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Irish Hawking Club Journal 2025



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All material is subject to scrutiny by the committee

POLICY AND OBJECTIVES

The Irish Hawking Club is dedicated to the sport and practice of falconry and to the conservation and dissemination of knowledge of birds of prey.

Membership is open to those who support or practice the pursuit of falconry to the highest standards and traditions.

The objectives of the Club are:

To represent falconry throughout Ireland and to foster international cooperation in order to maintain the sport, art and practice of taking quarry in its natural state;

To preserve and encourage falconry within the context of sustainable and judicious use of wildlife;

To foster good relations and cooperation with all national hunting organisations with like objectives;

To encourage conservation and the ecological and veterinary research of birds of prey, and to promote, under scientific guidance, native propagation for falconry, and the rehabilitation of injured birds of prey;

To monitor national laws in order to permit the pursuit and perpetuation of falconry;

To require the observation of all laws and regulations relating to falconry, hunting conservation and culture with regard to the taking, import and keeping of birds of prey, the hunting of quarry species and the right of access to land;

And to promote and uphold a positive image of falconry with specialist organisations or statutory bodies which regulate or otherwise affect falconry.

Editor's Welcome

Alan Jackson Isle of Man

Welcome to the 2025 edition of the IHC Journal.

I feel a fraud editing this issue of the Journal as I have no birds to fly nor have I been out with anyone this winter to see other birds flown. This means that the articles, pictures and stories give me the particular pleasure of the voyeur, all the fun, albeit from a distance, with none of the responsibility and commitment of owning and flying a bird.

I have, for a several years, been a happy spectator of members of the club flying their birds and I have seen some tremendous flights, again, without any responsibility. But at least I know, from my own experiences, how committed you have to be and how difficult it is to get a bird sufficiently fit, well manned and experienced enough to bring out on a field meet. I salute you all.

I thank all our contributors, without whom this Journal would not exist. It is always a pleasure to have contributions from our overseas members and this is echoed by our interim president Gary in his piece on travel broadening the mind. It struck me that Gary must have a very broad mind indeed!

With the health and well being of our birds foremost in mind it is sobering to read Dr Ladislav Molnár's article on what to look for when purchasing a bird. Declan Cairney has written a very honest account of how a bird can go from good health to a major injury in a split second, and how the consequences can have long reaching effects.

In reading the address by Darry, our new director, I was struck by her comments on what falconers in a hundred years would think of us; now is the time to make your mark on history by writing a piece for the next Journal.

Have a successful moult and breeding season and I look forward to more voyeurism in the hunting field.



Cover art



Goshawk (*astur gentilis*) a watercolour by Declan Cairney

Commissions on request, please contact Declan on declancairney2000@gmail.com

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Seabhaic seilge na hÉireann



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Director's address

Darry Reed Dublin

It is the Spring Equinox, there are lambs and calves in the fields and I've finally conceded it's time to finish up the hawking season. It's been a good season and it was great to get to a few field meets despite avian influenza restrictions impacting much of the season. Negotiating with the Dept of Agriculture for a derogation allowing for the continuation of falconry and field meets is an ongoing process and we're just going to plan a great calendar of events and push on, hoping for the best.

I've been thinking about the long evolution of the Irish Hawking Club since its inception, and although the world has changed so much, the fundamentals are still the same. If one of our founding members stepped from 1860 into a field meet today, they would find themselves at home with most of the techniques, field craft, language and comradery. Telemetry, and the variety of species flown would be a talking point no doubt. I imagine banter at the bar in the evenings would have been just as lively as it is today. I hope that just as I look at the faces looking out of the old IHC photographs and wonder about those falconers, I hope falconry and the IHC endures long enough that falconers a century in the future might look at our photos and wonder about us.

Throughout my early years in falconry and the IHC, I was an apprentice to Rowland Eustace, long time President of the IHC. Throughout good and bad years, he had an unshakable love and loyalty to the Club. He just kept smiling, and the wheel kept turning. I see this quality among many of the Club's long standing members now, and its now I have come to feel too. I want to give what I can, to help it to be the best it can be, and to give it strength for the future.

The membership as a whole are custodians of the IHC at this point in its long history. We just have to show up, keep smiling and enjoy the hawking and the



comradery. I hope to see many of you in the field during the coming season.



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Interim President's address

Gary Timbrell Co Cork

I've been a member of many falconry clubs to get access to their fieldmeets, as well as to our own, and to make friends with other falconers. Every president's report in every club's annual journal begins with the words 'It has been a difficult year...' This is always reassuring, for no matter how difficult a year it has been for us, there is always some country where it has been a lot worse.

In every age there have been problems, and permanent whiners and whingers, but when was it different, when was the Golden Age of Falconry? Medieval times? The 19th century? No, it is now, we are living in it no matter how many difficulties we face. We should count our blessings, not our hardships. Look at the History Page of the IHC website, you can do this in English, as Gaelige, or even En Français. Ease of communication is One Big Blessing.

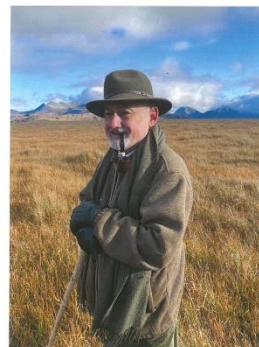
On that History Page, how many ordinary working people do you find? None. Kings, lords, yes, chieftains, aristocrats, yes; labourers, tradesmen, office workers, women, no. Well, we are in the age when anyone is allowed to practice falconry, Second Big Blessing.

Unlike our forebears, we have weekends and half days in which to do it; they didn't have those until the 1940s and '50s, until then Monday-Saturday was for work, while Sunday was for praying. Weekends equal the Third Blessing.

Widespread literacy and access to travel for meeting other falconers means that it has become way easier to learn, and universal literacy only came for the generation living in the second half of the last century. That's number Four Blessing.

As late as the '60s it was hard to get any kind of hawk, except a sparrow hawk, now with captive breeding and New World species which adapt to weekend hawking, it's easy. That's the Fifth Blessing, need I go on?

As IHC's interim president, I ask all members to consider the difficulties of 2025-26 as an interim



period in the current Golden Age: bird flu won't last forever, Department of Agriculture restrictions won't last forever, misunderstandings leading to torment by other government departments won't last forever, and we must hope that game shortages won't last forever.

We won't last forever ourselves, let's enjoy it while we can, we have a lot to be thankful for.

Carpe diem.



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Our time in Ireland

Suzanne Schmölz Germany

Missing Ireland

I could hardly believe it myself, three whole years had passed since I last visited Ireland. Back then, I travelled with my mum, driving around the whole island and discovering its wonderful corners, generous people, and many wonderful members of the Irish Hawking Club. We saw merlins, peregrines and sparrow hawks fly. This November landing in Dublin airport with two dear friends, I realised just how deeply I had missed the country. Ireland has become my place of longing, my dream destination. Every return feels a bit like coming home. I love its landscape, which is steeped in myth, raw, powerful, endless, untouched in many places and almost wild. Villages and houses seem to have slipped out of time, nesting against crumbling stone walls, green hills, the vast, wide-open sea, and herds of cows and sheep that look like scattered clouds of wool in the distance. The country's history is quite unique and touches me every time anew, filling me with a quiet reverence and awe, allowing me to feel a deep sense of connection to the strong, proud Irish people and their ancestors. The people are far too kind for a country with such harsh weather. The rain accompanies you faithfully, like a mist that drifts across the entire country. When the wind carries the salty sea air further inland, I feel every pore and with every breath my lungs opening a little more, connecting me even more deeply to this place. The deep green of the meadows, the white of the fine mist like a veil, settling over everything, and the warm orange of the moors blend naturally with the colours of the Irish flag.

Fishing in the Open Sea

My two friends and I stood ready in our waders, hunting jackets, and falconry vests, as if to prove we could withstand any weather



beyond comfortable temperatures. Yet the Irish weather hit us like a cold, wet slap in the face. The rain lashed down almost horizontally, making it seem impossible to fly the birds of prey that weekend.

Our Irish friends quickly decided, if falconry isn't possible, then we'll go fishing instead. We met at Derrynane Beach, a pristine narrow beach, where a few tiny lifebuoys hung crookedly along the edge of the beach. Excited, my two friends grabbed the rods



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bored, drifted away. We waited, and finally the peregrine returned overhead. The falconer clapped his hands and the snipe rose, first zigzagging just above the rough orange grass, then climbing higher and higher. The tiercel shot down in a typical 'water drop' formation, almost like falling from the clouds, narrowly missing the snipe. The snipe continued to gain altitude until it disappeared into the sky, the tiercel still following. After this exciting flight, the



falconer called down the peregrine and rewarded his dog. I am particularly fascinated by the Irish Setters, with their unwavering determination to remain on point until the peregrine is perfectly positioned, their calm focus, and their ability to never lose composure, no matter what.

Afterwards, we saw a merlin flying to a drone. It was fascinating and impressive to see how quickly this small falcon ascended and effortlessly caught the chick dangling high above on a string, landing it with playful ease.

The Irish Hawking Club

Before I moved back to my hometown of Berlin I lived in Bavaria for several years, where I got to know and learn about falconry. I heard from other falconers how they spend their holidays hawking in other countries. I was amazed and wanted to make new contacts abroad. Since I always wanted to visit Ireland it seemed like the perfect idea to join the Irish Hawking Club. And so I did in 2021.

I was particularly excited for this year's fieldmeet because elections were taking place this time. I sat quietly in the back row, listening to the meeting, which started late but was nevertheless structured and surprisingly formal. Congratulations to Darry Reed, who is the new, and first ever female, Club Director; Gary Timbrell as Interim President, Jason Deasy as Secretary and Andi Cheung as the new Treasurer, and Declan Cairney as Committee Member. A great team, set to lead the club through the next phase of its ongoing story (as Hilary White put it).

Irish time-keeping

Just as we Germans can come across as unfriendly – but usually in a nice way – the Irish are often unpunctual, yet somehow 'always on time'. If you ask when something is going to start, you usually get a relaxed 'shortly', which can cover a time frame of over three hours. But I quickly got used to this Irish sense of time. You become calmer, more relaxed, see things less rigidly, and realise that everything works out smoothly. At some point, a subtle movement arises through the group, a barely noticeable signal, and suddenly everyone heads to their cars, parked neatly in rows, waiting. Then it's off to the next bog for snipe hunting.

Special Thanks

Thank you to Hilary for your careful proofreading and brilliant feedback. A huge thank you to Keith for being always there for us, sending us pins and helping us all the time. Deep gratitude to the Irish Hawking Club and all its members for making this experience so memorable. I'm already looking forward to seeing you all again next year!

Soabhaic seilge na hÉireann!



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from the men and cast into the steel-blue waves. If you weren't careful, a sudden wave could splash salty seawater into your boots, making them squeak with every step. Suddenly, one of my friends stumbled, her fishing rod was taut – she had caught a seabass. All the men rushed over to help her handle the fish. As soon as it was done, they ran back to their own rods and cast exactly where she had been standing.

Later, we ate the fish in the lodge where some of our friends from the club were staying. A narrow driveway led along the river in Sneem to a once grand house, which, with its many winding corridors, narrow wooden doors, and tiny rooms, seemed far too busy to be just a house. A small fire burned in the fireplace, warming the room, the air thick with the scent of whiskey, and a window lintel sank lazily onto its frame. We all sat together at the table, savoring the delicate white fish, fried in butter, and served with chips and colestlaw. There was no question in our minds that the Kerrygold butter was the secret to its extraordinary, exquisite taste.

In the Pub with Storytellers and Falconers

In Germany, we have 'Kneipen' or 'Biergärten', but in Ireland, pubs are a way of life, a piece of the Irish soul in every village, no matter how small. Behind their colourfully painted facades, they serve simultaneously as living rooms, stages, and gathering places all in one. People sit together sociably next to a narrow fireplace, in the warm, subdued light, while someone is constantly fetching a drink for the whole table, usually Guinness. In one corner, traditional Irish music fills the entire pub.

One evening, we attended what was perhaps the most Irish event I could imagine: the Folklore and Storyteller Festival at Murphy's Pub, with live music on the first floor and friendly bartenders behind dark wooden counters who consistently refused to accept tips. That night, it seemed as if everyone in the pub was either a storyteller or a falconer, or both.

