight to see if I could get more obedience. Being my first imprint and second gyr hybrid I was learning fast and making the odd mistakes! Gyrs certainly are a study in themselves. For the most part he was doing well and had over a dozen head by the time we got to the Alberta meet.

Next, from Stettler, Alberta, we drove to the Canadian National meet in Weyburn, Saskatchewan. On the way there, just over the Saskatchewan border, we had a great flight at some huns. That was GB's second flight at upland game and he was not confused by the absence of water. He went up nicely and was

soon joined by a wild prairie falcon. They battled for a while and GB held his own, keeping directly above me in spite of having to outmanoeuvre the female prairie's stoops. Realising that it was a now or never moment, we flushed the partridge and were privileged to witness both birds put in fantastic simultaneous stoops from the clear blue sky at separate huns. Still reliving the flight, we continued the journey to Weyburn, only stopping to fly Chase. He successfully caught another duck as well.

At the Canadian meet in Weyburn we had a blast, what with meeting good friends (new and old), good falconry and an abundance of game. I would certainly encourage anyone thinking about it to attend the 'Millennium Meet' next year. It is usually during the second week of October. You will be given a warm welcome, there is a lot of good hawking land, with an abundance of game to fly and some of the best falconry I have had the pleasure of seeing either side of the Atlantic. Like the first Canadian National Meet of '94, it is planned to have special evening events such as guest speakers, slide shows etc. (anyone interested in coming can contact NAFA members Doug Bush or Bob Rafuse).

GB put on a great show and caught a pheasant and partridge and several more duck, including mallards, at this meet. The strong 35-plus mph prairie winds were more than a match on several occasions, but he did very well. Sadly, on the way home disaster struck that would end his promising hunting career. We had just got back into Alberta on the trip home after driving through a major blizzard that swept through the Saskatchewan province that day. We decided to fly GB, since it was getting late and we were still a long way from home and he was more predictable than my hybrid. GB went up really nice as usual but unfortunately the pond we thought had ducks turned out to be empty. The sounds we had heard were from the neighbouring field where hundreds of snow geese and duck were feeding. While we were running to find ducks in that neighbouring field GB disappeared from view. Thanks to telemetry, we

found him fifteen minutes later, not too far away, feeding on a gull. As I picked him off his prize I noticed he had injured himself. He had torn his leg right out of its socket and it was hanging loose. We don't know what happened exactly, but presumed he was bound to the gull in a dramatic stoop and it jerked his leg out of place, or maybe he hit a goose first before taking the gull, or was attacked by geese afterwards. We will never know. The gull's back was crushed, as too was one wing, so I favour the first explanation. We rushed to a vet in Edmonton to see what could be done. A few calls on a mobile en route found an emergency clinic open by the time we arrived late in the evening.

Unfortunately, x-rays showed the ligaments were too badly torn at the joint to allow it to be held in place. He would have been far better of breaking his leg instead. After several weeks bandaged in place it healed sufficiently so he could stand on it, scratch his head etc., but he did not have the movement or stability he needed to hunt. It was positioned outside the socket and, with no ligaments holding it in place, just muscle tissue. I knew it would never be as strong. I could see it happening again on the first duck he stooped at and hit. Now GB is spending his days in a breeding project at Jon Hitchmough's. His second season was only just getting started, but in forty-three days of flying he had thirty-one head of game to his credit. In his short but eventful second season he took seven species of duck, a pheasant and a hun, not forgetting that fateful gull. He was as capable as my female, but in pure entertainment value he was untouchable. I have never had so much fun with any bird in twenty years of hunting. I will sorely miss him, but hope that he will sire some fabulous game hawks for John. The two seasons with this tiercel cemented my passion for tiercels and this spring I hope to have a replacement eyas tiercel anatum to fly. My imprint hybrid is starting to court me and will no doubt be moulting soon. In the meantime I am seriously considering the idea of flying a cast of peregrine tiercels. Double the fun!



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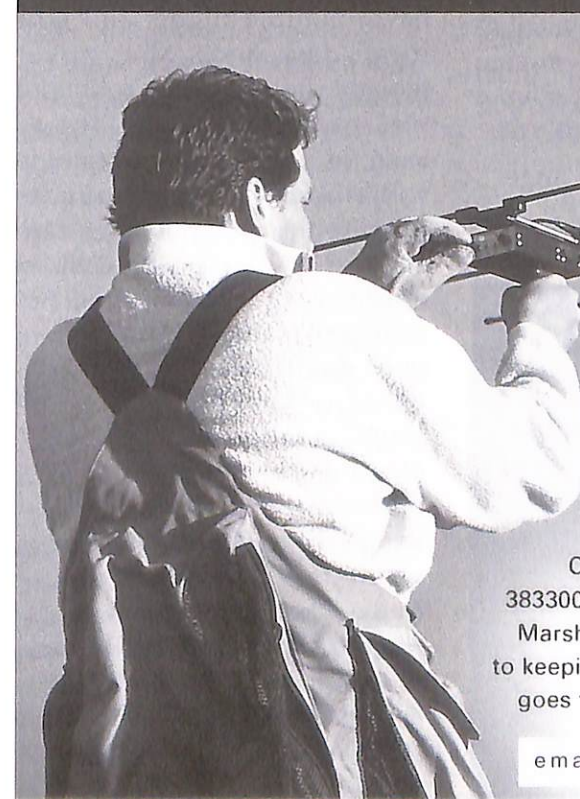
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My Angel

