

PROJECT LUGGER NEWSLETTER

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Editorial



Chairman with Garth

I apologise for the lateness of our Winter Issue Newsletter but so much has gone on this year, both in terms of the Project and Chairman personally, that things have unfortunately conspired to make delayed publication inevitable. As will be seen in the news items the Chairman was hospitalised whilst on a trip to Germany and France for the Project and on eventually getting back to the UK was hospitalised once more. All of which meant that quite a considerable number of things were put onto the back burner, including this newsletter. However we are back on track now and things are moving as they should.

The Project has had an eventful few months with various "Lugger Days" taking place, some successful, one in particular less so. But our whole policy of "Lugger Days" and the way they are staged is currently under review and next year, I believe, will see a very different approach. Monday 6th of May 2024 will be "International Lugger Falcon Awareness Day" and we hope that all working partners will make an effort to

participate and make the day a huge success. As the 6th falls on a Monday we will be asking our partners to make sure that on Saturday 4th of May social media is flooded with positive images of Luggers, the Project and the work being done to help them.

The DFO once again, completely out of the blue, donated 1,000 euros to the Project and equally out of the blue the Kong Company donated £3,231 to the Project. Both wonderful boosts for financing the work we want to carry out.

Our work in the field in Pakistan is making significant progress in terms of Luggers actually being saved and released from the illegal trapping trade and it is hoped camera traps at wild nest sites will also be a reality next breeding season. A detailed report will appear in the 2024 spring newsletter, all being well.

Charls Gray and Bob Dalton travelled to Pakistan last April/May and visited the "Raptor Rehabilitation and Conservation Centre Pakistan" at Gilgit and had the pleasure of sorting out some nine Luggers that had been rescued and putting them into our own new block of five rehabilitation aviaries we have there. These aviaries were built using funds raised by the Project Lugger Chairty and then sent out to Pakistan.

It should be noted that in the Trustees meeting held in October 2023 Charles Gray was appointed Vice Chairman of the Project. Many congratulations to Charlie and his appointment is in recognition of the wonderful energy and devotion he puts into all that we do in the Project. The Chairman knows he can always rely on his right hand man and appreciates just how much Charlie does for the Project. A great deal of it behind the scenes and unsung, but never ever unappreciated.



Charles Gray with Garth

Easter Weekend Promo Days



The project, in conjunction with three different centres has recently held Promotion days for the Project. With the financial constraints that seem to affect everybody at the moment the three days were a little different in both their application and indeed outcome to previous such events. Two were new days and one was with a tried and tested partner. The two new days were at Suffolk Owl Sanctuary on Easter Sunday 9th of April and the following day, Easter Monday, we were at The Raptor Foundation, near Huntingdon.

The day with the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary was agreed with the management some six months previously and had been advertised on FaceBook quite heavily

for around two months. Yet despite this when Charles and I turned up everyone was surprised to see us. No member of staff knew that Lugger Day was planned for that day. The manager and the principal member of staff were both off that day!! The staff were very accommodating though and

did their utmost to make the best of certainly a very bad start to the day. A quick phone call to the owner resulted in him being somewhat surprised at the situation and we were met with profuse apologies. Let me stress the staff present were most helpful and did what they could to salvage the day. Personally I can only comment that I was glad to move on at the end of the day and head for the Raptor Foundation.

On arrival at the foundation we were warmly greeted by Elizabeth Blows, who had more than kindly taken care of our accommodation for us in one of the centres guest rooms. A very different reception indeed from the other centre.

The following morning bright and early we set up our stand, inside on this occasion as the weather forecast was far from kind, and readied ourselves for the day. Despite the weather we did indeed have a very good day and got to chat to a lot of people regarding the Project and the work we are doing. We also took sufficient donations to justify the journey to ourselves and undoubtedly classed the day as a success. So once again very many thanks to Elizabeth and her friendly staff.

One of the highlights for me was to go into the aviary of "Blathazar" a thirty-year-old Northern Ground Hornbill who is a true character. If you give him food by hand, he flirts with you in his own way which consists of either trying to put the food he has just taken on your foot or by swallowing the food then slapping your out stretched hand with his beak very rapidly again and again. He is so gentle for such a large powerful bird. He really is one of my favourites in any centre that I visit.



Pakistan Developments



Late April saw myself and fellow Project Lugger Trustee, Charles Gray, head off to Heathrow for the long flight to Abu Dhabi and then from there onto Islamabad in Pakistan. The reason for our visit was to check on the progress of the building work at the rehabilitation and conservation centre that was being constructed at Gilgit, in northern Pakistan. Gilgit is in a valley where three mountain ranges come together and from there the Himalayas can be seen rising in the distance and dominating the landscape. When you stand anywhere in Gilgit and face the Himalayas then the Hindu Kush will be on your right stretching away into Afghanistan and to your left the Karakoram mountains that lead to China. Close by is also the confluence of the Gilgit and Indus rivers. Spectacular countryside containing some pretty spectacular wildlife.

Among these are some stunning birds such as Choughs, Ravens, Snow Cocks, Griffon Vultures and Golden Eagles. But it is probably the three big animals that most people associate with this area and type of terrain. The first is the Markhor, (*Capra Falconeri*) the national animal of Pakistan and a huge member of the sheep family that generally can be found above two thousand metres and males are exceedingly highly prized by trophy hunters. Each year a number of licences to shoot Markhor are granted and these are generally auctioned, ensuring the most amount

of money possible goes to the relevant Wildlife Department to maintain the population and to the local communities concerned to ensure their future cooperation in managing the animals. Big male Markhor are generally solitary animals and are diurnal. They are to be found in scrub forest of Oaks, Pines and Junipers. Another animal to be found in this environment is the Himalayan Brown Bear (*Ursus Arctos Isabellinus*). This is a very impressive animal with males reaching over seven feet tall when they stand erect. Unfortunately due to a combination of quite intense periods of persecution as well as the inevitable loss of habit numbers have plummeted. The last of the iconic three is the Snow Leopard, (*Panthera Unica*), surely one of the most beautiful animals in existence. In this particular region of Pakistan their numbers seem to be stabilising and there is a protection plan in place for them. Little did I realise on my arrival in Pakistan that I would get up close and personal with a Snow Leopard in a few days' time.