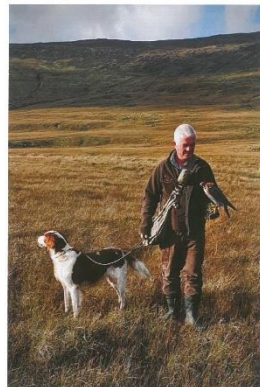
When Sea Eagles and Peregrines Fly

In Germany, I fly a female passage goshawk at quarry such as rabbits and crows, occasionally ducks and pheasants. But in Ireland, I was particularly keen to watch peregrines and merlins in action, enjoying and admiring their gorgeous and high flights at snipes and larks.

In Glencar, we looked for stones and placed them on the Mike Nicholls Memorial. We stood in silence,

remembering him, looking across the reddish Irish bog with its spongy damp ground.

A sea eagle flew over the blanket bog that stretched between rugged hills, past scattered houses basking in the sun at the bottom of the slope, and along narrow roads winding through the landscape like delicate threads. However, despite all this beauty, every step you took had to be taken with care, as one could easily sink waistdeep into the puddles hidden between rustbrown patches of grass and moss.



The weight of expectation already hung over the falconers as they worked their Irish Setters to what seemed like a precise and graceful choreography. Libby, the Red and White Setter, dashed through the bog, water splashing in all directions, until she gradually slowed down and suddenly fell on point. The falconer unhooded his peregrine tiercel, who roused briefly before taking flight. At that moment, we saw the sea eagle circling above us again, while the tiercel flew steadily, further and further in the direction of Tir na nÓg, the 'Land of Eternal Youth' from Oisín's tale. Libby remained motionless on point, and the sea eagle, presumably

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An eagle endeavour

Darry Reed Dublin

Having flown a variety of birds of prey through my life, for the last few years I've just enjoyed the low stress of flying Harris hawks. But I came to the stage where I was looking for a new challenge. I've been drawn to eagle falconry for the last few years, a quiet flame inside. I'd dived into everything eagle related; books, podcasts, videos and tagged along with some of the eagle falconers we currently have in the club. It's clear that the UK and US lend themselves better to the flying of golden eagles, both landscape and types of quarry available. To be successful here would be to carve out a new style/niche way of flying.

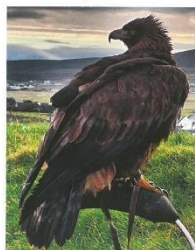
Golden eagles are heavy and can be noisy, so what I felt would suit me was a bonellis eagle, a nice halfway size between hawks and eagles, versatile, agile and from what I've been told acrobatic personalities, demanding a lot of time and patience. So I put the feelers out and looked for breeders across the EU and UK, being aware of the huge import difficulties where UK is concerned. The thing about putting the word out searching is that all sorts of mad offers come your way. There were some bonelli x goldie hybrids and goldies on the market I was made aware of. Then, in October, I was told about an older male goldie looking for a new home. Due to health reasons, his previous owner had to part with his collection of birds. Being only a half an hour down the



road, I felt it was worth a look and there might be some equipment for sale. The background of this 17 year old male is that he was bred in Austria by well known eagle breeders and has spent in life as a display bird in a falconry centre and then in a private home. He had no hunting experience and a chequered history with some incidents of aggression.

I asked questions trying to ascertain what the exact circumstances and behaviours leading to these incidents were. I picked up and put him down a couple of times, to get a feel for his energy, if you like. I could see he had an unhealthy association with humans and food, and the bare hand in particular, but all in all concluded that there were no irredeemable faults. His owner did not want money for him, or any of his equipment, just a home with a good capable falconer. I agreed to take him for a months trial and decided to waste no time putting him straight into a new regime of training involving the lure machine and indirect feeding.

I contacted Lauren McCough who has given me a huge amount of invaluable advice and mentorship. In real time, Neal Carroll gave me some great tutorials on the logistics of trading an eagle off the lure. The risk of injury from an eagle is far greater



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than that of any usual sized hawk or falcon, and very different logistics are involved in the trade off of due to the sheer size of their feet, aggression around food and the need to secure jesses.

The physically of handling and carrying an eagle was a shock to the system, and not something I have ever had to think about flying other species. While I could happily spend six hours ferreling carrying my harris hawk, I could only manage ten minutes to begin with carrying the eagle. My wrist hurt, my muscles ached and I felt this must be like when my kids hold the harris for ten minutes and get the weak arm and ask me to take her back. Building my own fitness for this task has been a main part of the training programme, and I can now carry him for a couple of hours with the help of my eagle stick.

It was a few weeks before I decided he was staying for the foreseeable, and what to do about his name. We were developing a good routine and working relationship that I've been happy to continue with. He has had variations of the same name in his last two homes, and as he is the same age as a legal adult human, turning 18 this year, I felt it right that he keep his name, Kaellan.



Before commencing lure machine training, I fed him rabbit for a week, and from day one on the lure machine he has enthusiastically chased the lure. After a few messy trade offs to begin with, where he felt ready to defend his prize, he realised the reward is food on the glove and trade offs became smoother. This is largely weight dependent too, and exactly as I was forewarned, an overweight eagle is much more likely to aggressively defend the lure like a plaything rather than focus on eating.

Although Kaellan takes the hood well, he grips up relentlessly when hooded and this tendency ruined some out of the hood slips. I'm hoping I can work through this with him over the summer but for the moment I am walking up slips bareheaded. We are 12 weeks in now and he has had a few slips, both on my local permissions and at the Adhill Island field meet and is chasing enthusiastically. He is as yet unentered and the season is coming to a close. Due to his late start, I will continue for the month of February and we will see what happens. So far, I feel we are developing a good working relationship, worth continuing.

Eagle falconry in Ireland is an emerging niche and it's certainly an interesting challenge trying to make it work. For this eagle, regardless of whether he becomes successful, he's experiencing a new lease of life and we're both having fun!



Killruddery Field Meet - goshawks on pheasants 1st February 2026

Eoghan Ryan Co Wicklow

I arrived to the Killruddery Estate on a damp and particularly cold, first of February. Neal Carroll, the field meet coordinator, had been delayed due to some car trouble and while we waited for his arrival we got to catch up with the club members and do some introductions. I returned to the car to put on another layer under the jacket to comfort me from the cold easterly winds. I was delighted to see Liam McGarry, former IHC President and a former work colleague of mine, it had been probably ten years since we had last met. Liam is an active member of the Killruddery Estate Shoot and years ago, when I first started out in falconry, I had attended these grounds to provide a young springer spaniel some experience in flushing and retrieving; that was only about 29 years ago!

We were introduced to the Head Gamekeeper, Angus Lee, who was our host for the day. We would like to thank the Earl of Meath for the privilege of engaging in falconry at Killruddery and to his brother, David Brabason of Belmont Demense, who we got to meet briefly and on whose land we hunted. There were three austringers with birds: Aodhán Brown, Shane Kelly (aka Bisto) and Kevin Logan. Each were flying goshawks, with Kevin and Aodhán flying white Siberian goshawks, both female if I recall. Each of them had their own working dogs, Aodhán with three liver coloured cocker spaniels, Bisto with a black cocker and Kevin with a black and white springer. I brought along my female Peregrine hoping to get a flight on the upper ground which was open land with bracken and some gorse. I had my 12 year old Brittany Spaniel with me and I was accompanied by a friend and work colleague of my wife, Andrew Thurrow, he is a keen American huntsman, who loves shooting over his Nova Scotia Duck Telling Retrievers, a breed of dog I had never even heard of before!

We began by walking along the edge of a woodland and could see a few pheasants out in a field but they were running fairly swiftly and making their way to the far side, a woodland area, out of range. We walked through a lower wooded area before making our way hunting the edge of a paddock defined by a high stone wall with a lot of bramble



cover. Kevin was up first, his springer flushed a pheasant but it seemed to me to flush out of sight of the goshawk who made his way into a tree. When the Gos returned to the fist, it was Aodhán's turn. There was another flush with the same result. His bird was a bit high on weight and given the number of spectators, Aodhán made his way over the opposite side of the wall to call the bird down while we collectively moved away and slowly made our way down to a quaint Victorian style cottage. It was several moments later when I heard a pheasant cackle and then turned to see Aodhán's Gos in full determined pursuit of the pheasant down the field and into the adjoining woodland. Aodhán returned a short while later having bagged his first pheasant of the day!



ground above. His three cockers were put to work the broad ditch and a short while later we heard more pheasant flush, but most of us had little sight of them again in the thick cover, but Aodhán did succeed in bagging his second pheasant of the day. We all then crossed a small sheep paddock, hopped over a few fences and made our way to the base of the Little Sugar Loaf mountain. I watched with keen interest as Liam McGarry, now 80 years old, threw his leg over the gate on his third attempt to climb over it, I hope I'm as fit and able when I am his age and roaming fields like this in pursuit of my passion!

Liam advised me of where some pheasants were likely to be on the side of the hill and so I decided to fly my falcon. I continued up the steep slope and had a few 'beaters' arranged to work from right to left of me. I unhooded the falcon who flew out and up but within a few minutes she had disappeared. I could see from the Microsensory App that she had made her way around the far side of the mountain and flying into the prevailing winds. Then I spotted her up above the summit riding the winds.



We then slowly worked our way up and into some sitka spruce plantations. We stuck to the forestry roads while the dogs worked the cover left and right, it didn't seem to me to be the optimum way to flush a pheasant as I imagined the pheasants running deeper into the dense forestry and away; however I think two or three pheasants did flush ahead of us in the laneway. This time it was Bisto's turn and while he swung his arm to propel the Gos, unfortunately one jess had inadvertently got stuck in the glove and the bird came to the ground a few metres ahead.

We then made our way along the upper end of the woodland. While Kevin's dog led the way and was focused and working cover, there was little flushing. When it was Aodhán's go again, he decided to run through a deep ditch and work from the open



I hoped she would then come right overhead, but her preference was to fly out into the wind and so she stayed working the other side of the mountain. She appeared to be working her way back to me on a few occasions but then eventually she turned and flew out across the northern part of the Killruddery estate. The app indicated that she stooped at something but it was far out of sight. Then after a short while of her flying around I could see she was perched on a tree c. 900m away. As she was now down the valley and much lower than my position, I decided to go and retrieve her. I left the party with Andrew and headed through woodlands and paddocks and when she came down to the lure she was wet, she had taken the opportunity to take a bath. She seems to have a habit of doing this at field meets! There was no where to weather her in the early morning and offer her a bath and besides it was so damp and cold that morning that I doubt she would have even taken one at that time if it had been offered. We tracked our way through the estate and back to the car and decided to call it a day and refreshed ourselves with a hot flask of tea.



The austringers had a few more flushes but alas no more pheasants were taken. The day turned out to be quite good weather-wise and it was lovely being out and about with like minded people watching dogs working and birds flying and catching up with old friends. Andrew enjoyed being out with kindred spirits, it was his first time witnessing falconry and he enjoyed the day immensely. A big thanks to Neal Carroll for organising, no doubt with the full support of Liam McGarry!



Pre-purchase examination of falconry birds – notes for veterinarians

Ladislav Molnár, Assoc. Prof., DVM, PhD.,

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The present surplus of falconry birds on the market has increased the necessity for a pre-purchase examination of all new falconry birds. This offers the possibility of selecting the best bird, whether for hunting or for breeding purposes. Having such an examination eliminates possible future disputes between the seller and the buyer in the event of the development of any disease which might restrict the use of the raptor. Such an examination markedly reduces the chance of acquiring a bird carrying a hidden disease or abnormality that might have negative effects either on flying performance or in the breeding pen.

The ideal is to have a series of tests and examinations that reveal any serious diseases or deficiency in the shortest possible time, preferably on the day of examination. In summation, we try to avoid laboratory examinations that take several days to deliver a result. On the other hand it is possible to keep samples of tissue, blood and swabs for a short period, for example a month, at which time they could be used to confirm that disease had been present at the time of sale and thus protect the right of the purchaser to financial compensation.

The examination consists of:

A clinical examination to determine the weight, condition, posture, physical and neurological responses to sensory tests.

A stress test: after bating from the glove, possible nasal passage problems are indicated by open-beaked breathing, and noises made during breathing.

A physical examination: it is very important to look closely at the wings and for possible bruising on the feet.

Subsequently, the bird should undergo inhalation anaesthesia with isoflurane, when 1 ml of blood is taken for a haematology exam. Firstly to determine the total number of white blood cells and the differential blood cell count.



Other laboratory tests include close examination of the mutes and cytology of the mutes. This examination confirms if there is any inflammatory process or candida yeasts and if the bacterial flora of the intestines of the individual are normal.

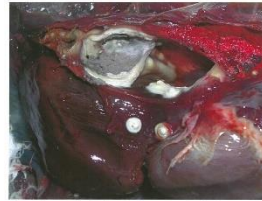
A parasitological examination of fresh mutes should be carried out by the flotation method, because using direct microscopy of diluted faeces has very low reporting value.

