

'H is for Hawk': Emmy winner Claire Foy on learning falconry, living in the moment for her new film

By [Robin Young](#) and [Emiko Tamagawa](#)

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Claire Foy with a goshawk in "H is for Hawk." (Courtesy of Roadside Attractions)

In her memoir "H is for Hawk," [author Helen Macdonald channeled her grief](#) after her beloved father's death into adopting and raising a goshawk, a fierce predatory bird.

The book was adapted into [a film of the same name](#), and Emmy-winning actress [Claire Foy](#) stars as Macdonald.

"Helen's memoir is such a beautiful, vivid, really raw account of loss and

this beautiful relationship with Mabel, the goshawk,” Foy said. “I found it so moving, and it meant a lot to someone very close to me. So, I was honored that they considered me to play Helen.”



10 questions with Claire Foy.

What was it like to co-star with a goshawk? This isn't something you can just walk on a set and do. Did you have to train?

“Yes, falconry is a real skill. I didn't know any falconers. I didn't know what it entailed. My only experience of it was reading Helen's memoir and several [other] falconry books. But it's very different doing it yourself.

“We couldn't have shot the film if I didn't get to a basic level of being able to handle these creatures and to also portray Helen's experience. Helen's a very experienced falconer. So, it was nerve-wracking, but then, as soon as I started doing it, I kind of realized that there was a really beautiful connection that could be had.”

Goshawks have a reputation as being majestic but also intimidating or even dangerous. You wear a special leather glove, and there are scenes

where you're just sitting there for seconds at a time, with the goshawk on your arm, thrashing its wings in your face. What was that like?

“It's something that they do, especially if they're feeling uncomfortable or they're not happy in their surroundings, or they're feeling spooked. We had to make sure that on set, everything was done to make sure they felt the most comfortable and safest, and otherwise we wouldn't have got half the footage that we did.”

The goshawks used in the film were hand-reared from chicks by Rose and Lloyd Buck, a pair of natural history filmmakers. When you work with them in the film, you often say, “Well done, Mabel!” Did you find yourself saying that even when it wasn't in the script?

“All the time! There was the idealistic, dream version of the script. But so much of it was improvised because I had a wild animal on my arm, and I had to respond to what was happening in the moment. I always had to be prepared to go wherever she was going but also keep an eye on what the story was, what the emotional beats of the scene were, to make sure that we didn't get too far away from the story we were actually telling.”

It's a story of the terrible grief that keeps hitting Helen, your character. Sometimes, in character, you have to be weeping, while also holding the goshawk. How did the birds feel about that? Or did they not care?

“I think if I had been jumping up and down and screaming, then Mabel would have had a real issue with that. But so much of my interaction with Mabel had to be on her terms, and that would have been true of Helen's experience.

“That meant that whatever moments of grief there were, they were sort of secondary to what was happening in the room.

“Helen in the film, as much as humanly possible, is attempting to not engage with those moments of grief.”



One of the goshawks perches during filming.
(Courtesy of Roadside Attractions)

The goshawk almost becomes a shield, but she's also very playful. In one scene, you throw crumpled paper at the goshawk, and she starts batting it back. Anyone who has a cat or a dog has had that experience, so it felt real when your response was excited joy: "Oh, look, she threw it back!"

"We didn't know that Mabel would do that. Obviously, these goshawks weren't the original Mabel that Helen had the relationship with, the one who did throw back balls of paper.

"But as far as anyone else is concerned, that's the first and last time that a goshawk has ever played [like that]. So, Lloyd Buck, our incredible bird trainer, was like, 'I'll try with her when I get home and see if she will throw some balls of paper.' And he said she did it a couple of times, but over a four-hour period. So, we were like, 'OK, well, we've only got about 15 minutes [to shoot the scene]. So, a lot of the joy in that moment is genuine, 'Oh, my God, I can't believe she's done this!' Which is exactly, sort of, what Helen would have felt in that moment."

Having learned falconry for the film, do you think you'll continue?

"I don't know. The film for me was quite an intense experience, and my relationship with my Mabels was very intense. So, I don't know yet... I would love to go back and visit some of the Mabels and see Rose and Lloyd Buck and visit them and their aviary. But my experience is so tied

in with those people and with those birds that it would feel strange to spend time with other raptors.”

Philippa Lowthorpe, who directed the film, called you a ‘natural falconer.’

“I don’t think I’m necessarily a natural falconer. I think when it comes to work, I tend to be quite gung-ho and pretty brave about what I attempt or what I do. It seems like an opportunity to step out of my ordinary life. And so, if I’m given an opportunity, like to learn falconry, then I’m going to enjoy it, and I’m going to embrace it.

“And I found the concept of falconry to be quite familiar to me in the sense that you had to become invisible, [you have] to adapt yourself to someone else’s rhythm, to the hawk’s rhythm and to make your presence be the last thing that needed to happen in the room. [That] was something that was very, very familiar to me, and so that aspect of it came quite naturally.”

Mabel is the diva in the room.

“Well, she is, but, like most divas, the best divas, I say, she wears it very lightly and is so on her own pedestal that no one can really compare or touch her.”

She doesn’t even notice you.

“Exactly. She’s like, ‘Oh, look, my elaborate human perch is back,’ is how she basically saw me.”

What should we take away from the film?

“I don’t want to be prescriptive. I can only say for me, [the film] is ultimately about love, that grief doesn’t really exist if love wasn’t there in the first place. And that Mabel, whilst it’s a story of a non-affectionate

species and a human being having a relationship, we can't help but love. That's sort of our baseline level as human beings, as much as we are sometimes told it's not, I do think love is where we sit.”

This interview was edited for clarity.



[Emiko Tamagawa](#) produced and edited this interview for broadcast with [Todd Mundt](#). Tamagawa also produced it for the web.

This segment aired on January 22, 2026.



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