When booking our flights what Charles and I had taken care over was to make sure we arrived in Pakistan at the official end of the celebratory holiday Eid, which is a huge public holiday celebrated by families coming together and I suppose the nearest equivalent in the west would be the Christmas holidays. We were aware that almost everywhere in the country comes to a standstill during that period and so sought to arrive when normality had resumed. Little did we realise that Eid has transformed itself, as the Christmas break has here in Europe, to an extended, seemingly never ending break.

Our eventual arrival at Islamabad all went quite smoothly on the customs and immigration side of things. The only very slight hiccup was that despite the fact we had visas the junior immigration officer that greeted us at his desk was unsure what to do and it took fifteen minutes for him to be advised he just had to stamp them and return them to us. But fifteen minutes delay is nothing to the four hours or so delays I have



endured with immigration in Pakistan, despite having all the correct documents. Soon enough, around four am, we were out of the airport and into the night air to be met by a mutual friend of both myself and our Pakistan partner, Kamran Khan Yousafzai. As Kamran was himself up in Gilgit he had arranged for us to be met by Harron Latif and a friend of his. These gentlemen were exceedingly kind and as we could not check into our hotel till nine am they took us off in search of some coffee to kill the time.

We found a twenty-four-hour MacDonalds that was open but was experiencing a power cut (the bane of life in Pakistan) and so we sat at an outside table watching the morning sun break and a pair of Bonelli's Eagles soaring over the Margala Hills looking for prey. The Margala Hills are close to Islamabad but are still wild enough to be home to a population of Leopards. These big cats have a reputation for coming down out of the hills when times are hard and preying on dogs and domestic fowl when given the opportunity. Eventually power was restored and we were able to enjoy some coffee as Mynah birds danced around the tables looking for crumbs. Seemed so strange to see these birds which are so valuable in the UK literally everywhere. They are of course members of the Starling family and share a great many characteristics with their better known cousins.

On repeatedly checking with our intended hotel the time given to check in got later and later and eventually the friend of Haroon made a phone call and switched our accommodation to a guest house that was owned by a friend of his. Accordingly we departed our lengthy coffee stop and set off to the new accommodation. It proved to be very satisfactory and so Charles and I were installed and told we would be collected the next morning and just after five am for our onward internal flight to Gilgit. We were sharing the guest house with three high ranking political refugees from Afghanistan who were seeking asylum in Canada. They relished the opportunity to speak with some fresh faces and so we were invited to take tea with them. This proved to be a highly sociable but very long-winded affair involving copious amounts of green tea. For someone that never drinks tea it was difficult to drink sufficient of the stuff to be polite but not quite enough to have gastric repercussions. The conversation was very interesting though and was inevitably followed by a round of selfie taking. How did the world survive before selfies?

Bright and early the following morning, five am to be precise, we left the guest house, having discovered our bill for accommodation had been paid for by our host, as indeed had our evening meal. Waiting outside was a gentleman called Irfan Khan, who I had met once, very briefly a couple of years before hand. He had been called by one of our hosts and told to collect us and take us to the airport. This is how things tend to work in Pakistan. The family, both immediate and extended, are called upon now and again to help out with such things and the willingness to do so and be of help never ceases to amaze me. Irfan





drove us to Islamabad airport and made sure we were safely ensconced in domestic departures before taking his leave of us. Islamabad airport is a very modern and extremely functional building and once checked in to our internal flight Charles and I went off in search of coffee. We had the choice of three different establishments, all open, and picked the brightest. It was very strange to be the only customers in what seemed like a deserted departure area. Eventually we were joined in the coffee shop by two Australian tourists. There did not seem to be too many people for the flight, which is reputedly so difficult to get seats on. However once we went to the departure gate it did turn out the flight was full. I am a nervous flier, and the sight of a relatively small turbo prop plane did not fill me with confidence. Particularly as we would be flying over and through mainly mountain passes to get to Gilgit. Suddenly the fourteen-hour road journey didn't seem quite such a bad option after all.

We duly arrived in Gilgit to be swathed in sunshine having flown through the most spectacular scenery. Waiting for us was Kamran and his driver. On being collected we went straight to a meeting with the local wildlife people. Here we met with The Regional Director Mr. Ijlal Ahmed and Mr. Iftikhar Akunzada the Divisional Wildlife Officer. These gentleman have

been very helpful in setting up the centre at Gilgit and without their help the whole project would simply not have been possible. These gentlemen very kindly presented both Charles and myself with a stunning book that has been produced on the birds of Gilgit-Baltistan. A dramatic framed photograph of a Snow Leopard took centre stage of the wall behind the desk of the Director and when I remarked upon it I was told that tomorrow a short trip had been arranged for myself and Charles to visit the Snow Leopard station in the nearby mountains. As with all such meetings, much tea was taken. At the conclusion of the meeting it was then on to the centre to see progress.

The centre itself had changed very considerably since our last visit and a block of twenty good sized sturdy aviaries were having the finishing touches regarding perching, food chutes etc put it place on our arrival. There was also an enclosed weathering ground with a good number of both hawks and falcons present. The hawks were all adult Goshawks consisting of six females and one male. The falcons were a mixture of Sakers, Peregrines, Luggers with the addition of one adult female Red Naped Shaheen and one immature male Black Shaheen. There were also two large hybrid falcons that had been confiscated from an Arab falconer who did not have the correct passports for the falcons on their hunting trip to Pakistan. There was also a large white Gyr x Peregrine hybrid falcon looked really rather out of place in such a setting. Having taken stock of the set up and helped with a few final tweaks in the aviaries it was time to head back into the city of Gilgit and get established in our hotel that would be home for the next week or so.