While under anaesthesia, the caudal air sacs are examined using a rigid endoscope.

For the endoscopy, the bird lies in a lateral position with its legs and wings stretched out, and the air sac is entered through the last intercostal space, or behind the last rib. The skin and intercostal



A large mass of intestinal worms (post mortem)



Large Aspergillus lesion in air sac, smaller lesions on the liver (post mortem)



Small Aspergillus lesion over testicle (post mortem)

muscle is incised. An endoscope of 2.7 mm thick and 30° of angle view is ideally used for this examination.

The main focus is on the perfusion of the lungs, the communications with the air sacs and the transparency of air sacs. The colour, structure and edges of the liver are of high diagnostic value. Penetration into the abdominal air sac allows examination of the kidneys, genital organs, spleen and intestines. If the air sacs are transparent, penetration is not necessary and the organs are visible through the sac walls. Endoscopy is the only examination that can definitively exclude the presence of aspergillosis, which is a debilitating disease of falconry birds.

A very common finding is the presence of fat from fatty deposits in the air sacs, or a protruding joint of the ribs or old aspergillosis granulomas blocking the ostia, the tubes that run between the lungs and air sacs. Treatment of these requires an experienced veterinarian. Air sacs have a strong self-cleaning capability and old inflammatory lesions can disappear completely after a few months.

Endoscopy of both sides of the bird is necessary because the findings can be diametrically opposed. Upon completion of the endoscopy of the air sacs, it is recommended that the trachea be examined up to its bifurcation.

As a final test, an X-ray is performed in two projections, lateral and ventrodorsal. This may indicate old fractures, foreign objects and old hardened tissue injuries.

Based on my experience, many times sellers and purchasers share these costs related to the investigation, or the seller includes it in the price of the bird. The buyer obtains a guarantee that, on the day of purchase, that he did not procure a sick bird, and the seller can thus guarantee that the buyer loses the right to complain.

I recommend that such testing should also be carried out on breeding birds too, as it can reveal the quality of reproductive organs and the suitability of the bird for reproductive use.



The seven year itch

Keith Barker Co Waterford

It's approaching Christmas and my memory takes me back to the day seven years ago when I caught my first snipe with a home bred imprint tiercel peregrine, on this wet and windy day I found the words written on an old social media post, I read the account and thought our journal editor might like to browse over it.

Do you have a first with a hawk or falcon? I'm sure our members would like to read about it no matter how brief it may be, content will always be welcome so here goes.

Sadly my tiercel was killed by a fox in the field two years later when he carried a woodcock a short distance, in the minimal time it took him he had been decapitated and buried in a shallow scrape.

21/12/2018

Just home from the Irish Hawking club's 2 day Athlone snipe hawking meet, I only could fly one day as family constraints prevented me travelling down Thursday morning; my tiercel Peregrine has been flying really well, coming close to bagging snipe on nearly every outing recently. I flew him on Wednesday afternoon and fed him as much woodpigeon as he could eat after his flight, he looked like he had swallowed a tennis ball when he finally stopped.

No feed at all Thursday. I drove up to meet the lads in Athlone who had successfully brought three snipe to the bag.

We met in the hotel bar along with Vincent Flannelly from the Irish pointer and setter association, myself, and three wise snipe hawkers Don Ryan, Kevin Marron and Eric Witkowski.

It was very late when we had eaten a lot of food, drank a lot of porter and talked a good deal in between about dogs, birds and hunting.

In the morning we strode out onto the raised bog land just outside Moate much the worse for drink, joined by the King of the Snipe, Martin



Brereton who was coughing nearly as bad as Don Ryans setter "Libby"

Martin's enthusiasm for hunting snipe shines just as bright even though he was clearly ill, but still turned out to have a go.

I was offered first point, take it or leave it they said, it was close to the bog edge and a busy road, I decided to take it and up he went. After a few minutes sparring with a merlin he came over and assisted by Kevin, we headed the point away from the edge trying to channel the flight into open ground, the snipe shot in between me and Martin with the falcon ripping down after it and missing by the width of a fag paper.

He was so close, I gave him the lure and fed him some pigeon bread with the thought of a second flight later in the day.

We slowly worked through the nine falcons to be flown, lots of banter leg pulling and Murray mints being banded about.



The more I saw falcons lofted the more I thought my hawk was not too bad at all, this branch of falconry is probably the most difficult on the planet, the four falconers I was with are probably the most experienced in this branch. Three of the lads could also drink Loch Derg dry if it was put in front of them.

My slip came around again, Kevin ran his dog for me, he came over lovely, we headed the point again but this time we were out in wide open ground, the flush was called and down he came, now there is one small bush near the point of flush and gairnago gairnago made a direct line for it, he going around it clockwise, the falcon anticlockwise, a strike and miss, the dog ran on no more than 20 feet and stiffened up again rock solid, my falcon re mounted, when nearly we moved forward. Out from under the dogs nose sprung an Irish Hare, the dog remained solid on point when nine out of ten would have been a candidate for the blue ribbon at the Waterloo Cup.

We called the flush, down he came and BINGO!! You probably heard the roar when he bound to the snipe.

He circled a while and carried the lifeless body off the bog to pluck and have some of his fill for himself.

I tracked him, called back to the field all was secure, and made my way back to be met by Eric's red setter solid on point in the heather. I lay down under the bush, Eric's juvenile tiercel bred by Matt



Gage was climbing into the sky, when he was at altitude he came over, all business.

Down he came levelling out as he passed me ever so close then scooping the snipe out of the air in spectacular fashion.

The brown birds stole the show that day, it was winter solstice, it had taken me 91 outings to catch a snipe, but well worth the wait.



Travel broadens the mind

Gary Timbrell Co Cork

Gary has been an IFC member since the 1990s. He was Journal and Newsletter Editor for five years between Liam Ó Broin and Híary White and IHC Director during Liam's presidency. He was national delegate to the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey, then Chairman of the Board of the IAF, both voluntary positions. From 2014 to 2024 he managed the IAF professional offices as its CEO and established the Mohamed bin Zayed Museum of International Falconry in Brussels, walking distance from all the European parliamentary institutions.

From 1977 till 2014 his education and professional background was as a zoologist, specialising in insects. He represented the IAF and international falconry community at all the conventions and conferences that could affect falconry, the Bern Convention, CMS, CBD and CITES, and has been actively involved with IUCN and in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage since 2005. He was part of the IAF team that achieved the listing of Falconry as UNESCO Global Intangible Cultural Heritage, and he worked with the IHC to achieve national listing for Irish falconry. He has practised or observed practical falconry in over twenty countries, having falconer friends in many more.



When falconry is mentioned to non-falconers in Ireland, a common response is: 'I thought that was only done by British aristocrats.' Here are some statistics: the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey has 110 member organisations, mostly active falconry clubs, from ninety countries varying from year to year, depending on who's paid their subscription or not. It's safe to say that there are at least another twenty nations where falconers exist. Some of them even have small clubs which aren't yet members of the IAF. We know these exist from answering their emails, or from seeing their social media posts. Some examples are Albania, Bosnia, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Iraq, Laos, Myanmar, Brunei, Papua New Guinea, Panama, Guatemala, Venezuela, Botswana, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire and so on.

Having been associated with the IAF for 25 years, I've had to travel a lot to attend various conferences and to meet government departments and regional officials, always for promoting falconry, but sometimes to enjoy field-meetings at the invitation of the national clubs as well; so I did a count-up of countries visited for falconry purposes. It came to

forty, or forty-two if Scotland and Wales are allowed. Travel broadens the mind and, in my case, the waistline.

To say that travel broadens the mind may seem a bit clichéd now, but it's absolutely true, especially when you are out of your comfort zone and made to realise that you're not anything like the expert you thought you were. Parochial life is very restricting, a major factor in boosting the Dunning Kruger Effect (that's when people overestimate their own skill because they don't know enough to see their own stupidity and lack of knowledge). When there is no-one else to ask for advice about falconry, who do you call? The guy with the owl in the garden centre. God, I hate owls.

In the beginning I spent three years in a small village with a kestrel and Woodford's 'Manual of Falconry' from the mobile library van, before becoming full sure that I knew nothing about falconry. Finally, a random stranger put me in touch with Rowland Eustace in Dublin. He convinced me that not only could the kestrel be flown free, but it should have been doing it for the last three years. Rowland introduced me to a reasonably local falconer, David Williams, who was then Rector of

Kinsale, and to the Irish Hawking Club who soon let me know that life was not all about Cork. I soon realised I still knew sweet nothing about falconry, desiring to learn Woodford by heart.

That time was pre-MBIM7 and the only way to drive to Slane for an AGM or to Banbridge for a field meet without falling asleep was to try to remember what village came next, and how many more Johnstons you had to go through to get there. Ringside seats at the IHC AGMs in the Conyngham Arms were always entertaining and informative, but the most important mind-broadening aspect of it all was meeting different falconers, listening to them, and learning from them, including their mistakes. Good advice is to learn from other falconer's mistakes, so you don't make any yourself. You can't do that by staying in your own parish.

I haven't flown a hawk of my own for several years, since before Covid. Flying birds became impossible as the work in IAF entailed so much travel, often abroad for two or three weeks a month, a week or ten days in Brussels at the IAF headquarters, then a conference in the U.S. or in Asia, or a hunting exhibition in the Middle East, then home to Cork for a few days before heading back to Brussels for meetings in the EU Commission.

Travel has broadened my own mind and really increased my appreciation for falconry and the great falconers I'm privileged to trot behind. So, what good things have I learned? What could you learn? Here is a list of countries and what I learned in them:

England
That partridges, not grouse, are the most iconic prey for longwings (until Sneeem). Flights are just as good at partridge as at grouse, high pitches, great stoops, with no mountains to climb and no midges. Partridge also give great fights for shortwings. Seeing a goshawk in its undulating chase after a wild grey or redleg is just as exciting as a peregrine's teardrop stoop.

That some of the best field meets are held in Woodhall Spa. The BFC have been organising this meet for some 60 years and have it organised down to the last detail, an iconic hotel, accessible hunting grounds with the right game, well managed groups with disciplined falconers and spectators. Everything about Woodhall is the essence of falconry.

That crow-hawking is best when it's done on horseback on very, very open ground. I flew a team of

crow/rock falcons in the early 2000's, driving hundreds of miles a week to find convids in places that would not provide cover, places with no trees or bushes. In three years, I saw four good fights; all the rest were flushes from trees where the crow had taken refuge and, if he were caught, it was only after a pitiful couple of fields.

An invitation to hawk with Nick Fox in Northumberland came for Liam Ó Broin and myself and Nick kindly loaned me a horse. In three days, I saw three ringing flights, covering what seemed miles at a thrilling gallop over rough, boggy ground. When I came home, I gave up crow-hawking. My ego had taken a real battering, and it deserved to.

Wales
Despite all the praise for abroad that follows in this article...

That the other man's grass is often less green than it is at home. All throughout a brilliant (from a craic point of view) field meet of the Welsh Hawking Club, the star performances were always by our own Martin Bereton's great lercel. We watched it knock a pheasant, stone-dead, into bracken in front of us, then immediately it got back up to find its proper pitch and took a fine partridge that Martin's dog was still pointing, despite the nearby kerfuffle with the pheasant.

Scotland
That Hell is a Scottish grouse-moor in August. The year before we went there, I was lucky enough to meet a Belgian aristocrat out stag-hunting in a French forest. We chatted about falconry, and he invited me to round up a few friends to hawk on his 5000-acre Black Corrie estate in Glencoe. Yes, there were grouse taken, but the over-riding memory is the clouds and clouds of *Culicoides impunctatus* (allow me that, I was an entomologist), the cursed Highland midge. About a hundred and fifty of the swine would fit on its Latin name. There were so many we were hard pushed to weather the hawks and had to keep them in our bedrooms until they were ready to fly. I got bitten/rangled so badly the others called the district nurse. I still dream about the smell of the useless Jungle Formula mosquito spray. Hell. You get the picture.

Belgium
That you shouldn't put your heroes on a pedestal. Just because he is a great falconer doesn't necessarily mean that he's always nice.

That our other Belgians, the ones who pay subscriptions to IHC, make up in friendliness, generosity, and congeniality for the broken heroes.