by Mike Tucker

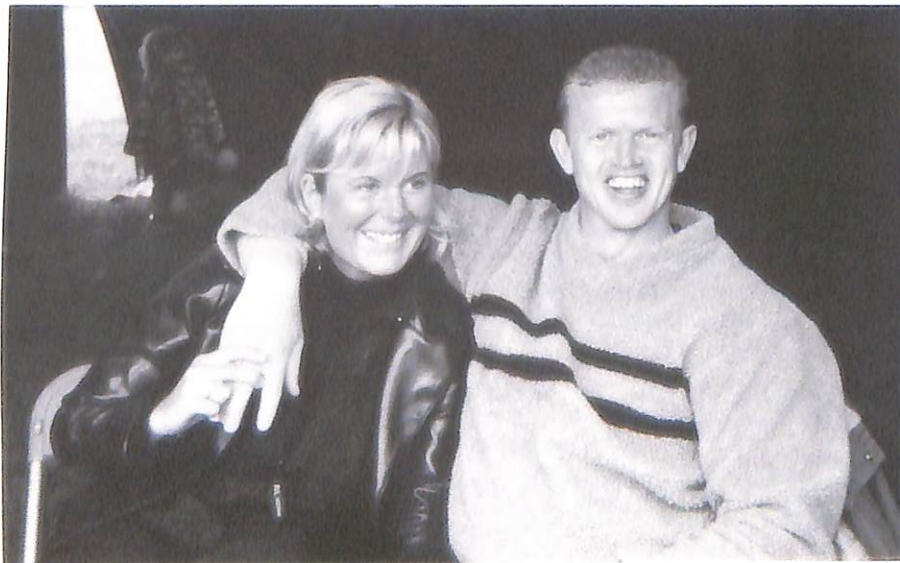
I HAD WANTED A FINNISH GOSHAWK FOR four years, but with a wife and two children money for a new bird was the last priority. However, after lots of nagging at my wife (Penny) I got my way.

I phoned a few people who had goshawks to enquire who to buy my new female from. I finally grabbed hold of Harry Gilbert, a breeder, and he said to put a deposit down and he would let me know as soon as anything happened. This was in October 1997 and the months just dragged by.

Harry phoned me early in June and told me he had two females. I could take my pick as I wanted to imprint her. I drove to Harry's and there were two lovely birds, at fourteen days old, in a box.

I picked one and came home. This was my first ever imprint and I wanted to do her properly. I had read possibly everything on imprinting and I had spent a small fortune on

The 'hawking widow', Penny, finally gets her husband back (Mike Tucker) after a long hunting season.



telephoning my very good friend, our editor Dave Jones.

Now for the mess and rows with my beloved. To start with I had my hawk in the living room in a bird bath with a plastic sheet underneath. This was fine for a few weeks, but then she was muting farther and farther, so I robbed our youngest child of her paddling pool, which is five feet round, with eight inch sides. This was placed on a ten foot square piece of plastic sheeting. All went well, so long as you don't mind cleaning mutes off walls, patio windows, the television etc., etc.

She was part of the family at this time and the kids loved her. She grew fast and strong, but then she changed and became a problem, a big problem. She wanted to kill me. I phoned my mentor and he advised me to fly her. She was eleven and a half weeks old and just hard panned. I travelled to Dave's as we both wanted to see her fly free for the first time. Angel's

weight was 2lb 13oz. I put on a creance, walked thirty yards and called her and she came instantly. I took off the creance and cast her to a tree. I left her for five minutes to let her have a look around and then swung the lure and she was down straight away. I then flew her every day for two to three miles, with her following on to get her fit. After a week she caught her first rabbit. She had spotted it along a hedgerow, approximately 200 yards away. She left a tree and flew about ten inches off the floor. The rabbit hadn't seen her so it came as a bit of a surprise when my little Angel decided to tangle with it. I ran and despatched it and let her feed, but not too much. I had trained her to jump on to the lure and have multiple flights and kills from day one. She never thought she was being robbed. I was now finding it hard to exercise her without her finding something to kill. I like to exercise her first, push her hard and then finish off with a kill. At fourteen weeks she killed her first pheasant. It was only a poul, but it flew roughly twenty or thirty yards before Angel caught it in the air. I was really pleased she had taken feather with her first chance. Her weight I had to bring down to get her hunting. It was 2lb 11½oz, but she was now flying like a true gos, she was constantly on the lookout for anything that moved and took six rabbits, one crow, one duck and two pheasants in a week.

I then went to Scotland for a



Angel outflies another cock bird.

week and she didn't miss a rabbit. In five days' hunting she caught twenty-five rabbits — and for some I would stand 80 yards away before I would slip her.

I then decided I wanted to fly pheasants as they would challenge my Angel's strength, but there's hardly any where I live so I was travelling up to 300 miles a week to fly her at pheasant.

Then came the annual field met in North Wales. On the final day it was me, Dave, Nic Farrant, Andy and Steve from Essex, Mike West and Roly Evans.

I had a very good day with Angel. Nic's dog came on point (makes a change for a French hyena), she flushed a hen pheasant and it took off like a rocket. Angel was in pursuit and, after 100-150 yards was reeling it in. After about 400 yards Angel took it out of the sky beautifully. The only one to

miss out on seeing the flight was Dave.

Dave and I travelled a lot during the season and only once while out hunting did I fail to have a kill (Essex boys), but it was my own fault as she was too low.

We then came to a field meet at Ilminster, where she killed five pheasants to finish the

Two imprints, Angel and Aeisha.



season off. Her last pheasant was 800-1,000 yards. Her final weight was 2lb 14¼oz for rabbits, 2lb 13¾oz for pheasant. I would like to thank all those who invited me to field meets and a special thanks to my mentor.

Total kills from 15th August to 4th February is 175. Not bad for a vermin hawk. 🦅

First year of the Essex Region

by Andy Hulme

IN AUGUST, MIKE CLOWES AND JULIE attended the inaugural meeting and the Essex Region was official. Our meeting place changed from the Cherrytree to the Walebone Inn. We started with half a dozen members and now we have regularly fourteen to sixteen people attend the monthly meetings.

The region this summer attended the Brightlingsea Working Dog Show and Tendering Show, representing the club and falconry on behalf of the Countryside Alliance. Both shows went well, with a good turnout of members, and at the

Tendering Show the region was offered around 1,200 acres to hunt on.

We had a summer barbecue in July after one of the shows, the autumn was finally here — hawking time!