This, it has to be said, really did come as a very major disappointment as we drew up at the hotel we had stayed in on our last trip to Gilgit some fourteen months previously. The name of the establishment is The Rupal Inn and boasts sixty rooms. This hotel quite simply has to be seen to be believed. The whole place is dirty, carpets are threadbare, wallpaper is peeling, as is the paint where it has been randomly applied. On our previous visit there was a great hole in the wall adjacent to the lobby which was supposedly for

the lift which was on the point of being installed. Nothing had changed and the hole was still as magnificently empty as it had been previously. Despite the fact there are sixty rooms there were only three other rooms occupied when we went to check in but a huge row erupted between the two people on reception as to what rooms we should be allocated. Our bags, fortunately not carried by us, then went on a tour of several rooms over three different floors until the two receptionists finally agreed we should have the same rooms as we had previously as they are the nicest.

My room had an extension lead for, as I was told, charging my phone and other electrical devices. This homemade extension lead was a block of sockets with two bare wires pushed in to supply power. These two wires could be traced back to the motor on the fridge where again they had been attached by stripping the wires and wrapping them around the appropriate places. But it is not as dangerous as it sounds as, needless to say, the fridge didn't work. The air conditioning and the television were also not working. I took both remote controls to reception and pointed out the lack of batteries in both. Someone was despatched to take the batteries from devices in other rooms to satisfy my gadgets shortcomings. On returning to my room I switch the air con on and left it running for about twenty seconds. I am not too au fait with air conditioning systems, but I tend to assume the room isn't supposed to fill with smoke and sparks come from the unit. The tv was more straight forward. It still didn't work as the wires from the back of the set that should have gone to a plug and thence into a socket had been cut off close to the set. I could go on at great length about the lack of facilities but it would be as boring for me to record as for you to read no doubt. Another delightful feature of Gilgit itself is that power cuts happen literally daily and last anything from a few seconds to eight or nine hours. This means of course the internet dies with it as does the hot water facility in the shower. It also means that obtaining breakfast (instant coffee, a greasy omelette and some slightly warmed bread pertaining to be toast) can be a very hit and miss affair. My only advice to anyone

finding themselves in Gilgit and contemplating the Rupal Inn for their accommodation is earnestly think again.

The following morning (Thursday) whilst waiting to be collected from the hotel we saw five griffon vultures circling the ridges of the nearby mountains. Eventually we were collected, late of course but then this is the norm here, and then it was apparently a forty-minute drive (in reality just over two hours) to the Snow Leopard Conservation Compound at Naltar. Again we drove through some simply staggering scenery and saw two Golden Eagles soaring on the way. Also saw many Ravens and a good-sized flock of Chough. To be fair it was worth it and the Snow Leopard was truly amazing, even if its enclosure was somewhat disappointing. It had previously been decided that as Charles and I were honoured guests we could go into the enclosure with the Leopard in order to take decent pictures. So as to facilitate our entry into the enclosure the key for the rather large padlock was sent for. It goes without saying that the key failed to open the lock and various implements were tried before the padlock was eventually smashed off with a large rock and an iron rod. Several of us duly went in with the Leopard and photographed him from every angle. He seemed utterly used to it but soon showed his displeasure by hissing and snarling accompanied by deep growling if anyone should venture what he considered to be too close. Despite the opportunity to get up so close



to such a beautiful creature I could not help feeling sad for his utterly boring existence. Apparently, he was originally stolen from the wild as a cub and was more than a year old when recovered by wildlife rangers. Accordingly he cannot go back to the wild and is fated to be something of a one trick pony circus act. The same man has looked after him daily for nine years and they obviously interacted with each other to a certain degree. Still doesn't seem much of a life for such a magnificent creature though.



fact that it was not turned out to apparently be our fault, as we hadn't specifically asked for it to be taken from Swabi to Gilgit. This is despite the fact that the package had been opened and each item questioned as to whether it was for Swabi or Gilgit. Each item that was for Gilgit was explained as to why required etc, but it still remained our fault it was not there. We had no other option than to plan accordingly and try wherever possible to make the best of a bad job. A lot of bits and pieces,

although shoddy and of poor quality, could be obtained locally and we would record what data we could. Charlie and I spent the rest of the afternoon assessing what could be paired up, not just with the Luggers but also, as requested, with the other hawks and falcons present.

After the visit to Naltar it was back to the rehabilitation centre in Nomal to check on all the hawks and the final bits and pieces being modified in the aviaries. Then, unfortunately, back to our hotel for the evening. As we arrived one of the receptionists was placing a dead Sparrowhawk on a table outside in the gardens. Apparently it had chased one of the pigeons that is resident at the hotel and paid the ultimate price for his endeavours when hitting a window. Such a shame, it was a beauty of a Spar and feather perfect.

Saturday was data collection day and as with almost everything in Pakistan the 8am start soon morphed into a quarter past twelve start. On the Lugger side of things we weighed and took various measurements from each falcon, coped them, rung them, took a feather sample and photographed them finally putting them into their allotted aviaries. Of the seven Luggers present that day we made up two immature pairs, put another immature male and two adult females all in separate aviaries. So Luggers occupied five out of the twenty aviaries by the time we had finished. The range of measurements we took were pretty comprehensive and will go towards making up a very small part of an intended decent data base. The great shame was that due to the normal casual approach to things we simply did not have the facilities to take blood samples.