France
That the degree of formality prevalent at Woodhall Spa can be softened to make a more relaxed day, without taking from the quality of the flights. The French falconers dress smartly, fly their falcons and their hawks with great expertise, and come together every day after the hunt to eat a lavish picnic together and then they meet again for dinner at a local restaurant. Being sociable is as much a part of their day as are the quality flights they enjoy, and it is important that landowners see you spending money locally.

Now you know where the idea came from to eat together after all hawks have flown, while parked in the layby at the side of Mike Nicholls' favourite bog in Glencarl!

Spain
That wild redlegs are just as hard and as thrilling to catch as wild greys.

That Spain has a very large number of superb falconers, especially longwings.

That falconers there must rent their hunting grounds and the average longwinger pays two to five thousand euro a year for a territory, depending on how many share the cost.

That, even though they all complain, biodiversity is very rich. I remember tracking a wolf in the snow near Valladolid, just before Lorenzo's brookie nailed a redleg in prime style, while a flock of around twenty great bustard watched us from the other slope, not two hundred yards away. Spain in winter was my favourite country for years.

Denmark
That remarkable things can be achieved by good people through dogged persistence. Falconry was illegal in Denmark for fifty years, but the falconers of the national club persisted in challenging that law which had been founded on prejudice and ignorance. A few continued flying their birds by invitation in neighbouring countries, always keeping up the pressure on successive Danish governments until, eventually, the recognition of falconry by UNESCO ICH added enough weight to their persistence to allow falconry again. I was delighted to be invited to a small field meet flying at ducks on the Isle of Man, the first

international falconry event in Denmark since the ban was lifted.

Czechia
That, just as at Woodhall, formality goes with efficiency, especially at big international field meets. Manageable groups with firm field-masters are important in the central European falconry tradition, which, for international meets at least, consist of long beating lines with 15 or 20 hawks or eagles and twice that number of spectators filing in as beaters between each hawk, falcon, or eagle.

That spectacle is to be marvelled at: the Germanic tradition of honouring the game at the end of the day is performed all over central and eastern Europe. The game is laid out neatly, in a square formation surrounded by green branches and the falconers stand formally at one end, spectators at the other and horn players between, playing fanfares for each species with formal adieu at the end. The whole tableau lit by flaming torches. It is very emotional and makes for a beautiful finish to the day, especially in Opocno in Bohemia, where it takes place in the courtyard of the Renaissance castle of the Colloredo-Mansfeld family.

That you need to attend as many field meets as possible. It is the best way to meet other falconers, make friends and receive invitations all over world.

Slovakia
That eagles on foxes are much more interesting than eagles on hares. The foxes faint left and right, like a rugby player, and the best eagles anticipate this. It's fascinating to watch the fox jinking left to avoid the strike, only to meet unexpected talons waiting for it.

That vigilance is important. We hunted at the foot of the High Tatras, part of the Carpathian Mountains which continue to the east across Transylvania, Poland, and Ukraine. At the meet, the local mayor's formal address to the falconers began with 'Welcome to you all, please respect the game, respect nature, respect the farmers and, by the way, don't go into the little woods to poe, there are lynxes, and a family of bears was seen last week.' I spent the day with a full bladder learning to be vigilant.

That there is a veterinary university there with its own falconry club and that falconry is on the curriculum in primary, secondary and university education.

Slovenia
That the generosity of falconers knows no bounds: I have seen hawks flown in many countries, but only twice have I been invited to fly other peoples' hawks. In Slovenia, Wilma, president of the falconers' association arrived at the meet with a used glove which she gave to me ??? then she plinked a goshawk on my fist and told me she needed to work her dogs. Goshawkers NEVER let anyone hold their hawks, or even come up close, let alone loan them out for the day. This goshawk opened my eyes to the possibilities of what a truly good falconer could do. He was fourteen years old and perfectly manned (I always said women make better manners than men), eyes as red as traffic lights. He stepped onto my glove without even a tidbit and spent a long day in the field. When a stiff breeze got up, I opened the front of my Barbour to give some protection and he just tucked in his head, lifted a foot, and went for a snooze. I caught three cock pheasants with him, thanks to Wilma and her dogs, and that day I realised that for years I had been a crap falconer.

That small lies do no harm: Wilma's husband was a shooting man and offered to take me out for an early shot at a roe deer, but in that part of Slovenia bungalow bills is even worse than here and, added to that, two-stick alpine walkers are everywhere, even at 6 am. It looked that to get a safe shot would be impossible. My host said, 'No problem, yesterday I rang the police station and told them I'd seen a bear, so no-one will be out walking today, and all the householders will be inside.'

In these countries I learned friendship, lasting friendship with accomplished falconers who only wanted to show sport and make me happy. All this through attending national field meets and meeting nice people. The same goes for Serbia, Poland, and Hungary.

United States
That old ways and new combine to give momentous results. Telemetry and GPS only became affordable once US manufacturers started producing.

That superb equipment can be had, it's expensive, but worth every dollar.

That prairie grouse species are spectacular quarry for large falcons and

That squirrel hawking with passage redtails is some of the best fun that can be had.

That there are rattlesnakes on the prairie – and redtails will catch them. Eeeew!

That trapping passage hawks and falcons is as much fun as hunting with them. Trapping season coincides with annual NAFA field meets and a day spent trapping is an education. For example, one falconer who invited us to go trapping with him caught and released three redtails before selecting the one he wanted. The reason? He saw the others had small and very clean feet. He reasoned that these were living off easy prey, nice, they would be of little use to him for hawking cottontails and jackrabbits.

That American falconers fight for their rights, and nearly always win.

That there is a university in Kansas with a curriculum based on Intelligent Design. It bans the teaching of evolution; all subjects must respect that God made the world in seven days. I know this from squirrel hawking in its grounds and, being the only one present not flying a hawk, I was obliged to make small talk with the students who were passing by with their folders and MacBooks. Oh dear.

South Africa

That getting out of your comfort zone can be refreshing. Mixing with falconers who are speaking Afrikaans and having sisstas between flights may seem odd, but they did it. Five falcons, five ducks, followed by a braai where about twelve kilos of assorted flesh fed nine of us. The heat was so intense that lawn sprinklers were turned onto the blocked-out falcons, and everyone went for a sleep while the hawks dried off as the evening cooled. Then it was off again to more duck ponds.

That getting lost when your GPS sends you into a township on a Saturday night where there has been a lot of drinking, with people falling all over the place, is a bit too much out of my comfort zone.

Argentina

That if God is a falconer he flies aplopadomas. The IAF annual meeting in 2015 was hosted in Misiones province in Argentina, wide open country with the Paraná River in the distance. It doesn't count officially as pampas, but it was so open it looked like pampas to me. We saw what was, without a doubt, exaggerations aside, the best flight I have seen of any hawk or falcon in my living life. Some falconers from the south had brought up aplopadomas to hunt the terns, the large southern lapwing which is spur winged. First flights were at yellow-winged blackbirds, were easily intimidated by

the aplomado, which was waiting on around twenty feet above the crowd of falconers and spectators. They are pretty birds but rarely flew more than a few feet before baling into the reeds and tussocks to be refreshed and inevitably caught, not great sport, but then ... up flew a tera.

The aplomado went into turbo mode and the lapwing jinked from side to side, up and down and round in big circles, the aplomado absolutely pushing it, forcing it. A wild aplomado joined in, making up a cast, and cooperating entirely. The flight was like a greyhound coursing match, jinking in three dimensions, again and again. After a full ten minutes of this, the falconer's bird hit the tera to the ground and landed on it less than ten feet in front of a substantial audience. There were cheers and clapping and the wild hawk realised that we were there. He left in rather a hurry.



Paraguay

That bat-falcons are so sexy as aplomados. Both species combine the stamina of shortwings with the aerial ability of falcons. I was allowed to fly one the second time I was there. It flew teros in as great a style as the aplomado in Misiones did, although it didn't catch one. It did catch a vampire bat for me, though!

That wearing Vans in the jungle can be dangerous. We came across a fer-de-lance, the most poisonous pit viper in South America.

That peregrine-caught herons are delicious.

That forest falcons (*Micrastur* spp.) can easily take nightjars in the twilight.

That ornate hawk eagles can catch caracaras and large tegu lizards.

That I hate monkeys; they have absolutely no manners and the rain from the jungle canopy is not always rain.

Egypt

That for a pursuit (off-the fist) flight, the karwan (stone-curlew) is as good as the tero. Stone-curlews are rarely seen in Ireland, in the last hundred years only six accidental off-course migrants, but when you consider this is a desert bird, favouring dry, hot conditions, it's no wonder. In North Africa there are large flocks, and it is the preferred quarry of traditional falconers in the desert, south of Alexandria. Like the tero, the karwan is a strong, jinking flyer, the ones I saw never went high, twenty feet was the highest, but boy can they fly. Traditionally followed on horseback, now you have eight or ten falconers bouncing along in the back of a battered pick-up. A super exciting flight, covering a couple of kilometres.

That, contrary to what the books say, lanners CAN hunt, it was lanners I saw flying and catching karwan in fantastic style. This might be a case, like the American retail, where wild-caught passage birds greatly out-perform captive-bred ones. I recommend falconers from Ireland, where a passage wild take is not available, go and see this phenomenon where falconers are allowed to fly passage birds.

That small-scale artisan falcon trappers still exist, and they maintain traditional ethos and skills. I spent a day with Abdelbaki, an ancient trapper, a wise man revered by all the falconers around Alexandria. He had knowledge to spare that would

never be found in books. For the trapping season he lived in a hut in the desert and trapped a small number of passage falcons which he sold to make a living, not to make a fortune. I learned humility from him, and I learned not to judge all members of a community the same.

United Arab Emirates



That for unexpected meetings with great falconers, not just field meets are important, game fairs and exhibitions are just as rewarding, even more so. After making so many falconer friends at the old UK Falconry Fairs, at which IHC was always a star attraction, I decided to try ADIHEX, the Abu Dhabi International Hunting Exhibition, which is one third guns, one third equestrian and one third falconry. By absolute chance I sat in a coffee stand next to an American and started to chat.

He turned out to be Tom Cade, who remained a good friend and also became a good friend to the IHC. He was famous in Abu Dhabi due to his incredible work with the Peregrine Fund, as a pioneer of captive breeding, and the saviour of the peregrine falcon in North America.

A huge retinue of paparazzi were passing, surrounding a golf cart with a very old and infirm Arab gentleman inside. Tom said: 'Here is Sheikh Zayed!' For new members of IHC who may not know the name, Sheikh Zayed was the ruler of Abu Dhabi

and the founding president of the United Arab Emirates, certainly the most generous contributor to conservation in the world. His huge funding projects saved several species from extinction, and I have no hesitation in saying that there is no genuine species conservation project in the world that has not benefited from his late Highness' generosity. He was a very wise man, well able to identify chances, especially the myriad of fake charity workers looking for funds: 'Help save the unicorn, give us money' type non-government organisations. You will be familiar with many of the names; these are the organisations that constantly try to stop falconry and hunting. They got nothing from him.

He saw Tom from his golf cart and called him over. Click, click, click went the paparazzi. Tom grabbed me by the arm and pulled me over to for an introduction. Not being enamoured of kings and royalty myself, I was shocked to see how I went to pieces, almost tearing-up at being in such illustrious company. I don't remember the actual words spoken, but His Highness designated an aide for Tom to walk him round the entire exhibition. I went with him and soon noticed that whenever we stopped to look at something, a hood, a hawking bag, a kettle, a scarf, a boy in Arab clothes who was walking ten paces behind was picking it up and carrying it – all the stand holders knew that the aide was from the Sheikh, and they were gifting everything to us. I told Tom what was happening, and he sent the young fella away, saying to me 'We best not go near the white gyrfalcons, or we'll end up with huge problems!'

Anyway, Sheikh Zayed died a month later. He left a fortune in international endowment funds for conservation and falconry, and for many serious charities concerned with health and poverty.

That the greatest pleasure is sharing knowledge with other people. Not just your own knowledge, everyone else's too. I was privileged in leading the IAF team to organise the 2017 International Falconry Festival in Abu Dhabi, funded by H.H. Sheikh Mohamed Bin Zayed, where two youths from each of ninety falconry nations were invited and sponsored for a week in the desert with workshops, hunting, and social events. The workshops were the best. They took place in Bedouin tents, young people sitting in circles on

carpets around the expert falconers who led the workshops. No PowerPoints, no slides, no microphones, no electricity, just elders from falconry communities in every country speaking passionately about hawks, falcons, equipment, methods, and skills to their audiences. My greatest pleasure was to casually stroll around the sand outside the tents watching the rapt audiences of young people hanging onto the every word of the speakers.