The region has had two field meetings, both successful, by kind invitation of Mr Michael Freeman and his gamekeeper Nigel at Haughley Green. Great sport was seen by Nigel with the goshawks and Nigel's son Martin with the Harris hawks.

Members of other regions of the W.H.C. graced us with their presence for the second field

meeting with their superb gosses and enjoyed the hawking and hospitality.

A third field meeting is planned for the last day of the game season by kind invitation of Mr James Buckle on his estate in Suffolk.

It has been a good first year for the Essex Region, but a better one lies ahead, with guest speakers and more field meetings planned for the '99 season.

I would like to thank all Essex Region members who have worked hard to make the region a success. 

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Breeding Season Problems for Hens

by Neil A. Forbes, Dip ECAMS FRCVS, and Ron Rees Davies, Cert ZooMed MRCVS
Lansdown Veterinary Surgeons, Clockhouse Veterinary Hospital, Stroud, Gloucestershire.

Egg lethargy is a normal physiological process which will occur to a variable extent in all egg laying females. An egg-laying female extracts an immense volume of calcium from her blood which in turn is replaced by more calcium from the bone, in order to coat her precious egg with a shell. If her homeostatic mechanism is not sufficiently well tuned, when the calcium is removed from the blood it is not replaced sufficiently quickly from the bone, leading to a dangerous reduction in blood calcium levels, which on occasions may drop seriously low, leading to lethargy, weakness, lack of muscle contractions and even on occasions fits, coma and death. The problem is caused initially by either a low calcium diet, a non-functional parathyroid gland, kidney defects, lack of sunlight (which contains ultra violet light which converts vitamin D3 in the diet to activated vitamin D3 which is essential for calcium metabolism). Hopefully the reader will appreciate that this is a complex system, which the body normally controls very accurately and efficiently.

Egg binding: so when does egg lethargy become egg binding or worse? In truth a female should control her calcium metabolism so well that one hardly knows what is going on, except of course for the behavioural changes which accompany nest building, courtship (e.g. food passing), copulation and egg laying. A female should not spend undue time on the nest and certainly should not be on the floor of the aviary and unable to stand up. What is crucial is to maintain efficient visual monitoring of the female wherever she is in the aviary. Egg binding, technically, is when a female is trying to lay an egg which has become stuck on its way down the oviduct. This often occurs when she is short of calcium, as the latter situation reduces uterine muscular activity, hence delaying or preventing egg laying. The main factors responsible for this are changes of weather,

especially wet, windy stormy weather, frights and shock, calcium deficiency or concurrent disease or illness. If a bird is suffering from this condition she should receive very prompt oral calcium and vitamin D3 supplementation (e.g. avimix, nutrobal or calcivit), electrolytes (fluid therapy at a rate of 10ml/kg body weight by crop tube) which can be achieved readily by the breeder, the bird should then be taken inside and warmed in a box. If this action fails to result in egg production within two hours the bird will require urgent veterinary treatment to remove the egg. Preventive action is to ensure that birds are protected from inclement prevailing winds which might occur at that time of year, to prevent other shocks (e.g. cats walking over the roof of the aviary). Dietary calcium levels may be increased in the month prior to egg laying, although the amount of casting consumed should not be increased (as would occur if changing from chick to a rodent diet).


Once a female has laid her first egg, you know when to expect the subsequent eggs. If they are not forthcoming, investigations should be carried out.

Veterinary treatment will normally involve an anaesthetic and intravenous fluid therapy, with additional calcium. Antibiotics may be administered and hormone gels or injections may be given to try and encourage egg laying. If, after an hour or so, no progress is made then surgery will be indicated. If the egg is of significant value then a caesarian section may be performed to remove the egg undamaged. Alternatively the egg may be drained the 'imploded' (i.e. crushed) to make it smaller so that it can be passed without causing further injury to the hen. Any lubrication which is applied to the egg (e.g. liquid paraffin) will render the egg infertile, so if the eggs non-viable anyway it is less stressful and damaging to the hen to remove the egg in this manner rather than

struggling to remove the egg whole.

Egg peritonitis occurs when a yolk is released from the ovary and instead of passing into the infundibulum (funnel) at the top of the oviduct it passes into the abdomen, often giving rise to an egg peritonitis. Alternatively, if a yolk is already passing down the oviduct, if some shock or trauma occurs, e.g. a fright, bad weather, calcium deficiency or egg binding, then the egg which is in transit may stop moving down and instead go into reverse, then travelling back towards the ovary. If this continues, the yolk, perhaps by this stage with albumin (egg white) added may end up back in the abdomen, leading to a severe peritonitis with the subsequent egg. Prevention is not always possible, but sensible measures are obvious.

Treatment needs to be quick if the bird is to be saved. This will comprise antibiotics fluid therapy and, on occasions, a hysterectomy. Once a bird has had an egg peritonitis, even if it does recover, a high percentage have further gynaecological problems in the future.

Prolapsed uterus: this is thankfully a rare but very dangerous condition. It occurs where a hen is straining to produce an egg but for some reason the egg is not forthcoming. This may arise because the egg is adhered to the oviduct wall or there may be a twist (torsion) of the oviduct itself. The result is a hen with a large (3cm for a 1kg bird) mulberry coloured fleshy protruberance coming from the cloaca. If left in this state the bird very rapidly becomes shocked and will die. The only possible solution is emergency surgery. Just pushing the mass into the cloaca and sewing it in will result in a disastrous. The body wall must be opened and the uterus pulled right the way back inside. If the bird's future breeding career is important then one may try to save the uterus. If the bird's life is more important, removal of the uterus is a quicker and safer procedure. 

‘Sheigra’, My Imprint Goshawk

by David Jones

ALL RAPTORS HAVE THEIR OWN individual personalities, like people, dogs, horses and so on. Ninety-nine per cent of the falconers (Austringers) I hunt with fly imprint Goshawks and what a good season we’ve all had, mainly flying pheasant with long slips and long flights. This is shortwing flying at its best. First you have to make the hawk from a ball of down into a ferocious hunter and a partner for life. You can only achieve this with **hard work**. There are **no short cuts to make a hawk fit**, so don’t listen to those armchair falconers who talk a good story but are never seen flying a good hawk. That was a trap I once fell into.