Friday went to look at a possible site for public displays of bird of prey flying that the local wildlife people want to help encourage tourism to the area. The site itself was very good but extremely difficult to access and a considerable distance out of any town. I was assured it was in a main tourist route but hardly any cars passed whilst we were there. Then it was on to the centre to make preparations for data collection the following day. This was evidently going to prove extremely trying. Despite having sent everything possible we could require, including blood sampling kits, microchips and applicators, coping sets, verniers, tape measures etc over to Pakistan some two months earlier by courier to ensure everything would be there for us no one had thought to bring the package from Swabi to Gilgit. A drive of between fourteen and sixteen hours depending on road conditions. Despite repeatedly being told everything was at Gilgit awaiting our arrival the

At Kamran's request we then also helped him pair up and sort a considerable number of falcons from the weathering lawn. These were also supposed to have data collected from them but in actual fact were simply rung and put in aviaries. All in all a messy scrappy day but Charlie and I took meaningful information regarding the Luggers belonging to the Project. It was interesting to note the Wildlife Department sent along a man who

would be assisting occasionally at the site in the future. His presence was realistically far more for public relations reasons than anything else. All I can say is thank god for that and that he won't be involved with our Luggers at all hopefully. It has to be said his skill and finesse in handling raptors matched that of a road digger assisting a dentist. We got an inkling of this when he donned a massive pair of gloves because he thought he might have to hold a male Lugger. The day was a long and tiring one but was brightened by several Hoopoe's that were feeding on insects around the site as we worked. Also bringing a degree of joy was "Bud" an English Pointer dog that resided at the centre. As with most dogs in Pakistan he cringed and cowered if anybody went near him but after a few days he would come galloping at full tilt if either myself or Charlie called him. A lovely dog and typical Pointer. Could literally smell food in your pocket and, once he was confident with us, if he smelt it he would do his best to retrieve it.

Sunday was spent at the centre checking on everything and making little refinements to perching etc in the aviaries. Also put in baths purchased the afternoon previously. In the afternoon we met with Mr. Iftikhar Akhuzada who hosted our party to a meal sitting outside in the beautiful Nomal Valley. A meal of river caught trout and superb chicken was the order of the day. It was simply delicious, and the company was first class.

Monday was a busy day in that we visited with the Minister for Wildlife and took tea in his office, discussing Project Lugger with his and his principal conservation officer. Then it was on to the customs collective to speak with the chief collector and bring him and his office up to speed with all that was going on at the centre. Then from there to chief of Forestry to again, advise and update him and his staff on all that is happening. Bureaucracy is an absolute art form in Pakistan and each department likes to stretch its muscles independently



and feel they are the ones actually in control. With the round of political self-indulgence over it was back to the centre for a final check over of the falcons placed in aviaries and make sure everyone was settled in and feeding okay.

Tuesday one final visit to the centre and a chance to say goodbye to the people there as well as "Bud" the Pointer and back into Gilgit to visit the offices of the Divisional Officer. One final chat and a bout of genuine well wishing and it was on from there to the university to meet with the head of Ornithological research. He was keen to have students to placement work at the centre and perhaps enlarge this into field studies relating to indigenous raptors in the area. Then a final evening meal with Kamran as tomorrow morning it was an early start to the airport and then onto Islamabad.

Wednesday our flight was called early, and we arrived in Islamabad about an hour ahead of the scheduled time. Even so our friend Irfan Khan was there to meet us and take us to our guest house for the night. The best stay of the trip yet with a clean room, superb toilets and washing facilities, hot water, air conditioning, just perfect. In the evening Irfan and a friend collected us and took us for a truly superb Chinese meal.

Islamabad really is a very modern and sophisticated city in places. What does take some getting used to is the sheer number of armed guards and the sort of establishments that you find them employed. It is to be assumed that armed robbery and perhaps, in the more affluent parts of the city, kidnapping is a very serious and continual threat. Certainly every guest house has its own guard in place complete with combat type pump action shotgun. Even such unlikely places as McDonald's have security screening arches and armed guards. In fact the day after we left Pakistan the fast food restaurant we had used on our visit was the scene of a politically inspired act of terrorism and eight people were killed. Violence in Islamabad flared the day after we left due

to the goings on surrounding ex-prime minister Imran Khan and his arrest then subsequent release.

Thursday after what can only be described as a much needed superb, relaxed nights sleep and a truly luxurious hot shower followed by an acceptable breakfast, it was time to await the arrival of Mr. Rehan Mussadar from Rehan Industries. This is the firm that makes all the falconry related items the project buys and also that as private individuals Charlie and I both also deal with. As always he arrived promptly on time, a most un Pakistani like trait that we are grateful he indulges in, and we concluded our relatively short business in a friendly way. It was good to catch up with him again.

Then Irfan collected us for the two hour drive out into the country to Kallar Kahar Lake to meet with Mr. Akbar Hassan Bharwana. This gentleman is a very important figure in the development of falconry in Pakistan and I have had the pleasure of meeting him several times. We knew the day was going to be a good one as we saw a Lugger Falcon make a pass at some Parakeets as we drove out of the city. As we reached the toll booths to enter the motorway towards Lahore we knew something was brewing with thousands of people gathered on the side of the road where traffic comes from Lahore to Islamabad.

We drove for around two hours before finally reaching our destination just a few minutes before our host Mr. Bharwana. Again a good omen was that we saw an immature female Lugger making an attack on a group of Mynah birds that were dashing backwards and forwards between several groups of small trees. The restaurant our host had chosen meant we could take our meal overlooking the lake and the considerable wildlife there as we ate. I think the best way to describe the meal would be unusual and leave it at that. Once finished and coffee enjoyed it was time to head off to the hunting lodge of the friend who had accompanied Mr. Bharwana. This wasn't too



far away and turned out the friend was in fact a landowner of some considerable stature and owned land for as far as we could see around the lodge. The ground supposedly held good numbers of Partridges and falconers were often invited to come and fly their hawks there.

I had taken a couple of gifts for my friend Akbar and he presented myself and Charlie with two very special swivels, one each. Charlie's was given a swivel of male Goshawk size and it was made of solid silver. Mine was for a female Goshawk and had two jewels set into the silver work. A truly beautiful item. Since I last visited Akbar he has increased his family with the addition of a son and most unusually his wife and children were brought out and we all posed together for photographs. In all my visits to Pakistan I have never known this, that the wife should also be in the photos.