Mongolia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan

The eagle falconers from these countries are of the same ethnic group, Kazakh, and their nomadic nature took them across borders. Even the eagle guys in China are Kazakh, so I group these countries together.

That sideways thinking is good: in this tradition, the eagles are fed from a food bowl, dipping their beak in it for food never on the fist. Why? To stop the eagle from feeding you, being grabbed by a 5 kg goldie is a severe injury.

That there actually are nice people in the world. That to understand what might have been thought of as bizarre and unacceptable by western standards, may have a valid reason, that you need to be there in person to understand.

Pakistan

That some countries have a vast variety of raptors to spot leaving the airport for the hotel or on the way to a meet – luggers, redheaded merlins, black kites (hundreds), blackwinged kites, buzzards, kestrels, shikras, steppe eagles, spotted eagles, trees full of fruit bats ...

That marning is everything. The falconers absolutely live with their hawks, day and night, the daytime perch is the falconer's charpoy (bed) turned on its side for his gos to use.

That the two fingered gloves that everyone told us were for sparrowhawks are actually for gosses, and then only when feeding them, or taking them up off a kill. Normally they don't use a glove for carrying the gos around. I have a great memory of a roadside restaurant, a big one, maybe fifty tables, and the chairs around our long falconers' table were: falconer, gos, falconer, gos, falconer, gos, me, falconer, gos etc. all round, with the hawks just chilling on the backs of the plastic chairs, fully relaxed and most of them asleep.

That some of the female gosses are huge. That are all trapped on passage and the best are selected.

That partridge identification is difficult. We were told we were hunting black partridge, but I thought they were francolin. Anyway, there were a lot, they held well to a point and flushed like rockets. Excellent quarry for the goshawks. Also delicious.

That if you want to see the very old-fashioned looking English pointers in the 18th and 19th century prints on pub walls, you have to go to Pakistan. Every falconer has at least one.

That there are leopards in northwestern Punjab. We were warned to keep together close in the hunting group and also, when I went for a pipe of tobacco outside a restaurant that looked down on the capital city (Islamabad, it's huge) the wailer freaked and hunted me back in. It would have been bad PR for a tourist to be scooped by a leopard within sight of the parliament building.

That wild cannabis grows there in profusion, like weeds, in orange orchards.

That it is possible to reverse legislation. After the British left in '47 and the arbitrary line was drawn separating Pakistan from India, India banned falconry. Pakistan banned it later citing illegal activity associated with commercial trapping and poaching by foreigners. Both of which did exist, and still do, however, the traditional communities in several provinces suddenly found their highly developed falconry with goshawks, sparrowhawks and shikras being classed as criminal. They continued under the radar and worked hard with IAF and UNESCO to convince their government to rescind the draconian laws, until now, principally due to Kamran Khan Yousefszai and his Pakistan Falconers' Club, not only is falconry legal, it is seen as essential by the regional governments and environmental agency.

That the falconers of Pakistan who fly goshawks are the best in world. I told them this and they all said, 'You should go and see falconry in Afghanistan; those guys are even better.' Maybe one day.

That the kindest, most generous people I have ever met have been Pakistani falconers. I took £500 with me and came back with £500. I was not allowed to pay for anything, for fear of insulting our hosts and that Pakistan has replaced Spain as my favourite country,



My apologies for turning what started as a plea for all falconers to travel the world to see and to learn from all other falconers, into an autobiography. I have fallen into a trap which catches many writers, making it all about themselves.

Anyway, these are some of my favourite memories of things I have learned from outside of Ireland, from countries where language, religion, colour, agegroup, gender, or wealth weren't used to distinguish between falconers. There are many kind people in the falconry world, and they all have a lot to teach in the way of skills and knowledge, not just about practical falconry, but about how you think about it, and about falconers, and about life. That's probably philosophy, please excuse me.

Moral: you can only learn so much from a book, then you need experts, you need experts, facetoface, who will broaden your mind, who will show you other ways of doing things, often better ways, sometimes worse. Knowing how not to do it increases your understanding of why the right way works, and it's really encouraging to know when you're doing it the right way. To find these experts you need to travel, not just from Shanbally to Kinsale, or even from Cork to Dublin, you need to take the boat and take the plane.

Realise that you need more knowledge and skills than you can get from one hawk, or one species, or even one style of flying – longwing, shortwing,

broadwing, eagle, wallingon, or off the fist, mountains, farmland, forests, deserts – there is something to be learned and appreciated in all of these and your falconry will improve beyond your wildest dreams.

I am reminded of the old saying:

'The wise old owl sat in an oak, the more he saw the less he spoke.'

The less he spoke the more he heard, why aren't we all like that wise old bird.'

God, I hate owls.



Buddy

Alan Jackson Isle of Man

Twenty years ago I was flying a female goshawk on the Isle of Man and had the idea of acquiring a male to attempt to breed my own birds. My female was a four year old parent reared bird and, although I was a novice when I bought her, had developed into a keen and capable hunter.

My mentor Keith Hollingwood, who had guided me to success with her, (you're trying to fly a turkey, take an ounce off!) had heard of a male imprint goshawk that DNA had suggested was female, making the original buyer back out. I phoned the breeder and arranged to go over to Anglesey to collect it. When I arrived there were two male siblings, both of which were originally thought to be female, and as a friend back home was keen to fly a goshawk as well I bought them both.

These birds had been creche reared in a busy family with dogs and children and were close to fledging. Buying the birds was easy, how to get them home was an issue as the Isle of Man is not part of the UK or the Common Market so CITES export and import licences would be required. These would take at least six weeks to acquire and I was heading home that evening. I decided not to tell anyone and file the required paperwork as soon as I got back.

My friend Nigel was happy with his bird, I gave him the choice, and I named mine Tippee and his was Buddy. The birds were great fun to watch when we met up and let them try out their wings together. I was doing some building work at the time and a nosy neighbour asked why I had such a lovely bird tied to a perch, I hadn't the time to chat and my reply of 'so he doesn't fly away' was a missed opportunity. That afternoon I had a phone call from the breeder to say that the police had been round to inspect his premises and paperwork and they were particularly interested in the two goshawks that he had sold to someone on the Isle of Man! It transpired that the nosy bloke had reported me to the wildlife department. I walked in trepidation for a knock on the door but none came. I can only assume since I had filed the paperwork with them that there was no point in pursuing a conviction.



Tippee and a large leveret he caught

Tippee turned out to be a superb bird once I started hunting with him. In the early days Nigel and I flew the birds together and one early slip was memorable. My flatfoot flushed a cock pheasant from some gorse and both birds were off in a flash and as they flew over a hill they resembled nothing more than a bomber plane with two fighter escorts. We ran several hundred yards to where my flatfoot was standing guard over a dead pheasant with two hawks wondering how to pluck it!

We stopped flying them together as they became more prey focussed, we were aware that crabbing could become an issue and it wasn't worth the risk. Also, I wanted to concentrate on pheasants and Nigel preferred rabbits. For a small bird (666gm) Tippee proved lethal, taking many pheasants, hen birds often taken on the wing but cocks were followed until they put in. The fights got better as the bird became experienced and the pheasants wider. This all came to a sudden end in January in his first year when he flew onto an electricity pole with switchgear and was electrocuted.

This left Buddy as a potential mate for my female but Nigel was a little reluctant to risk him and he was having too much fun flying him. The next year I got a call from Nigel to say that he had lost Buddy when his transmitter had become detached. I was very busy at the time and thought the idea of breeding was a bit of a pipe dream so didn't try to

buy another male. I was trapping corvids the following spring and I had a Larsen trap at the top of the steep field behind my house, when I came home from a job my wife said 'you have something in the trap, I can see it jumping up and down'. I was amazed to find it was Buddy and Nigel was so surprised that he checked Buddy's ring to make sure. Our breeding idea was back on track but too late for this season.

The next January saw me build a large dual aviary in a secluded place on the farm, out of sight of nosy public. My female Liz, despite being parent reared, had for a few years shown signs of finding me attractive and she was even more interested when I installed her in this aviary with a great big nest built in one corner. Buddy seemed equally pleased with his adjacent accommodation and it wasn't long before he started showing off too.

I had no idea what I was doing but had made the gauntlet of my glove nice and white in the hope he would deposit semen on it. He didn't, he thought my grey beanie hat was much more sexy and he would dance around on top of it. I kept examining the hat closely for signs of a valuable pearl but none appeared. I was beginning to think he wasn't up to the job when a drop of semen fell onto my glasses, he had been hanging over the edge of the hat in his excitement! We only managed to rear one chick from four fertile eggs that first year because I tried to incubate them myself and messed up. Over the next couple of years we raised a few birds by letting Liz do the job herself and it was great fun to go into the aviary and check the eggs and chicks by sliding a hand under Liz and later on, helping her to feed the youngsters. Interestingly this friendliness came to an abrupt end as soon as the youngsters fledged. I went in one morning to see the youngsters at the back of the aviary with Liz, who raised her hackles and flew at my face! I dodged her but never went in again until I removed the eyasses.

Having put Liz and Buddy into the breeding aviaries one February everything seemed to be going well and I walked down with food and a few sprigs of fresh greenery for Liz when it dawned on me that the area was suspiciously quiet. Peering through the spy hole I couldn't see either bird. I went into Buddy's side first and was horrified to see a hole had been cut in the wire through which he had escaped, the same was true on Liz's side and our hopes for another successful breeding season were in the wind. Don't you just hate interfering busy bodies?

Despite much searching Liz was never seen again but Buddy, although I never saw him, apparently hung around as I had occasional reports of sightings. In July, later that year, rooks were raiding our pheasants' food so I had erected a ladder trap nearby and sure enough Buddy was soon clattering around in it, much to the consternation of the rooks. Nigel was again pleased to be reunited with his bird.



Buddy at around fifteen years of age

Roll on a couple of more years and the usual phone call, 'Buddy has got out'. To save embarrassment I did not ask how but a few months later, when someone said they had seen Buddy on our farm, which is a good four miles from his home, out went the trap again and he was soon in it. This made me wonder if he began to be caught!

Nigel's fitness began to wane and Buddy spent a couple of years in an aviary and when Nigel died suddenly, Buddy came to stay with me. This period was short lived as I then had health issues of my own and Buddy was passed to a friend who rehabilitates birds of prey but doesn't fly them. Buddy settled down to life alternating from spells in an aviary and being weathered on a lawn with a tremendous view over the south of the island.

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Last year, scanning through social media, I saw that an escaped hawk was terrorising lame hens in our village, you guessed it, Buddy was on the loose again. His now owner asked me to keep an eye out as he was reported to be nearby but I saw no sign for several weeks. It is my habit to walk our two spaniels every lunchtime to a field alongside a small stream. I had recently fenced the stream and was admiring my work when the spaniels poked their heads through the fence in a state of high excitement. They rapidly withdrew when a clearly angry goshawk squeezed through the fence and started to dance around with its wings out trying to foot them in the face. The dogs were equally keen to nip this mad bird apart and it took a bit of shouting and beating them with my cap to avoid bloodshed. I dropped my cap onto the hawk as a makeshift hood but he grabbed it with one foot and my hand with the other. This did mean that I had a

chance to get a proper grip of him with my other hand and we walked back to the farm holding hands!

Phoning my friend when I got back to the farm he was, as I expected, delighted. I asked if he could come and collect it but he said he was sorry but they were in Scotland, could I take him back and put him in the aviary where a friend would feed him with the other birds? So Buddy went home and now sits out looking over the countryside with his new jesses on. It is of interest to me that whenever and wherever he has escaped it is our farm he comes back to when he has the whole of the island at his feet, the last time from ten miles away.

After twenty years, was this his last adventure, who knows?



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Snipe hawking

Thomas Richter Germany

Waiting on falconry is the highest form of falconry, as our ancestors taught us. That's what we want too! So, upon retirement, after a combined total of around 60 years of rabbit hawking, we emigrated to the promised land of Bavaria, where we thought there would still be game for waiting on falconry, and set up a peregrine tiercel. It actually started off quite well, so after a few years we got a second tiercel, Susanne's Speedy.

But humans always strive for more, and the game stocks in Bavaria are no longer what they used to be. In short, we looked for alternatives. Our guiding spirit was our friend Willi, who shared Facebook videos with us of snipe hawking in Ireland. It looks very easy. Eric Witkowski strides lightly across the bog, his two Irish setters find lots of snipe and point rock-solid, the bird comes from a great height – and bang – he has the snipe. Very simple. There is plenty of game that is very easy to hunt, and that's what we want as well.