This season I dedicated my new eyas female Goshawk to flying pheasant. Her flying weight was 2lb 9oz to 2lb 12oz. Her fat weight was 2lb 11oz, so you can see there’s a great difference in the flying weight of an imprint and a parent reared Goshawk. That’s why imprints are stronger and healthier birds.

I fly my hawk at the top end of the scale and mainly on appetite, and with all the problems that come with it. However, I still achieved 116 kills. Ninety-seven of those were pheasants, three

partridge, one duck, one moorhen, two crows and ten rabbits. I had a big problem entering her on rabbit and had to take her weight down to 2lb 6oz, but after a big feed on her first kill she would take rabbit at 2lb 9oz and pheasant at 2lb 11oz.

Hunting with a social imprint is very rewarding. Your role is more in the centre and less on the sidelines. She will follow you like a Harris hawk when on your own and if you lose her on a kill and your telemetry has broken you will have more chance of retrieving her. The big advantage that I see and hear from many social imprint falconers is the strength, health, determination and number of flights you can achieve in a day. Also, her breeding potential is becoming easier with artificial insemination.

I am a falconer who believes in making his hawk fit by getting her to follow on through open trees and deep woodland, flying her in the wind and to the lure in semi-falcon style.

In the early days my social imprint would always come and look for me as I am her partner. To enforce this training I would hide and make a loud whistle when in

thick woodland and she would search the wood until she found me then land by my side on a low branch or on my unbaited glove. This training began when being fed from the age of 14 days onwards by whistling long loud whistles or calling her name. (These sounds she would remember and connect to food.)

My style of hunting with this Gos was very free, as my main aim was to socially hack my Gos with the security of telemetry. I would spend up to five hours a day with my dog and hawk hunting and training in woodlands. I would even climb into trees and sit down with her, then try to imagine how good it would be to have wings. I have improved my imprint techniques (thanks to Mike McDermott) by keeping my hawk in the house for a longer period of time on a bow perch at close quarters, then hunting her hard. This has definitely helped with her calling — she’s a much nicer and quieter bird than the last one.

I flew her to the lure in semi-falcon style, making her climb vertically, and one thing I discovered while flying her to the lure was to pull the lure away just before she grabs it and make her chase it on foot or short flights. When she has caught the lure, keep tugging it so it represents live quarry. The more I tugged it the more aggression she would take out on the lure and the nicer she would be towards me.

I often feed my Gos with my bare hand while she sits on my glove and when I cut open her caught prey on the ground she will let me barehanded pull off titbits to feed her and she will not foot me with her razor talons. I have always placed my bare hands in among her food from her first kill and helped her with it. This gave me an insight into her temperament, forming a strong bond.

Making close contact with your bird from an early age is a lot of fun, although at times it can be messy. You are the partner to the unpolluted grey matter within the skull of your young hawk and the mistakes she makes will probably relate directly to things you should have done and this will always be so.

Young imprint Goshawks will sometimes slap you, meaning grab your leg or arm. This is not a killing blow but an adolescent tantrum that will last for a short time if corrected. The remedy is to keep her bowed down and fly her hard. That will normally cure her tantrum. If you think you are going to have problems flying your social imprint to the fist after lure training, a good tip is to throw the lure out on the ground and when she comes in pull it up to your fist between your thumb and first finger until the lure is on your fist. Remember, a Gos hits your fist hard so keep your arm extended away from your face and don’t feel intimidated. This works for me. You can then fly her from low branches or posts to the fist. A social imprint is a hunting partner and you must also hunt, help, and sometimes be her slave. Bad weather and tiredness is not an excuse for not flying your Goshawk. There will always be some shelter on bad days in woods and valleys, if only for thirty minutes of following on. Your effort will be rewarded with a stronger, fitter bird.

Whether impinge feathers, securing the tail bell and telemetry mount, or attaching a new set of aylmeris, I have never cast this Gos yet! I just tie a pigeon carcass (with most of the meat cut off) on to the lure then throw it down. She will mantle over it with her tail fanned out ready for impinge. Other falconers that I know do the same. (I have this on film.) This is where the barehanded training comes in while securing aylmeris.

As she matures and becomes fitter, more demanding and less dependent on me, she knows that she can catch game with sprinting short or endurance flights. Killing pheasants at 100 yards or over a



Sheigra finishes her first season with her 97th pheasant as Briar guards her hunting mate.

mile. By the time I catch up with her she has started to think for herself and has broken into her food. If she misses her game and spots another victim she will self-hunt. I have no problem with this as her fitness will take on many flights and the excitement of running through the woods or fields with telemetry is exhilarating. I hunt in many ways: following on, off the fist, by my side or even under bramble bushes, hawk, dog and I. Self-hunting can become a bit of a nuisance when out with other falconers while they are waiting for a slip. I could stop this behaviour by cutting her weight down and flying her on short discipline flights that would keep her tight to me, but I prefer to fly her high on appetite, then I know she will perform without the danger of weakness. If she has no appetite she will do her butterfly impression, flown off the fist with long lazy wing beats, flying into trees or following you at her own pace. Until the transformation when her appetite kicks in, with power flights and the determination of a true fit predator that takes no prisoners.