All too soon time ran away from us, and it was time to slowly make our way to Islamabad airport and begin the long two stage journey home. On the seemingly never-ending journey there was certainly a great deal to contemplate. Charlie and I had achieved a great deal, but other people's indifference prevented us from achieving a very great deal more. So I think my assessment of the trip as a whole would have to be, "could have been better".



Hawke Binoculars

Graham Bessant and Gauntlet Bird of Prey Centre very kindly donated two pairs of Hawke Binoculars to Project Luger for use in field in Pakistan. One pair were presented to Kamran Khan Yousafzai of the Raptor Research Centre for Conservation and Rehabilitation Pakistan which is based just outside the city of Gilgit in Northern Pakistan. This is where Project Luger has its base in Pakistan and has five aviaries within the centre dedicated to Luger Falcon rehabilitation. The binoculars were given a very thorough field test during a visit to the Snow Leopard Rehabilitation Centre at Naltar, two hours from Gilgit, high up in the Karakoram mountains. Everyone was very impressed with the power and clarity of the binoculars as well as their lightweight which made them practical for carrying in the field all day.

The second pair of binoculars were presented to Sajjad Bashir in the Karachi region of Southern Pakistan. Sajjad does a tremendous amount of exceedingly valuable work when it comes to Luger conservation, and he has joined forces with the Project to be able to increase the number of Luggers he can comfortably rehabilitate. To this aim we not only gifted a pair of the superb Hawke binoculars to Sajjad but also a microchip



reader and 40 microchips, engraved stainless steel rings with closing pliers, a digital camera etc for recording thoroughly the details of all Luggers that pass through his hands. We are discussing the feasibility of putting up nest boxes for Luggers in the Sindh region, but obviously we need to involve the offices of and get the approval of the Sindh Wildlife Department before going down this road. Also we hope to put camera traps at Luger nest sites in the not too distant future.



West of England Falconry



We enjoyed another promotional day for the Project with our good friends down at West of England Falconry Centre which is run by Naomi Johns and her staff. The centre itself has undergone quite a considerable transformation over the winter and now all residents are free lofted and flown out of aviaries when the allotted demonstration time comes around. So nice to see the residents of a centre kept in this manner and if course it forestalls the inevitable upset that seeing hawks and falcons tethered causes some people. This surely has to be the way forward and a good and positive thing for ensuring that centres remain popular with the public.

The day was originally meant to coincide with International Lugger Falcon Awareness Day but this falls on May sixth, the date chosen for the coronation for the new king. So it was held a day later on May 7th and was suspected that after the previous day's celebrations things might be a little on the quiet side. Numbers were most certainly down on the previous two years, very much so in fact, but still sufficient people came to make the day worthwhile.

As always with Naomi things are well organised and planned meticulously in advance. Both circumstances and managerial direction would appear to have changed at the centre and accordingly we as a Project would not be getting the usual donation we have received in past years but we did have a stand, chatted with the public and had the opportunity to sell our T shirts etc.



All in all it was a thoroughly enjoyable day, and the weather was exceptionally kind to us. The only fly in the ointment was that Charlie and myself had only returned from Pakistan some thirty hours earlier and had planned to man the stand together. But poor old Charlie picked up a very serious bout of food poisoning in Pakistan and required injections at his local hospital to get things back on track.





Chris Parr, Charles Gray and Garth

2023 Breeding Update

The Project had two pairs of Luggers successfully breed in the UK this year. The pair with Hobbledown Centre in Surrey who produced three chicks from four eggs. The eyasses were two males and a female but right from the word go the female seemed to not be developing as she should. She grew at the correct rate but was remarkably inactive, unlike her brothers who were full of beans. When it came to exploring the aviary and moving to and from the nest site the brothers were constantly active, but the female hardly moved at all. It became clear that something was seriously wrong, and it would be necessary to take her to see a vet and try and get to the bottom of things. But before that could be arranged the young falcon died. A great shame.

At the appropriate time the two surviving brothers went on to their new homes. One went to Sam Gray, eldest son of our Vice Chairman and Trustee Chales Gray, and the other youngster went to Hobbledown's sister centre.

The other success was with Chris Parr in Bishop's Gate, Hampshire. His pair had two young from three eggs, and one unfortunately died at just under a month old on the 22nd of April. The

remaining youngster, a male, fledged successfully and is now with the chairman. This particular Lagger is very special to the Project as his mother was given to the Project by Garth Boswell right at the beginning of things. Garth was suffering very severe health problems and longed to see a youngster produced by his female. We had two false starts where the first time the two out of three eggs hatched but the young died at a few days old. The second time two young hatched from three eggs but one or other of the parents killed and ate them at just over a week old. The male of the pair was changed and finally a youngster was produced. But with great sadness Garth had passed away before he could see his wish fulfilled. However "Garth" the male Lagger will keep his memory alive and be an ambassador for the Project.

Chris Parr now has a second pair of Luggers together at his premises. "New Boy" the male Lagger gifted to the project by Jim O'Connor in Ireland has now been paired up with a suitable female and we have high hopes of the pair for the future.

BFC Spring Meet



The Project was invited by the British Falconers Club to give a presentation on its work and progress at their Spring Meeting which was also the 50th anniversary of the formation of the Northwest regional group of the club. As it was considered such a milestone in the affairs of the BFC it was felt by the trustees that it was important we accepted the invitation and make the effort to attend. Accordingly after a lot of juggling of travelling logistics to accommodate those wishing to be part of our party four of us,

myself, Diana Durman-Walters, Ronnie Moore and Charles Gray. Our party all left Fleet in Hampshire at 8am on Saturday 20th of May to attend the event. We arrived at the venue, The Tickled Trout, near Preston, around five or so hours later. We really didn't have that long to sort out where we were, get the Project Lugger stand set up before the main body of the meeting was due to get underway. Just time for a quick coffee and to catch the breath before the meeting got underway.