Getting in touch with Irish falconers was no problem for us, as I – Tom – was still an official of the International Association of Falconry (IAF) at the time, and Gary Timbrell, its managing director at the time, is from Ireland. Our Irish falconer friends are also extremely helpful; we were warmly welcomed and provided with both accommodation and access to suitable bogs.

The cottage was architecturally very idyllic and was surrounded by meadows and a body of water. And that's where the idyll ended. There was water not only in front of the house but, as is customary in Ireland, also from the sky and, unexpectedly for us, also inside the house, running down the walls. Our ladies in particular were not amused, and we changed our accommodation for the coming years.

Walking in the bogs also proved to be a huge effort. None of us turned into bog bodies, but waterlogged wellies were not exactly rare. And the dogs also had their difficulties with the unfamiliar game.

After several trips to the green island, Willi was ultimately the most successful, we both came away empty-handed. Until – and this is the reason for

writing this report – until one truly beautiful day, Willi's Emma pointed seriously and it was Susanne's Speedy's turn to fly. The bird took off brilliantly, the snipe zigzagged into the sky and the whole thing disappeared behind the next hill. There was no way through from this side of the hill, so we drove around it and aimed for the bird from the other side. The signal was clear, it was maybe 500 metres ahead of us on the ground, but in the most difficult bogland terrain. We spread out, and 60 years old Willi, our youngster with the longest legs, found and recovered the bird after an extremely arduous struggle with the bog. There was no prey to be seen, but somehow the crop was full. Could it be that good old Speedy had caught the snipe and eaten it whole? The next day, there was a pellet, and Susanne had not been a laboratory veterinarian for decades for nothing, so she immediately had the idea: the pellet must be examined. Back in Germany and at her old workplace, snipe DNA was indeed detected from the pellet.



Susanne with Speedy and the second snipe

Once you've taken the first step, the second isn't so difficult, and that's how Speedy got to the second snipe.

Soabhaic seilge na hEireann!



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Making braided furniture

Darryl Reed Dublin

When I returned from my hiatus away from falconry, I found there had been a few new evolutions... gps telemetry, drones and braided furniture. I was intrigued by the braided gear and ordered a couple of sets from a braider in the UK. It cost a pretty penny, but I was an immediate fan and convert. The features I like about braid are that it lasts multiple seasons, is machine washable and wear and strain is visible, unlike leather which snaps without warning. I also liked how loop leashes sit at the swivel, you don't get the button hanging through.

I've been using and making braid a few years now but have only recently fully appreciated the benefits of a jess extender. The jess extender sits between the jesses and swivel. There is a loop which the jess sits thread onto and another loop for the swivel. It effectively creates a leash with a swivel incorporated, a few inches from the jesses. I think of them more as a leash extender! Their primary use is for falcons, where short jesses are required to avoid the falcon straddling the block, and it places the swivel beyond the tail feather tips. My favourite benefits are that it avoids the situation where a jess slips down over the swivel, and that the leash, swivel and extender come away as one piece, so avoids having to remove leash and swivel separately.

Due to the cost of having to order braid from the UK, I decided to start making some. I found some useful videos on youtube and ordered the essentials. For standard gear, alwood micro cord 1.18mm, available online from paracord.eu is my favoured material. For micro gear, the smaller nano cord is best. I have been making eagle braid recently but have not settled on the best size and material for this yet. Other essentials include beeswax, haemostat clamps, superglue and a lighter. If you can plait hair you have a headstart on learning to braid, but it is not difficult to learn from scratch. The cord must be waxed to give it grip, which makes it far



easier to maintain tension to keep the braid tight.

The two main braids used for falconry furniture are both 8 strand braids. Round braid threads two strands at a time, and square sennit braid threads a single strand at a time. Sennit braid is slightly more time consuming but gives a smoother finish. I do nearly all my braid in square sennit, as it gives a more satisfying result, though round braid is perfectly serviceable. If you need to take a break or to hold a loose end while making a loop or jess still, haemostat clamps are necessary to hold the cords in order and maintain the tension. Leashes usually take



several sessions so needs to be stored clamped between sessions. Braiding can be hard on the hands initially, but you develop calluses on your fingers. For buttons/knots for jess ends, you can braid extra length and make a leash knot. The nicer finish is a rose sennit knot but this was one of the

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most head frying things I've ever learnt to do, so leash knot ends are a better starting point for first attempts at braid. I finish my jess ends in a layer of epoxy resin, though most other braiders use super glue and/or a lighter. After my first few sets, I was flying it and really enjoyed the process, so started to make braid to order. It's very time consuming but I tip away at it most evenings as I watch tv. A jess takes about one hour and a leash takes about three hours. So a full set is about five hours braiding. I certainly don't do it for money! Like hood making, many people don't appreciate the time or skill involved until they try it themselves. I tried my hand at hood making years ago and found it very difficult, and would consider making braid the easier of the two skills. My order list is always long though, so I would love to see some other falconers in Ireland learn to make braid. I am happy to give guidance and anyone looking to give it a go is welcome to contact me.



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A Connemara summer with Ronald Stevens

Kyran Kane Co Louth

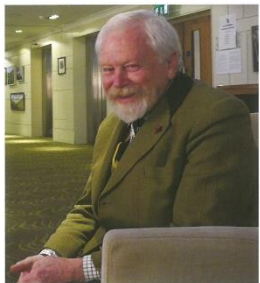
Having kept, since boyhood, a selection of tame Jackdaws, Magpies and Hooded Crows taken from the nest and reared to free flying and eventual wandering away, in 1957 I took a Kestrel from the nest, fitted her with jesses and trained her to fly to the fist and live on a block. An approach to the British Falconers' Club led to contact with Ronald Stevens and William McDougald, the latter being a

Veterinary Surgeon in Dundrum who had an inter-medved eyass falcon named "Pride" that had been taken from an eyrie in Wicklow. (McDougald was responsible for introducing Mink into Ireland) At the age of seventeen I was fortunate enough to be invited to Fermoye Lodge by Ronald Stevens, initially as the cook at a salary of four pounds a week! Arriving at the Lodge my first meeting with Mr. Stevens, revealed a softly spoken, courteous, short and balding, welcoming and friendly character clad in a somewhat frayed tweed jacket. Through the summer he taught me how to conduct oneself around hawks, to make jesses and hoods, to tie and untie a 'Falconer's Knot' with one hand, to hood and unhood a hawk, and eventually I was permitted to carry and unhood and cast off falcons on the moor.

The large kitchen with an ever hot range had an adjoining pantry and a cool larder that was actually built into the bank behind. The adjoining dining room was some thirty feet or more long by twenty wide, the far end being of glass sliding doors revealing a wonderful vista of distant blue mountains, purple moorlands and the silvery Fermoye Lough.

My culinary expertise, although capable and adequate in putting breakfasts on on the sideboard and luncheons on the table, was not of the standard required to cope with large luncheons and numerous resident guests. The wife of Stevens driver and dog handler replaced me, as she, although basic in her repertoire of dishes, could cope with the demand.

The trainee butler, Peter, a local youth, was only learning English, so we conversed in Irish. Not much older than I, Peter had a sense of how he appeared in his formal butler's uniform and when he caught my eye would be on the verge of exploding with laughter, whilst perhaps carrying a heavily laden afternoon tea tray.



The Lodge sits in a small isolated wood of Scots Pines and Larch with a dense understorey of Laurel and Rhododendron. The surrounding moors, are bare, there being no other trees for miles around. Adjacent is Fermoye Lough, one of the chain of lakes and rivers of Fermoye Fishery. The Demesne included, I recollect, some 100,000 acres of Grouse shooting rights.

My duties now were purely related to falconry. A female nearly fledged eyass Merlin was awaiting me. I trained her to fly to the fist but unfortunately she soon developed frounce and died.

The Mews was a purpose built long building having a small windowless room for the marning of a hawk at one end and at the other end was a small pen holding domestic fowl and pigeons. The completely open front was barred with vertical wooden slats. A screen perch ran the length of the Mews with fittings for four or five hawks who had a view of all the comings and goings along the drive at the far side of the wide lawn. A circular concrete bath set into the lawn in front was about five feet in diameter and six inches deep in the centre where there was a stopper in a plug hole that drained into a gravel sump beneath.

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Kyran's sparrowhawks at Fermoye Lodge

There were two eyass Peregrine falcons in the Mews when I arrived in mid-July. These were for Geoffrey Pollard who arrived with his charming wife, Diana, soon thereafter.

Pollard quickly had them free flying and coming to the lure. Pollard and Stevens used the lightweight Indian style hoods so easily made from a single piece of leather as described in Mavropodatos's book 'A Falcon for the Field'.

The summer of 1959 was long and dry and hot. Midges were abundant and troublesome on the moors; I recollect the Irish Red Setter's back covered with a shimmering coating of midges.

Grouse were scarce, so the hawking was poor, although we went out almost every day. Pollard slowly trained his hawks to wait on. The well trained Setter held a point steadily, but in the whole season I only saw one successful spectacular Grand Stoop from about 600 feet by one of Pollard's falcons.

Some distance from the lodge in a secluded place, sheltered by trees, was the breeding shed that had yet to produce any result. This was a large fully roofed timber building rather like a barn, some thirty yards long by ten yards broad and thirty feet high

inside. There were two very large windows, one either side with vertical steel bars and a horizontal shelf across half way up on which the hawks would sit, gazing at the outside world. The insides of the walls and roof were painted white, making the interior of the shed bright. High up, near the roof, were three or four platforms about three feet square, as perches. One of these contained dried grass turves as a nest site. A breeding attempt some years later failed as the eggs dropped into a gap between two turves. There was a small spy hole behind this platform, and a ladder mounted outside to allow for inspection. There was also a ladder inside the shed up to the shelf. The entrance door was at the far end of the shed. Food, which was fastened to a plinth in the centre of the floor, was of portions such as would not be carried up to the higher perches. Occupying the shed were McDougald's falcon, "Pride", and an eyass tional, "Clougher", taken from a local eyrie. Their union had yet to bear fruit! Success some years later was with, I believe, a Prairie Falcon tereal. I used bring the food most days, removing any old remnants. Neither bird was very alarmed by my presence.

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Stevens' Falconer, Jacques Godard, also had experience of fishery management and was a very keen fisherman. A break in the weather brought heavy rain and the rivers were in flood, Jacques went down to the river out of the lake and came back in the afternoon with seven salmon all between ten and twenty pounds. These were filleted and the sides smoked over smouldering peat in a purpose built smokehouse. What became of the sides I have no idea!

Godard moved to Sreebe Fishery as Manager and lived there for many years with his Swedish wife, whom he had met by a riverside. Their children went to the local school where they were educated through Irish. Some years later their house was burnt down by a disgruntled former employee. They left Ireland and Godard made a successful career in salmon culture. I had the pleasure of meeting him again years later at Robert Hutchinson's house.

Stevens had a very sweet tooth; the daily afternoon tea trolley always had a cake on it. When served with a large slice he would invariably remark 'Oh, what a feast!'. His grandniece, the author Susan Boyl, told me that she remembered his uttering this remark years later when confronted with a rich confection. McDougald visited one afternoon with his family bringing a box of sugary doughnuts. Pollard brought a case of sweet Asil Spumante wine that was served during the course of a long luncheon when a French Count and his wife visited.

I walked into the larder one day only to find Stevens holding in his fingers a slice of mango from a dish of chutney and about to drop it into his wide open mouth. I retreated rapidly and we both carried on as though it hadn't happened. A love of classical instrumental music was evident each morning from the strains of orchestral concerti and symphonies coming from his bedroom.

One incident that puzzled me at the time was when the Taoiseach (Prime Minister), Seán Lemass, was expected on a private visit. Stevens stated aloud his decision not to bother shaving his well grown stubble. However, when Lemass arrived, a long conversation between the two ensued over afternoon tea.

The conversation, one evening, turned to religion. Pollard claimed no particular affiliation, merely commenting on the sexual strictures of



Catholicism, this extraordinary jibe directed at me. Reid Henry declared himself an Evangelist at heart, his father having been a Missionary in Ceylon. Stevens stated that he had studied all the major religions and found them all wanting and so held no particular affiliation. He, however, without asking me my preference, must have felt a moral duty to ensure that I went in the car with the driver and his family to Mass every Sunday. The Irish speaking congregation in the church revealed the backwardness and poverty of the area. The collection basket held pennies and halpennies, the older women were wrapped in black shawls and the older men wore rough tweed trousers and tweed waistcoats.