Coming to the end of the season, ‘Sheigra’, my Goshawk, went stale and off colour. This was something that I had never experienced before and I couldn’t understand. I thought I would seek advice from

my good friend Will Farrance in Essex, who had flown goshawks for thirty years and this season will be flying his first imprint. He asked me what diet my hawk was on. Pheasant, I say, as that’s the main quarry I hunt. William then said I must change her diet and feed her on washed, skinned chick or washed rabbit for a while, as she has too much mucus in her gizzard. So I changed her diet without her losing weight and also placed a quarter of a teaspoon of small gravel (Rangle) inside each skinned washed chick and within two days she was back on form, taking two to three pheasants a day. Now, I thought, why didn’t I have this problem before with my last Goshawk. The reason was I flew her out of the aviary and she always had gravel on the floor that she would take when needed. The lack of rabbits in my area and my passion for flying pheasant also contributed to her dietary problem. Too much rich food is not always a good thing. The moral of this advice I was given is to **keep the past in mind when reaching for the future** and remember you are dealing with a reptilian brain; not a dog, not a horse or a child. Her thought patterns are alien to ours but we can build bridges and communicate with one of nature’s greatest hunters — **The Goshawk**.

Sheigra at 14 days. The imprinting begins.



Philippine Eagles

by Jemima Parry-Jones

THIS YEAR HAS BEEN SOMEWHAT HECTIC for me personally in terms of travel. Normally I manage about one trip a year away from the Centre. I have to go abroad as it is the only way I can actually let go and not think about, phone, or rush home to the Centre! I hasten to add that I do not go and lie on a beach somewhere. I can't think of anything that would drive me round the bend quicker than sitting doing nothing.

I usually go to a conference somewhere in the world. I am lucky enough to be one of the international directors for the Raptor Research Foundation, which is based in the US. This, as well as the fact that these days I am asked to chair or run sessions, give me a good reason to go. Add to that most of my beloved friends come from a very long way off and I live to see them, plus I can put the travel off against tax, and that is a good reason for going. Over the years the Centre has gained a name and credibility in the raptor conservation world and part of this is due to me being able to attend these international conferences. Well, that is my excuse for leaving the UK once a year!

But since last August I have been to Africa, Japan, South Carolina, India, Japan and The Philippines — in that order! Probably one of the most interesting trips for others is the one I was lucky enough to make to The Philippines. I had to go to Japan to discuss and finalise a contract that we are doing out there this year. John, who was going to be in charge out there at the start of the contract, came with me. It seemed silly not to take the chance of going back via The Philippines as we were in their neck of the woods so to speak.

I am a little fanatical about taking hand luggage only. I have lost my luggage five times. Once I didn't see it again for over a week and had the telemetry that was in it stolen. So I hate not having my things under my control at all times. The difference between the climate in Japan and The Philippines in February made this interesting packing! It snowed in Japan and was freezing cold, it was wet, warm and muggy in The Philippines. However we managed,

although we did not stay in the same place for more than two nights in the whole thirteen days of travel and by the time I had packed my hand luggage for the eighth time I would happily have thrown the whole bloody lot away!

We arrived in Manila, which is the capital and is in the north of The Philippines. The Philippine Eagle Foundation is based in Davao, which is on the island of Mindanao, which is in the south. So we had to stay the night in Manila and fly out the next morning to Davao. The plane left at 5 am! So we had to be at the airport at 3 am — great! My favourite sort of time to be at an airport. Still, it didn't really matter as I get very little sleep abroad anyway. As we sat at the airport, with every seat and standing space full of people, I chanced to look at the newspaper the man sitting next to me was reading and there, right on the front page, was a picture of a newly hatched baby Philippine Eagle! It had been hatched a couple of days before. It turned out that everyone at home actually knew this before I did, as Dennis Salvador — the director of the Philippine Eagle Foundation — had e-mailed everyone involved with the news. But, because of the time difference and the fact that we had been travelling for four days, I had not been in e-mail contact with home and so did not have the news forwarded to me. It was a lovely surprise and I grabbed a newspaper on the plane.

We got to Davao and were met by Dennis, who took us for a great breakfast and then to the offices of the Philippine Eagle Foundation. They are well organised, with good space and also a very nice truck, sponsored in part by The Peregrine Fund. After chatting to various people at the offices and watching a video of the baby Philippine Eagle hatching we put our luggage into a van and were driven about an hour out of Davao to the town outside which the centre where the captive eagles are kept. We were put up in a really nice resort with glorious gardens and large wooden chalet type housing dotted around the grounds. After dropping off our gear

we went straight up to the Centre and I saw my first Philippine Eagle. Actually, the first one I saw was the baby and perfectly wonderful it was too.

Especially as last year I changed over all my incubators to the Brinsea Octago 20 and had a really good year hatch-wise; far better than previously with my old incubators. Dennis had visited us last year and, between the two of us and Brinsea, we had managed to get two incubators subsidised and out to The Philippines. The newly hatched baby hatched in the Brinsea Octagon 20 — and this after a break of six years since the last successful hatching. Not only that, but it was the first baby to hatch without assistance. So pretty well done, Brinsea and the Philippine Eagle Foundation I would say!

We then looked round the Centre and saw the full sized version. Boy are they spectacular! They really are stunning eagles, although not as heavy as the Steller's Sea-eagle or the female Martial Eagle, their very long tail and that huge slender beak makes them look enormous. Sadly, the two slides that I have of me in the same picture are very out of focus, but they do at least give an impression of size. We had seen all the eagles — some are on view to the visiting public, some are in private aviaries to assist with breeding. They also have a number of other raptors, White-bellied Sea-eagles, Serpent Eagles, a couple of Philippine Hawk Eagles, Brahminy Kites, Grey-headed Fishing Eagles and the Giant Scops Owls and I forget what else!

We talked, looked, sat in the sun and generally relaxed, which was nice as things had been a little hectic up till that point. Dennis knew that I really wanted to see Philippines Eagles in the wild, so after various discussions on the phone it was decided that three of the research team would take John and I out into the field to see eagles. The only problem was that, in the area closest to the Centre, an army brigadier general had just been kidnapped and was being held hostage in exchange for political prisoners. Consequently,

the Philippine Eagle team did not want to take us in there in case we were grabbed and used as hostages — although who the hell would want to pay anything for me is another matter!