Project Lugger was the first of the presentations and so no time to get nervous or over think things. With fifteen minutes of the meeting being called to order we were on. The Power Point presentation on the project went down very well indeed and the question and answer session that followed it was very lively and really quite interesting. It has to be said the membership were very generous and something in the order of three hundred pounds was raised for the Project. More importantly we got to talk to a lot of interested people and explain to them in greater depth what we are trying to achieve and how we are going about it.

Once the main body of the meeting was over it was time for our party to head to the Air B & B we had arranged and get changed and ready for the evening. There was an evening meal to be taken back at the meeting venue and an opportunity for friends old and new to get acquainted. The far from memorable meal was followed by a very lively and well subscribed auction then raffle. All in all it has to be said that the event as a whole was superb and very well organised. We certainly felt it was well worth the trouble of travelling up.

The following morning we departed and headed for Gauntlet Bird of Prey Centre to catch



up with Graham Bessant, the owner. Graham did his original falconry training with Diana some thirty years previously and they hadn't seen each other since. It was a touching reunion. The whole trip was a happy event and good for the soul.

I would add as a personal footnote that I hadn't been to an official BFC meet since 1969 when I first ever joined the BFC. I attended "The Falconer's Feast" in London that year as very much the novice and very nervous newcomer. I was made to feel so very uncomfortable by the utter rudeness shown to me by one of the principals of the club hierarchy of the day that I left within twenty minutes of arriving and vowed I would never attend another. It was only out of my respect for Steve Halsall that I even contemplated this one. Steve is a gentleman of the first order as well as a superb falconry furniture maker and falconer.



The Raptor Fair

In June Project Lugger had a stand at The Raptor Fair held at the beautiful National Centre for Birds of Prey, Helmsley, Yorkshire. With the apparent demise and almost non event of what was the flagship of such falconry related shows, The British Falconry and Raptor Fair, and with no Falconry Village at the Game Fair this year, then this really was the only event at which to showcase the Project to



an audience that appreciated falconry and raptor conservation. The centre at Duncombe is a really lovely one, and the aviaries are nice spacious from the point of view of the visitor and most certainly nice and spacious from the point of view of the residents. The collection housed at Duncombe also has a considerable number of different species of raptor that you don't tend to see at too many other places. The collection is particularly strong in Eagles, with some really stunning examples not only on display but also flown daily. And I do mean flown, not just flopped backwards and forwards as is so often the case. To see an eagle as a mere speck in the sky and then, when called upon to do so, fold and come back into the arena really does take some beating as a truly breath-taking experience.

The trade side of the event was not what could be considered packed, but it certainly contained quality. People such as Graham Forbes, Rhuanan Raptors, Honeybrook Animal Foods, Microsensory, Ben Long, the IBR, Ian Vance etc. Also it was nice to see the artist Martyn Brook exhibiting again. I have always been a great fan of Martyn's work and count myself fortunate to have a considerable number of his pieces. The British Falconers Club also had a stand, which was nice to see, but there seemingly was something of an under current to be detected when visiting the stand. In these difficult times falconers need to not only stick together and support each other but been seen to do so. At least in my opinion.

On the Project stand we had Ronnie Moore as our guest, and he was selling copies of his book "Memoirs of a Hunting Falconer". Ronnie kindly donates a set amount from each book sold to the Project. We were also fortunate enough to receive a visit from our wonderful Patrons Alan M Hunt and Judi Kent Pyrah, both wonderfully talented artists and fervent supporters of the Project.

The flying displays, from my limited vision from the Project Lugger stand, were excellent. Each time a display was due someone would come to the stand and want to discuss some point or another and of course the primary reason for the Project to have a stand at the event was to engage with those who are interested to learn about the Project. However, the bits of pieces of the displays I saw were indeed excellent and apart from the eagles the highlight for me was a superb Barn Owl, again flying as though wrapped up in sheer enjoyment of flying and not just desperate to get the next piece of food on offer.

Over the course of the two day event those of us on the stand spoke to many very interesting people and also felt that the Project achieved its aims of spreading the word regarding what we are trying to achieve and how we are going about it.





7th Anniversary of Project Lugger

The 7th anniversary of the founding of Project Lugger, and also "International Lugger Falcon Awareness Day" will be on Monday May the 6th 2024. We at the Project sincerely hope that all our partners and ambassadors will join us in making a special effort this year in flooding social media with positive things regarding the Project and the work that we, and also importantly, that you yourselves do.

Accordingly we would like to ask for your cooperation in putting up photos of yourselves with your Lugger Falcons, preferably close to your Project Lugger Partner sign, onto Facebook and telling people a little about your Lugger. What is his or her name, sharing any little traits she or he may have etc. Let us not forget the Project Lugger Facebook page has over 30,000 followers now and as well as helping to promote Project Lugger you will also be promoting your own centre or business.

We would also like to ask that you join us in making the weekend of Saturday 4th and Sunday 5th of May a "Lugger Falcon Awareness Weekend". To this aim we are happy to supply you with leaflets and stickers as well as activity packs for the children, all of which can be given away completely free. Should you really want to enter into the spirit of the weekend we can supply Project Lugger Mugs, T shirts, Pin Badges, books etc for you to retail, but we would ask that funds raised through these goods do come to the Project to help us further the work we are doing.

It may seem very early to be asking for your cooperation concerning an event next May but time races by all too quickly and it is all too easy for things to be forgotten then suddenly overwhelm us. If you need any merchandise and freebies for next May please contact our Awareness co-ordinator Sam Gray on samprojectlugger@gmail.com

Between now and the event next May Sam will be contacting as many of our partners and ambassadors as he can directly and trying wherever he can to help you all make a success of the weekend. Please feel free to e-mail Sam in the meantime if you need Project leaflets, stickers or any other promotional material.