In the Study was a framed photograph of Haile Selassie, Emperor of Ethiopia, in full military regalia, bearing an inscription from the Emperor. This was in memory of the time His Majesty had stayed in Stevens' Walcot Hall when he was exiled by the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935-'36. Walcot Hall had been built by Clive of India when he returned to Britain in 1757 with the vast riches he had looted from the coffers of Calcutta after the victory of Plassey, worth some £88 million today.

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Homing instinct in hawks

Ronald Stevens

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TWO eyass peregrine falcons were taken from their eyrie in Ireland in 1969. They were judged to be in danger because under their cliff was an encampment of boys and it was feared that the young hawks might be shot during their branching days. Subsequently these eyasses were passed to me to hack back. One of them duly returned to the wild but the other hung about round my home in Connemara.

Autumn and winter passed. She was still here during the Spring and Summer of 1970, and still she refused to go. Often she killed for herself and as time passed she would absent herself now and then, sometimes for as long as a week. Often I found remains of her kills out on the bog. They were all wild duck. But on her less successful days she flew round the house looking for me and when she saw me in the garden she took her stand in a tree and screamed for food which I threw out for her on the lawn.

All of this was quite entertaining until I wanted to fly three other peregrines. One of them was a five years old eyass tiercel which this year, with John Morris' saker falcon, produced two eyass hybrids. Every time the three hawks were flown the territory-conscious "hack" hawk always appeared on the scene to buzz them unmercifully. On one occasion she hijacked the tiercel to the village of Costello which is about seven miles away as the hawk flies. I was lucky to get him back. After this incident the rogue falcon was named 'Leila', after the glamorous though misguided Arab girl hijacker we all read about in the newspapers at about that time.

Not content with persecuting the other hawks while they were being flown, 'Leila' carried the war into the enemy's camp by stooping at her rivals as they weathered. It was a common sight to see three well-behaved hawks covering behind their backs on the lawn while from overhead that demon pressed her attacks.

On one of these occasions my American friend Henry Swain voiced his admiration of those spectacular stoops but I could not share his enthusiasm. I could not do anything else than reflect



that for a whole year I had suffered this hawk's importunities. Something had to be done. Translocation should solve the problem and it would have to be done at a safe distance. The words of the song 'It's a long way to Tipperary' came to mind and seemed little short of divine guidance. Would Henry like to take her there? He welcomed this opportunity of seeing a lot more of Ireland.

So 'Leila' was trapped and put into a container and on the early morning of 23rd August 1970, Henry and Miss Pery left by car. They returned the same day in the late evening when there was still enough daylight to see their broad smiles of triumph on the completion of a mission well done. The point of release had been in a wild mountainous district of east Tipperary, 140 miles measured distance by road from home.

One morning, it was 31st August, the three hawks were enjoying the early sunshine on the lawn when, to my consternation, they all looked skywards

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In the 1920s and '30s Stevens and his brother had a large collection of waterfowl and cranes at Walcot Hall. Ronald travelled to South Africa to get waterfowl and eggs and also to Iceland where he acquired the Gyr Falcon eyass tiercel about whom he wrote in 'The Taming of Genchis'. The house and estate were requisitioned by the Army during the war. When the war was over the collection had been eaten. In the book 'Laggard' he describes his return to the Hall.

In residence was the artist David Reid Henry who was painting a magnificent and very large picture of two life size Gyr Falcons, one white, the other grey, disputing over a dead Raven. He was using gouache with a very fine brush to paint the individual barbs on each feather. He had old Gyr wings and tails that he used as models.

There were two already completed pictures, one of Shelducks on mudflats and the other of Grouse in Heather. The perfection of detail in the latter was such that a photograph that had been taken of it could have passed as a photo that had been taken out on a moor.

He left for a while when Keith Shackleton arrived and painted a mediocre picture of Whooper Swans fleeing from an approaching rain storm. Reid Henry had grown up in Ceylon and once cooked a curry for the house. The side dishes accompanying the main dish included one of Sharwood's mango chutney, the subject of the anecdote recounted above. Reid Henry told me of seeing a Peregrine feeding on a dead camel when he was in Egypt in the Army during the war. He had an intermewed Peregrine tiercel that flew free daily, returning to the Lodge roof in the afternoon, and coming down to the lure.

There was a small population of Golden Pheasants living in the wood surrounding the lodge. They used emerge in the late afternoon and make a colourful parade along the drive by the lawn.

Beside the wide terrace was a group of small empty aviaries. A motley collection of exotic birds including a Bulbul, a small Crested Mousebird or similar and a European Nightingale arrived once and were released into the aviaries, food was placed on a platform suspended from the roof. After a week or less a trapdoor in the roof above the food was opened and the birds flew free. This poorly managed attempt at establishing a population of exotics was a complete failure, the free flying birds soon all vanishing. The Nightingale was reported from Galway later.

Efforts were made to trap a wild tiercel that was seen regularly, by setting a clap-net baited with a pigeon, but the tiercel fled the net through the open end each time. In the late summer migrating Sparrowhawks began to appear and take Wood Pigeons. One was easily caught with a Bai-chatri and became mine. I manned her and took her to the field. Walking by myself with her and coming upon a small covey of Partridges I hurried her underhand after them and she caught one immediately. Elated with my success I joined the falconers with the peregrines only to be told that I should have followed the covey and caught a few more! Stevens, however, was effusive in his praise and congratulations. Later a second hawk was caught and manned but I had no further success at prey.

In the late Summer a consignment of Eleanora's Falcons was anticipated to arrive when Stevens was expected to be away on some business. Jesses and hoods were prepared and I was left to deal with them should they arrive. In the event they did not come and on Stevens' return in late September I returned to Dublin with my Sparrowhawk that strayed a few days later. Thus ended my involvement with Falconry.

With my wife, Helen, I revisited Fermoyle in the late 1960s while on home leave from Kenya where I was now working. We chatted about Kenya and life in Africa, but Stevens wasn't really very interested now that I was no longer a falconer.

Afternoon Tea was served as usual.



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with cries of apprehension - a concert which, for me, had distinctly disagreeable associations. Within minutes 'Leila' was back in her tree again.

There seemed to be no choice other than to curb her liberty of which she had taken advantage so blatantly for so long. Henry by then had returned to California so I had to trap her myself this time, which I did with considerably less finesse than that previously performed by Henry. After capture she was jessed, belled and hooded. Strangely chastened she looked on the mew perch wearing these accoutrements of a trained hawk.

That same evening, with Fr. Patrick Farnon, then chaplain to St. Vincent's Hospital, Dublin, and Dr. Hayes and his wife, also of Dublin, acting as witnesses, I stripped one of my two Indian passage falcons of her jesses and bells and liberated her to take the place of 'Leila', well knowing that for this changing falcon there would be no return. To put finally to the affair I reported what had been done to the honorary secretary of the Irish Wild Bird Conservancy.

Nevertheless that is not the end of the story. On 1st September 1971, I took 'Leila' to Co. Mayo, hoping to kill a grouse with her. But she never got properly started because soon after arriving there my young, late-hatched, untrained, hybrid falcon escaped from her block. (Fortunately John Morris still has her on the nest-brother the hybrid tiercel.) All day and every day the search for this unique falcon continued, assisted by John, Thelma Mansfield, Alec Phinn and Tony Huston, who all very sportingly had dropped everything to come to my aid. But we saw nothing of her. In a desperate bid to contact the lost hawk I turned 'Leila' loose in the hope that the lost hawk would be attracted to her, but the plan did not succeed.

Before leaving for home on 11th September I was conspiring again to lose 'Leila'. So instead of taking her up I deliberately left her out and travelled home without her the journey by road from Ballycroy to Fermoyle being nearly a hundred miles.

After my return I had to go to Galway on 14th September. I left home by car at 10.30 a.m. and had turned out of the drive entrance and hardly gone a hundred yards when I saw her sitting on her favourite rock. Quite possibly she had returned the previous day for I had not looked for her. I continued on my way feeling discredited for turning my back on her

after this latest demonstration of her loyalty to Fermoyle, but there was an appointment to keep in Galway. I did not take her up until the next morning when she came to the lure with her usual cluck of greeting. Although she had started her journey without bells I had not taken off her jesses, being unable to discount the possibility of her return. She was in high condition as she had been after her return from Tipperary so that it is not hunger that brings her home.

In the past when eyasses were procurable it was my practice to teach them to home, flying them at increasing distances away and afterwards leaving them to fly back, which most of them did. But the approach of Spring is a dangerous time and over-confidence just then lost me more than one hawk, such as 'Sheena', a falcon which was frequently left out to fly home again after an afternoon's hawking over a duck marsh ten miles from the mews. On nearing home in the car I used to tease John Spellman about his slow driving on those occasions when the hawk had won this race back to the Lodge.

Disappointed in her first few flights at grouse, 'Sheena' gave up flying them, and for that reason it was decided to return her to the wild. The day came when Jacques Godard, who was with me then, was leaving by car for Dublin. He was to liberate this hawk in suitable country at a safe distance far on the road to the big city. He did that but the plan failed because the next day she was home again. After that event Jacques and I were firmly of the opinion that we had a hawk which could not be lost, but we were wrong because within a week she left us on a different journey, the direction and timing of which she herself had chosen. Spring was round the corner and we never saw her again.

Is 'Leila' a hawk which can never be lost? I doubt it.



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Hunger Jewells His Eyes

Decian Cairney Co Galway

'What but fear winged the birds, and hunger jewelled with such eyes the great goshawks head'
-Robinson Jeffers

The Goshawk is a species that has truly captivated me for as long as I can remember. Having only a small amount of exposure to them as a wide eyed 15-year-old, in comparison to my daily handling of Harris hawks, falcons and owls throughout my teenage years, the sense of mystique and danger that shrouded the larger Accipiter (Eurasian Goshawk (*Astur gentilis*) formerly (*Accipiter gentilis*) was like nothing else.

When the opportunity arose in November 2021 to take on an imprint male from that year, my initial hesitation was quickly quashed by excitement and trepidation. For three seasons, we stalked the muddy fields, hedgerows and grassy boroens of Co. Meath. Both hawk and I blundering and foolish but leaping step by step. I will never say he is an amazing bird, not one to stand proud and unwavering around strangers and dogs on long field meet days, but we worked well as a team in our own way and split the blood of over 80 head of game in those three winters.



Before the injury

Primarily rooks and hooded crows, with the occasional jackdaw and roughly a dozen or so pheasants, the only close call with fur was an accidental slip on a hare. Given I did not, and still don't, employ the use of ferrets or a dog, both hawk and I cut our teeth on the constant mind games and tactics required to succeed against the most intelligent and numerous quarry Ireland has to offer, the corvids.



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Figure 2

By March the stitches had been removed, no more eye drops were necessary and the hawk was on full fat weight in his new aviary ready for the summer moult. The nictitating membrane regained almost 90% of its original movement but there was some permanent damage to the cornea of the eye. The same could not be said unfortunately for my father, who felt a strange affinity to the injured bird as he himself had suffered a blood clot in his right eye resulting in permanent partial sight loss around the same time.

This past summer seems to have taken an age to pass, and I write this article now in the first week of October 2025, on the cusp of a new season hunting with the hawk. I did what I could over recent months trying to repair the mistrust I had sown, but the two weeks since pulling him from the chamber have been some of the hardest of my falconry career.

Improvement has come from fully committing to operant conditioning in the last weeks. Operant conditioning is a process which is at play between every animal and its trainer at all times, but something

that if utilised correctly, can have the most astonishing and rapid results. Traditional falconry training methods are somewhat based off this and given the extreme food-driven nature of raptors, it is simpler to engage than in other species. The constant use of tiny titbit rewards, a quail leg or neck diced into centimetre sized pieces at hand every time I handled my hawk gave me a considerable improvement in a very short period of time.

I began with rewarding the lack of baiting from the glove as I walked around my garden, a minute without baiting resulted in a tiny reward, then the longer he went without baiting the more regular the tiny rewards. I then waited for tiny changes in posture, bringing in his wings slightly, or turning his attention to something other than my looming face. By rewarding every slight behaviour that I deemed progress, he began to understand my motives. This, 'rewarding the behaviour you want to see' when put plainly, seems obvious, but when put to the test in such a rigorous way it is a joy to behold the results.

I hope this article provides food for thought for some, and I wait with as much trepidation for this coming season as I did nearly five years ago. I have no idea what the coming months will bring or if anything close to old glory will ever be regained. Maybe in next year's journal I will have some thrilling stories of daring flights from the very nearly one-eyed hawk.