So it was decided to take us to an area that was safer, but further away — five hours way in the P-fund truck! The catch was that the road there was a bit rough — that was the understatement of the flaming century. We left at 9 am and drove — the road seemed okay to me — but that was just to lull us into a false sense of security. Then we hit the rough stuff and boy was it rough! Three hours of literally hanging on to the seat or straps, depending on where you were sitting. It was exhausting!

However, we got there and then waited for a guide to take us in. We switched into another somewhat older vehicle and drove through rain — well it was a tropical rain forest and it did rain — almost all the time we were in there! We drove to where we were going to collect a pony which was going to carry all our stuff, and boy, was it loaded, although I hasten to add I carried my own stuff. Then we climbed the hill/mountain where the eagles lived. It was very odd to see this mountain which should have been covered in rain forest but only the very tip was still clothed in trees. All the way up we came across huts and fences and land tilled to grow crops. Even in the most unlikely places. It was really very sad, and you could see how the eagles and everything else that relied on the forest had slowly been pushed and squeezed out.

Although I have seen many films and slides of deforestation, it is not until you see it for real that it really sinks in. But on the other hand there are people who need to farm to be able to survive. The old policy of slash and burn has changed a little too. Where once the land had been used it was then left and eventually secondary forest would regrow. Now, with the pressure from high population, the land was kept in use and so nothing had the chance to regrow.

We got up the mountain and to a lodge where we stayed the night. It was getting close to dark when we arrived so, although we had a short walk into the forest, we could not go far before returning to the lodge. There was a group of bird watchers staying in the bedroom area of the lodge, so we slept downstairs, which would have been fine although I did get a little damp. However, the



Philippine Eagle — a bird worth saving.

flaming bird watchers decided they wanted to see an owl before it was light so they asked for breakfast at 4 am! This meant that the people looking after them had to be up and getting breakfast in the downstairs bit at 3.30 am and this was where we were sleeping. So we had to get up and I was not amused. Then, can you believe it, about twelve bird watchers trudged off into the pitch dark with torches on their heads towards the noise of a scops owl and wondered why the damn thing flew away long before they got there — what a bunch of idiots! And ruined my sleep, too.

It was light by 6 am and we walked up to where the nest was in view and sat down with binoculars and spent about five minutes trying to find the next. The researchers knew where it was, but it took John and I a bit of time to find it. I then wished I had a spotting scope rather than my binoculars, good though they are.

There in the fork of a huge tree was a huge nest and an almost full grown Philippine Eagle. It was standing up and wing flapping and generally playing around on the nest. After a while we spotted one of the adults in a tree further up the hillside and then when that moved in the tree I spotted a second bird in the same tree. Because it was raining they did not do any flying, which was a shame. However, it was such a treat to see these birds, of which there are probably only about 124 left in the wild.

We stayed until we were pretty damp and then returned to the lodge, picked up another pony and the gear

and made our way down the mountain, bidding farewell and good luck to the eagles.

A tough trip on the road back meant that we were more than ready for a shower and a rest, both of which were very welcome. It was at that point I decided that my socks and trainers were not coming home with me — they had died a noble death walking to a Philippine Eagle forest, but they now needed to rest in peace in the bin!

I gave a talk to the staff the following day and we then moved to an hotel closer to the airport as we were flying the next day. There were a number of questions that the staff and Dennis wanted me to ask so I wrote a report that night and on the flight on the way home.

To get the chance to see these birds and to work with people with such dedication against what are enormous odds as very special. I was talking to them over our last dinner and told them that I had always felt that to work in the conservation field one had to be an optimist, otherwise you might as well not be in the job at all. I mentioned that after my visit to India and seeing all the problems there, plus the problems they are having to deal with, that my optimism had taken a beating, but that it was important to keep a spark of it alive.

Seeing what they are doing is enough to fuel that spark, and so we are going to do our best to afford to be able to go on helping them. If anyone feels they would like to help, what they really need is funds. You can send donations here and I will pass them on.

A day out on the Dillington Estate

by Jane Michell

THE COUNTRY LANDOWNERS' Association had invited members of the Welsh Hawking Club to hold a meet on the beautiful estate of Ewen Cameron's at Dillington, Ilminster, Somerset, so that the CLA members could get to know more about hawking and what it entails. Taking part were the regional director of the CLA, Annie Lanigan, and events organiser Elizabeth Ferris, as well as a good turnout with several other members present.

On a grey, cold windy day we all met in the car park of Dillington House, then split into two groups so that we could hunt from each end of the estate without too much game disturbance and a chance for each hawk to have a flight.

We started by walking up a wooded slope where one of the pointers, called Briar, instantly froze on point, then was told to put up. A pheasant immediately flushed from the footpath where we had walked. The first slip was Dave Jones's with his goshawk; she was a bit panicky as we had

only walked 100 yards from the car park and none of the hawks had settled, so he decided not to slip. We then walked on to more open land with the edge of the hill sloping away to our left and a good view of the valley and countryside.

It was generally agreed that this more open country would be better for the birds and spectators. A pheasant was pointed and Dave slipped his gos. She went into the wood and Dave followed her with telemetry in hand and later found her on a kill. Mick Cane's gos flew next and went straight up into a tree, but later took some strong birds. Mike West's hawk, a seven-year-old female gos, considered to be an experienced goshawk, flew a cock pheasant into a small wood at the bottom of the hill. When Mike got there he searched the wood for a good twenty minutes, with telemetry signals coming from everywhere. Mike then discovered someone else was on the same frequency. He later found his hawk fed up on a cock

pheasant. So Mike had to call it a day.

Jim French, with his mature male gos, was also experiencing some early problems, as Jim and his hawk had been dragged out, by Dave, from his chalet in Oxford with the flu. Jim still hunted down a pheasant with his male.

The other group of goshawks was more successful on open land, with Mike Tucker's 'Angel' flying long and well, taking five pheasants. Paul McCanian's male gos was flying his heart out and filling Paul's bag. Andy Hume's male gos was like a dart, not missing much, and was a happy hawk at the end of the day. Everyone remarked on how selective goshawks could be.