If we are honest quite a number of our partners, who have been loaned Luggers, or indeed in a few cases given them, by the Project have kept their heads down and remained very quiet. We would like to encourage everyone to now participate more fully and help raise our profile. Thank you.



Sam Gray with Gandhi

Rain and Kindness

Gauntlet Bird of Prey Centre, in Knutsford, Cheshire, once again were kind enough to host a special “Lugger Day” this year in order to help the Project raise awareness of its work and also, hopefully, some funds. This is the second year in succession that Gauntlet and the Bessant family, who own and run the centre, have been generous enough to lay on an event designed to help Project Lugger. Last year’s event was a great success, undoubtedly helped to no small degree by the stunning weather on the day and for the week leading up to it. This year however the weather gods deserted us and the forecast for most of the week, including our special day, was bleak to say the least. Periods of prolonged and extremely heavy rain were predicted with temperatures being considerably lower than they had been of late. Things were not looking as positive as they could.

I arrived at the centre on the Friday afternoon to set up the Project Lugger stand for the following day. This was after a horrendous journey that should have taken around three and half hours actually taking a little over six hours. A combination of the inevitable Friday traffic, heavy rain, road works, and human stupidity turned the journey into a marathon of frustration that quite simply had to be endured. I eventually arrived



at the centre with a feeling of having survived more than having simply travelled. For the last half hour or so of my endurance test the weather had brightened considerably and a weak watery sun even managed to show its face. It transpired I couldn’t actually set up the stand yet as there were two options, either indoors or outdoors and we needed to see just what conditions would be like the following morning before making a final decision. However there was a real positive to be enjoyed in that I had arrived in time to see the main flying demonstration of the day which is a display that tends to set Gauntlet apart from other centres. It is nothing short of inspiring.

The main flying display starts routinely enough with an African Fish Eagle, then a Verraux’s Eagle Owl, followed by a Hooded Vulture, then a Griffon Vulture and a Lanner Falcon being stooped to the lure. But then the audience is quite simply wowed by a staggering array of different species all whirling around at the same time. Those participating in the display are Maribou Storks, White Pelicans, European Storks, Black Kites, a Bateleur Eagle, Hooded Vultures, a Secretary Bird, there are even a couple of goats wandering around. All the while an informative and educational commentary accompanies the spectacle the audience are enjoying. Conservation is the message that comes across loud and clear. Conservation for all not simply targeted species,



but all species. As a piece of entertainment the display is quite simply in a class of its own. As an educational tool for conservation it is a very powerful and exceedingly effective one. Hats off to all those at Gauntlet. The work involved in bringing together such a well orchestrated spectacle must be simply staggering.

Saturday morning dawned very wet, windy and chilly. From the looks of the leaden skies the chances of a let up in the dire conditions any time soon was out of the question. Having reviewed the options it was decided to set up outside after all but with just a small resighting of the site to set up gazebo and tables. A right angled corner in the meeting of two buildings was chosen and so the tables and the project Lugger representative, me, would be protected from the worst of the elements but still all visitors that day would have to pass the stand on their way round the centre. Despite the awful conditions a good number of people turned out and made the effort to visit and on behalf of the Project I managed to engage with a great many of them. "Lucie" the resident Lugger Falcon at Gauntlet joined me on the stand for part of the day and certainly helped to create some interest. I also gave a very brief talk on the Project to an audience that had gathered for a "meet and greet" display. The brief talk was warmly received. No small part of the warmth could be credited to the fact that "Lucie" was on the fist and help focus attention.



The day progressed and although not overrun with visitors, due to the weather, I was kept busy most of the day. The rain did alter from torrential to merely drizzling in the afternoon and so the main display of the day could take place. Before it began however, I was called to the front of the audience and the Trustees of the Gauntlet Conservation Trust presented Project Lugger with a cheque for £500. This came totally out of the blue and was a tremendous surprise. The kindness of others towards the Project is always so heart-warming. I thanked my hosts and the Trustees of the Trust for their amazing generosity and took a few minutes to explain to the audience just how far £500 will go in Pakistan and the simply amazing things that can be achieved with such a sum.

Overall the day was well worth the effort and the horrendous travelling on the Friday to get there. All I can say in conclusion is thank you one and all at Gauntlet Bird of Prey Centre and the Gauntlet Conservation Trust for both your continued support of Project Lugger and your boundless enthusiasm when it comes to conservation.



Heart Stopping Trip

Myself and two fellow Trustees from Project Lugger recently made a trip to Germany and France to check out a Falconry Centre with a view to joining the Project, and a large falcon breeding establishment that is interested in helping the Project and to finally attend and support a weekend “LuggerFest” being hosted by one of our German Project partners.

We flew into the curious Eurohub airport of Basel/Mulhouse/Freiburg, where you can choose to exit on either the Swiss/French side or the German side. Although our first destination was in Germany we exited on the French side as this is where we managed to get the best hire car deal for the trip. Once the car was sorted and we were up and running we set off to the centre in Germany which was just some forty minutes or so away.

I had visited this particular centre quite a number of years previously, before project Lugger was initiated in fact, but had come away impressed with the flying displays, both in terms of content and sheer quality of flying. The crowds when I was there were held spell bound at the quality and quantity of the flying. At the finale of the big show there was something like thirty or so different birds of prey whirling around with one or two oddities thrown in, such as European Storks, Marabou Storks, Crowned Cranes, all there to add variety and colour. The displays were slick, obviously the subject of tremendous preparation and were a real credit to the park and the staff. Roll forward a number of years though and anticlimax was very much the order of the day. The weathering area and flying ground were tired looking and the equipment relating to weathering

the raptors on the lawn was in a sorry condition and in desperate need of refurbishment.