Although the morning was not entirely successful in that the goshawks did not make as many catches as I thought and often seemed disinterested in their prey, for someone who has not been hawking before it was interesting to learn the reasons for their disinclination. A variety of

factors obviously played a part in the success or failure of a catch, such as it being too early in the morning, their weight being a bit too high, a long journey or new terrain.

In the afternoon we took the long wings up to a large ploughed field with thick hedgerows and a slight bank with lots of pheasants hiding in the hedges. Sadly, the CLA party had to leave by this time so they did not get to see the spectacular flights by the falcons.

Julian Godfrey's Peregrine/Saker was the first to go and was put up, although the hedge was full of pheasants she decided to go after a bunch of crows in the opposite direction! There was a delay as Julian went to get her across a 100 acre ploughed field. By the time he reached her his boots were twice the size and weighed a ton, which slowed him up considerably. After this lengthy wait we saw flight after flight while the birds tried to gain enough height. The wind was strong and blowing in the wrong direction, so most of the birds found it difficult to gain the height needed to drop on to their prey. However, they all tried and tried again in a very impressive manner. There was a £50 bounty on a white pheasant, which was persistently lurking in the undergrowth before finally being flushed out. Although we all thought it had been caught by Pete Bowyer's peregrine tiercel it managed to escape into the wood. (So we think?) Mark Gardener's peregrine falcon took a pheasant after a chase. We then decided to head back. There were sixteen pheasants actually caught and a very good time was had by all. We would like to thank Ewen Cameron for the invitation to his estate; Annie Lanigan our regional director (CLA); Elizabeth Ferris, events organiser; Chris Wilson, farm manager; Tony Wensley, gamekeeper; and Simon Hawker, assistant gamekeeper.

Finally we all returned to the local pub and many samples were drunk of Somerset ale.

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Hunting Rhodesian Lanners in Scotland

by John Condy (Harare, Zimbabwe)

The Mecca of Longwing hunting of gamebirds must surely be hunting grouse in the Highlands of Scotland.

In 1972, I had the opportunity to do this. The first problem to overcome was that there were sanctions being imposed against Rhodesia by the rest of the world. I knew that should I apply for a permit from the British Home Office to import some falcons to Britain the answer, should they be bothered to reply, would have been No.

Being a member of the 'ways and means club', and all Rhodesians were by this time highly innovative in finding ways of doing all sorts of things to get around 'sanctions', I decided to get my friend Steven Frank to get the permits for me, giving a Malawian address, and to meet me at Heathrow.

In due course I arrived at Heathrow with three haggard lanners (one had been caught 48 hours previously) and a haggard peregrine tiercel, with no permit to import them.

I walked up the red route with the two cardboard cartons containing the birds and was prepared to explain to Customs that the permit was in the hands of a friend who was to meet me.

I put on my best innocent and honest face and the customs officer said: "What have you got there?" "Three falcons." "And what are you going to do with them?" "I hope to kill all the grouse in Scotland." "Well push off and get killing."

It was as easy as that. I walked out to find Steve, who immediately said: "How on earth did you get through? Here is the permit."

Those were the days before terrorists and highjackings.

The first ten days were spent in Somerset with Eustace Poles, where I spent all the time manning and training the birds to the lure. The peregrine became sick and died. It was sent to the veterinary laboratory in Cambridge. The post mortem report was negative. In retrospect I am sure it died of insecticide poisoning brought on by dropping its weight.

So on the 'Glorious twelfth' we were all in place at Steve's croft near Dornoch.

Steve had a pair of Peales peregrines and a Scottish falcon. My Lanners consisted of one very lazy bird, one average and one very good one. I had already assessed their characters, so did most of the hunting with the good one, 'Sasha'.

Her first kill was a spectacular vertical stoop on a grouse. It was not from a great height. Most of the time Lanners do not go very high. Their home hunting is often in woodland, where a very high pitch can be a disadvantage. It was seen to be vertical because on the way down one could see first its back then the belly.

Over the next two weeks one of the points that showed up was how much more tenacious in the hunt the Lanner was compared to peregrines. As soon as a grouse dropped into the heather, peregrines would lose interest,

whereas the Lanner would go into the heather and get its quarry. In fact once Sasha went down a wide four foot deep hole, to get her grouse.

I knew parts of the Highlands from the days before I started at Edinburgh University. I had worked in Ross-shire as a labourer with the Forestry Commission, so I looked up an old friend, Sandy Grant. We arranged to go after ptarmigan near Ben Nevis. It was a very beautiful and almost hot day, with only a slight breeze. Near the top of a ridge, we saw ptarmigan 100 yards away. Sasha was put up. She was mounting nicely when a cock grouse got up under her. Of course she went straight down and got it, and our ptarmigan just took off and croaked their way round the hill to safety.

It was disappointing but, on the other hand, I got a thrill at just seeing those beautiful birds again, and we did not go home empty handed.

A week later I lost Sasha. She had been chasing some bird across a busy road when a car hit her. Seeing she had jesses, the driver of the car took the body to the Air Force base at Lossiemouth. Here it was well known that the Air Force kept a squadron of peregrines for clearing the gulls away before the jet fighters took off.

The second Lanner was lost, and the third (lazy) I gave to a young girl who had fallen in love with her. She was a beautiful bird, but not one I would have kept for hunting.

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First Slip . . . Up!

by Neil McCann

ONE OF THE FEW WISE MOVES MADE by myself was to join the Welsh Hawking Club, in which I received a much greater knowledge by hands-on experience in which no book or video could visage on one of the oldest sports known to man, 'falconry'.

This season I was to take on two of the most difficult things to train, in my eyes. The first, an English pointer x spaniel dog, in which I travelled a 1,000-mile return journey to collect from the Scottish Highlands, to where I saw Paul Dooley fly his female goshawk with such 'ease' and passion that made me want one there and then. To take rabbits with deadly speed and accuracy; there were no ill manners or bad temperament shown by bird of falconer, as written in all the books, which made me in dire need to fly this type of bird.

After much debate over the hard winter/spring and summer months trying to train my first dog and endless phone calls to friends

Neil McCann's gos on rabbit.



asking where I was going wrong, seeming to be getting nowhere fast, I am still trying hard twelve months on. Paul put me in touch with a friend, Keith, from whom I purchased a beautiful German x Finnish female eyas goshawk, weighing in at 21lb 14oz, in August. The training went like a textbook, and with a lot of patience and time she was flying free in five weeks time to take us our first rabbit.

A trip to Wales with Mike Fagan and his very reliable Springer tyke, as my own dog was still under very much basic training. I still to this day do not know who is training who (a bit like married life). Within ten minutes Mick's Harris hawk had a rabbit flushed out of the gorse and the first rabbit in the bag. We moved down the valley over a stream and through three sheep fields, typical tyke working every metre but still awaiting a slip for myself. Through two more fields, over a gate into the next field with small clusters of nettles. I

nearly stood on a rabbit before it bolted. Megan was off the fist like lightning and over the rabbit within seconds. She followed the rabbit directly above it for more than fifty yards before, you guessed it, the rabbit popped into a warren and Megan flew up into the nearest tree to sulk for the rest of the morning, afternoon, and early evening, only visible by the pink ribbon on the tail mount. It then rained. In Wales it does not rain but belts it down. Myself and Mike now looked like the Glums, nothing would bring her down.

Then she moved off, over to the wood 200 yards away. We packed lures and started the game of cat and mouse, or follow that beeb, beeb for four hours, like two loonies out of the asylum, with what the farmer thought looked like with TV detector vans on foot looking for my prize possession. It was now dusk and the Glums were not wet but sodden and, to finalise it, she landed ten feet high (only spotted by the pink tail ribbon) in a tree in the middle of a cesspit. I was knee deep in at this point and she refused to come at any expense. She was left to the Welsh night air. We returned to our car, which I had left with the sun roof open, to find puddles on the seats and the floor — the end to a perfect day.

The telephone was hot (and so was my ear, from the wife, for returning without the bird) from friends offering to take the day off work to go out at dawn to hopefully find and recover Megan. At 5.30 am I had tracked her down (who says birds don't move in the dark?) to the middle of the bull field below the moor, a quarter of a mile away. I waited till first light, when she moved to the small spinney (small wood)



Paul Dooley, Mick Fagan, Tony and Jan hawking in Wales.

down the valley. Lindford Christie had nothing on me that morning, climbing barbed wire fences with telemetry, bags and wellies on.

She was found at 5.30 am, full light at 6 am, moved off the bull field at 6.15 am. I got to the spinney at 6.30 am — a long hard run around the bull field. She was bleeped down and spotted by the pink ribbon fifteen feet above my sweaty, shiny head. We stared at each other for seconds before she came down within minutes, which felt like hours, to a full quail on a lure and I crawled through mud to pick her up. There was no one more pleased than myself that Monday morning.

Mick and I have returned for many a successful hawking day in Wales, and Megan would not have had a good season catching rabbits, pheasant and hare if it had not been for Paul Dooley and Mike Fagan's knowledge of the sport of falconry and having such well trained dogs to hawk over. If it had not been for them these photographs and this article would not have happened. 🐾



Dave Dimond (Chairman) with his wife Jeanie (Treasurer) at yet another show flying the flags for The Welsh Hawking Club — many thanks from all of us.

Welsh Hawking Club

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St. Bavo, the patron saint of Falconers

Helen Scouse (Gwent Hawk Rescue)

It had started with three messages on the answerphone awaiting our return from a pet charity's Christmas fair. The first was from a concerned lady, the next from her son, an angry farmer with a shotgun and the last from the police. They all related to a large bird of prey who was dining off chickens about six miles away.

And now here we were at the foot of a tall oak tree in whose crown sat a hunched and angry Harris hawk. For three days she had ignored all our blandishments, titbits, chunks of beef, rabbit, seductively trailed lures — you know the scene! Occasionally she would dive down into the scrub and emerge triumphantly clutching a vole but what she really, really wanted was her hen.

My husband had rescued its body, set it in a cunning trap devised from a chicken ark and I was entrusted with the string. It was very early, grey, cold and beginning to drizzle when I made a vow to St. Bavo, the patron saint of falconers.

St. Bavo was a 7th century Flemish nobleman whose great passion was hunting and hawking. He kicked his wife downstairs, sold his serfs to other landowners and finally was accused of stealing his overlords' white Gyrfalcon. At the last moment on the scaffold the errant bird turned up to save him. St. Bavo became a Christian and spent the rest of his life as a hermit, healing people, animals and birds — but he never lost his love of hawks.

Within the hour I had got her. She was furious. She had no bells or telemetry and only one mews jess. She was also, as we suspected, as high as a kite from all her plump chicken dinners. Neither had she any identichip — in fact the only clue to her owner lay in the number on her breeder's ring and fifteen telephone calls later we were none the wiser. Matters had been further complicated by another female Harris hawk loose in the area,

which was returned, ring number unread, by another falconer.

Another four months and I had fulfilled my vow. St. Bavo's picture hung in the Wye valley Art society's spring exhibition in the Monmouth museum. At the preview the secretary was retailing the story to some friends when a lady exclaimed that she thought one of her neighbours had lost a hawk and requested our address to pass on to him.

Apparently, he was a newcomer to the district, not given to socialising,

with an ex-directory 'phone living in a barn conversion so new and private that it did not even feature in any directory. It was less than a mile from the chicken farm. When her owner finally turned up (With the correct ring number) Feathers McGraw (as we called her) greeted him with interest and almost with affection. So St. Bavo not only interceded to bring her into safe custody but also ensured that she was duly returned to her rightful owner. Well, he would, wouldn't he?

Painting by Helen Scouse.



Study of a Silver Gyr by Lindsay H. Graham.

The paintings on this page and the back cover are available as prints from The Welsh Hawking Club.



An Ancient Roost
by
Lindsay H. Graham.