The show itself was a very poor and pale imitation of its former self. All participants were imprints and none could be described as fit. Watching a male Harris Hawk flop backwards and forwards with barely the energy to make the T perch it was being launched at rang alarm bells. Five Black Kites followed, and these normally highly active raptors struggled to make the various perches around the arena. Also they were not constantly on the wing as you would expect but took off only when food was proffered. I could go on and on but the point was the show was a shadow of its former self and the whole thing just looked tired and past its sell by date. Even the owner/presenter seemed to be merely going through the motions and it was patently clear his heart wasn't in it. The hawks themselves looked tired and uncared for. Most needed coping, some imping, and all without fail needed new furniture. Once the display had finished, we quietly left and made our way to our accommodation for the night. On the drive we discussed the centre, and all agreed this was not somewhere for the Project to seek an association with.

For me personally I was a little worried that I seemed to be struggling for breath but tended to dismiss it being due to tiredness, different atmosphere to the height above sea level etc.

The next morning we drove to SB Falcons, a very large and successful Falcon breeding establishment about an hour or so into France in the Strasbourg direction. The S of SB Falcons stands for Sandra, and I had met this particular lady in Saudi Arabia when I had visited there the previous year. We then very briefly discussed the possibility of perhaps SB Falcons helping the Project by perhaps breeding some Lugger Falcons for us and it was agreed it would be best to discuss such a topic when we all had more time and away from the hustle and bustle of a major falconry event so far from home. Sandra and her father Eric made us most welcome, and we discussed a



form of cooperation for the future. What was of particular interest to me regarding the conversation we had was that SB Falcons breed some simply outstanding Gyr Falcons, Peregrine Falcons and Gyr x Peregrine Hybrid Falcons. However it appears that several years ago the business almost folded as no falcons were being sold. The market was fickle and ever changing and, as with many breeders across Europe, the Arab community were simply not buying falcons from them anymore. Then Falcon racing took off and every single falcon bred by SB is almost pre sold. I spoke with Sandra's father and he said that for several years now not one of his falcons had been sold for hunting. What a dreadful admission on the state of falconry as a sport.

Our party was offered the opportunity to have a guided tour of the facility and my fellow Trustees jumped at the opportunity. As normally would I but I really was starting to feel very unwell. Once the visit was concluded we drove back to our accommodation for the night, and whilst the others went out for something to eat, I settled down early, due to feeling so unwell.

The following morning, Thursday, we drove to Germany to visit with Conny and Juergen Wiesinger at their small Falconry Centre in Wustenrot. Conny and Juergen had spent a very considerable time and effort arranging a "LuggerFest" weekend. The Saturday would be a special day for all those involved commercially with birds of prey, centres, display teams, bird control people, rescue centres etc and the Sunday would be a day for the general public. Unfortunately by now I was so ill I couldn't even manage to walk round the centre, but what I could see from the car was really quite incredible. A myriad of stalls all set up ready for the next two days of Lugger Falcon celebration. I sat quietly whilst my companions busied themselves with helping Conny and Juergen fine tune things for the two day event. In the afternoon we retired to our accommodation and again I just wanted to sleep.

Bright and early next morning Conny



*Diana Durman-Walters
with Juergen Wiesinger*

and Juergen turned up at our accommodation and having taken one look at me Conny called an ambulance. The result was a whirlwind of activity which somewhere along the line included me receiving an ECG. The paramedic looked at the results and said quite simply "you are coming with us". When I asked why I was informed that in his opinion I was approximately twenty minutes away from possibly a catastrophic heart incident and that I needed to get to hospital as soon as possible. It was not reassuring to be told the hospital was around thirty-five minutes away when my incident was due in about twenty minutes. Long story short I did make hospital in time and spent just over a week there. It transpired that one of the valves in my heart had not been shutting properly and that my lungs had filled with fluid, and I had pneumonia. So I missed the "LuggerFest" at Conny and Juergen's, which according to everybody was a massive success. I was sad to have missed it but so glad that it was a success after all the hard work and planning that had gone into it. The event itself raised over 1,300 Euros for the project, so an incredible result.

Just as an aside I would like to mention that on being told I would be discharged from hospital my friend and fellow Project Trustee, Charles Gray, organised to drive down to southern Germany and bring me home. An incredible act of friendship that will never be forgotten.



Juergen stooping a Lugger to the lure

LuggerGanza 2023

Dorset Falconry Park once again, very kindly, played host on behalf of Project Lugger to the annual event that has become known as “LuggerGanza”. A fund raising day for the Project with the days events heavily accented towards educating visitors regarding the plight of the Lugger Falcon in the wild. It has to be said that the Park itself with the “Lugger Zone” in particular looked absolutely stunning and a true credit to the entire Ballam family that own and run the Park in such a friendly and successful manner. September is always lovely time of year at the park and walkways and weathering areas look wonderful.

The Lugger Zone itself is a lovely area and had undergone a little bit of wash and brush up ready for the big day. The zone is a peaceful area and there are seats amongst the trees to allow people just to sit quiet and take in the atmosphere of the zone itself or quietly peruse the information on hand as well as observe four Luggers in the independent aviaries or check out the two breeding pairs that are in seclusion aviaries on CCTV display within the Lugger Gallery.

There were all sorts of stands to keep visitors amused as well as the actual Project Lugger stand with items relating to the project for sale and information packs for youngsters free of charge. The stand itself and the manning of it was all a very last minute scramble with the Founder and Chairman of the Project having been hospitalised in Germany the previous weekend. However as a result of a series of frantic phone calls and people's general good nature and willingness to help the stand was there and fully manned all day.

Kyle Smaldon did an excellent job flying the resident Lugger Falcon “Kyla” to the lure in the main display of the day whilst Martin Ballam informed the audience of the plight of the Lugger and why the Project was of such importance. The whole day was undoubtedly a success and roll on 2024 for the opportunity to do it all over again. A special thanks go to Martin and Maria Reynolds as well as Ronnie Moore and Val Smith for manning the Project Lugger Stand for us on the day. Their help was invaluable and is very much appreciated.



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