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As the number of kills increased, and particularly throughout the 2023/2024 season, the hawk developed a particular penchant for an initial faux attack, building up speed and flushing the corvids feeding in an open field. He would then pull up to roughly 20/25 meters, look over his shoulder, and power down towards a chosen bird. This led often to mid-air takes directly in front of my face as he took rooks that chose to scatter under his initial throw-up, flying back towards me staring agape over a farmer's fence. Thrilling stuff indeed, and for me superior to those huge arcing flights after pheasants which often disappear over distant hedgerows.

Injuries during the hunting season are an occupational hazard as we all know, and this hawk has had his fair share. Each incident has been a learning experience and greatly humbling as my inexperience and self-doubt ate at me each time. As any falconer surely feels the same, when your bird is injured as a result of human error or complacency it brings upon a hot wave of self-loathing and regret. A slip not properly thought through leading to a collision, or an injury from barbed wire that went unnoticed for two days. Hindsight can dog a man sometimes, but God these hawks are made of tough stuff!

The cost of living in the GDA (on a zookeepers salary) saw me return West in 2024, home to The Burren. It took me until January 2025 to complete construction of an aviary for the hawk on my parents land, who had been in the care of a very close falconer friend for the intervening period. With his fourth season almost a write-off, I was impatient to enter him and get at least a month or two of hunting.

And just like that, still touchy and high in weight, he baited from the scales in my new and unfamiliar weigh room, his gear slipping from my fingers. He had 3 meters to accelerate and hit the window behind me face first, knocking himself out stone cold. The resulting two months of treatment and recovery dwarfs the brevity of the incident itself. The

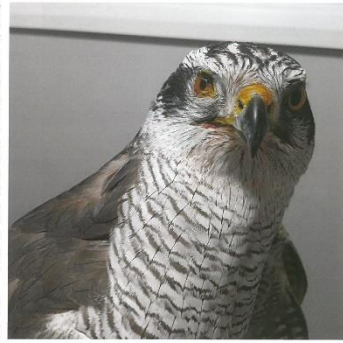


Figure 1

right side of his face began to swell and his eye closed up. After 12 hours of no improvement I took him to Rookhall Vets in Limerick, my trusted friends who I had worked with before many times with other raptors through my work.

We began a course of anti-inflammatories and pain relief but as the swelling reduced it revealed the nictitating membrane on the right eye was not working. His eye began to dry out in a matter of hours with a yellow crust developing around the edges (Fig. 1). We then began the treatment which saved his eye but spelled seeming disaster for our relationship. Three times a day, for over a week, I restrained that bird and administered antibacterial eye drops and eye lubricant. While infection was kept at bay, the cornea went glassy and I feared partial or total blindness in the eye.

Eventually the decision was made to suture the top and bottom eyelids shut to try and protect what we could (Fig 2). It turns out that was the saving grace, but every day we got closer to a full physical recovery I felt the psychological trauma to the hawk was becoming an insurmountable obstacle.

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Hunting rabbits on the Spanish plains

Stijn Suykerbuyk Belgium

As most falconers will know, the European rabbit is not native to Ireland, Belgium, or much of the European continent. Its original home lies on the Iberian Peninsula, in Spain and Portugal. The Romans recognised its value and spread the species across Europe. And thanks to them we can still fly what is for me, a favourite quarry today.

The rabbits are native to Spain—and still plentiful there—caught my attention many years ago. Even more interesting was the landscape itself. Spain's dry climate and open terrain are the closest you can get in Europe to the natural environment of my favourite hunting companion: the Harris's hawk. The idea took hold early on. One day, I would hawk there.

When I eventually got in touch with a local falconer with the proper hunting permissions, who also organised hunting days, things moved quickly. With two friends just as enthusiastic (or foolish) as I was, we set off. The biggest hurdle was the 1,700 km drive, which seemed intimidating at first. Yet after leaving at four o'clock on Saturday morning, grabbing some sleep along the way, we were hunting by Sunday around noon. Not bad at all.

The terrain was exactly what we had imagined: dry, open plains surrounded by mountains. There were no trees, only patches of knee-high, dry



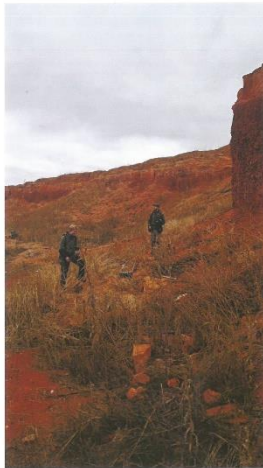
cover. It immediately felt like Harris's hawk country, and the birds confirmed that feeling. Within the first hour, three rabbits were taken: two by my female, Betty, and one by Pico. Pico, a juvenile male and Betty's brother, was entered on that very day.

The rabbits themselves were noticeably different from those at home. They were smaller, with weighed individuals between 1.1 and 1.3 kg, compared to the 1.5 to 1.8 kg we are used to in Belgium. Their coats were thinner and greyish in colour. Most striking, however, was their behaviour: they ran fast and kept running, often passing several burrows or hiding places. Chases of over 150 metres were common and at times felt more like hare flights—though with less resistance once caught.

Our days were filled with ferreting, which, as anyone who has done it knows, can be both action-packed and frustratingly slow. Some areas had clearly been hunted hard, and once we identified places where rabbits consistently refused to bolt, we moved on. Thankfully there were plenty of fields with lighter cover to work.

Many rabbits, accustomed to frequent hunting, bolted early and at distance, but enough

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After three days of hawking, we ended with sixteen rabbits in the bag, and a great deal of experience gained by both hawks and falconers. Hunting abroad remains an adventure well worth the effort!



offered clean slips to keep things exciting. Watching up to three Harris's hawks hunting together making repeated attacks in cover, was a spectacular sight. We found ourselves running like dogs just to keep the rabbit moving. Especially as the last hour of daylight—the happy hour—proved consistently productive.

Between the hunting days, we explored parts of inland Spain. We have to admit that inland Spain has a rather deserted feel, but the city of Toledo and its rich historical past were certainly a highlight. Even more impressive, however, was watching our host and his friends fly their falcons—mostly peregrines—at the native red-legged partridge, something we had never witnessed before.

Stoops from heights of 300 metres and more were a common sight, and feeling the camaraderie and mutual respect between the two disciplines, shortwings and longwings, was a real pleasure.



Update on Betty

Betty performed remarkably well during her first season, which we concluded in February after her 50th head of game. Most of her catches were rabbits, but she also managed two brown hares, a duck, a pheasant and a pigeon.

This season, as of December, she has already surpassed 55 heads, and the season isn't over yet. She achieved two brown hares in the Czech Republic, placed 6th out of 16 in the Falconrace.cz, and we are now focused on our first Egyptian geese. She has already caught a few in great style but lost them in the struggle.

Betty is developing into a very well-mannered hawk who truly understands her job. Rather than carefully timing her grip for the head, she often settles for wherever she can grab hold. While this works for rabbits, her primary prey, it proves especially costly with brown hares. Nonetheless, her efficiency improves with every hunt, and she is gradually losing her youthful enthusiasm, as is typical for aging Harris hawks.

At home, she remains quite noisy, which is my own fault for starting her a bit too young last year. If I were to do it again, I would wait longer before starting her training. That said, her noise doesn't bother me—or my neighbors—and I'm excited to look forward to the next 15+ hunting seasons with her!



An exceptional flight

James Knight Co Galway

Photography by Elise Koszarek

There are lots of different strains of the highly pathogenic Falconry virus, HPFV 5000, but I venture none are more debilitating in every way than imprinting and hunting the true accipiters. I honestly didn't know if I was up for another bout of it. All my friends seem to have been cured, perhaps they have found a vaccine. Where have all the goshawk men gone? Peregrines stole them, every one, when will they ever learn... you know the song. But if you are lucky, then you may get a few short seconds of a flight that make it all worthwhile, a few short seconds in return for the daily hours, the weeks, the months that make up your season. Those short seconds — when they come, if they come — then my goodness, you need to relish them.

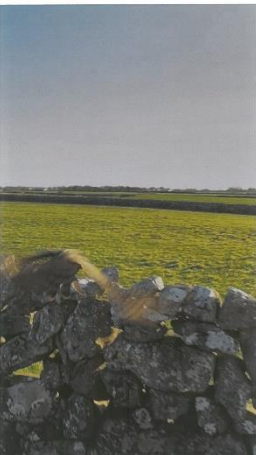
This is an account of one such flight, a season highlight — an exceptional flight for me, at least, in many ways. The hawk - a first-year female sparrowhawk named Edna. Taken from a wild nest under license at around 10 days old. Crèche reared with two male Harris hawks until she could fly. She was then free lofted on her own and trained and flown from the aviary. She had 66 catches under her belt by the time this flight took place. I normally hunt alone, but this time a colleague, Elise, was with me, and she videoed it — and how grateful I am. I have watched it over and over again: in real time, in slow motion, freeze frame, zoomed in. I have sucked every last bit of flavour from it. Thinking about it, of all the unusual things, perhaps the most exceptional part of this flight is, in fact, the blue sky. Only if you have lived in the west of Ireland will you appreciate how rare that is! I thought I would add stills from the video to illustrate the text, a little graphic novel or comic strip. Of all the fancy features on phones these days one of the simplest, but possibly the most interesting, is the timer in the bottom corner of the video, it is really illuminating. It's insane how quickly a sparrowhawk flight can be over, but not this one. So here it is, broken down, mouthful by delicious mouthful.

0:00 seconds
Photo 1

The first frame is Edna leaving the fist, going over the stone wall. The magpie is just a tiny dot against the far wall, only visible by rewinding and playing again and again to see a couple of moving pixels. It's across the field and on passage. I wondered if it is too hard a slip but it's wide open country.

1:00 seconds
Photo 2

By one second, she has dropped down two inches above the grass and is in flat-out accipiter mode, just eating up the ground. The magpie already sees what's coming, well he knows the Land Rover. He tries his first tactic: to put as much distance as he can between the two of them.

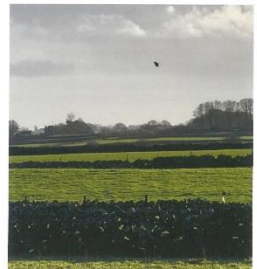


2:00 seconds
Photo 3

Two seconds in, and Elise — who, unbeknown to me, should clearly be a professional wildlife videographer — starts to zoom in. The magpie becomes visible, a flash of black and white against the grass of the next field. The magpie is beginning to realise that distance as a tactic isn't working.

4:00 seconds
Photo 4

Four seconds in, and Edna is going over the far wall. The majority of accipiter flights are over by now, this one is just beginning. The magpie tries tactic number two: altitude. He is now obvious against the sky, climbing for all his worth.



5.00 seconds
Photo 5

At five seconds, the magpie reaches his maximum height. Realisation has hit him: his second tactic, altitude, isn't working either. Edna is coming like a rocket. She has so much excess speed she can swing up underneath and grab him. That's what I pay my license fee for, folks — right there. All you ex-accipiter men — Keith, Don, Eric, Neil, etc. — you know that sight, that expectation. Swap the magpie for a pheasant, duck, partridge, and Edna for a goshawk — it's the same exhilarating picture. One I know you still secretly dream about, from the other side. There is no falling with gravity here. It's good old-fashioned, roll your sleeves up, combustion engine stuff all the way. Edna sucking on diesel.



7.50 seconds
Photo 6

The magpie has no choice now but to try his third tactic: he has to start coming down and look for cover. Think about that for a moment, coming back down to Edna's level. The magpie goes into a slanting dive, at times fully tucked. From five seconds to six seconds, Edna doesn't flap a wing. She is broadside, sootying through the air towards the dropping magpie. He is coming down, and she is ready. At six and a half seconds, they drop below and disappear behind the wall. You can just see a gate, some sheep wire, and a bit of wall on the video. Ninety percent of magpies would've bailed out into cover here, but perhaps Edna was too close and the magpie couldn't. So, both birds reappear a foot apart, shooting back upwards. This is it — from behind — the classic bind. Edna knows he is hers, but somehow the magpie keeps climbing.



8.80 seconds
Photo 7

Frozen in time at 8.8 seconds, you can see the magpie has pulled up so steeply it's almost past the vertical. The sparrowhawk is on her back, legs extending. Past the apex of his curve, the magpie has stalled and is starting to fall. Edna prepares to receive him at last — only, impossibly, he doesn't fall. He hangs there for a split second, then starts to haul himself up through the air from a static start.



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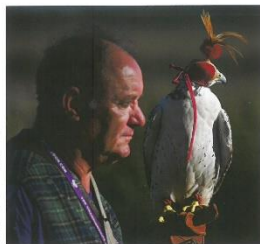
Medieval Brigstock

Wayne Davis England

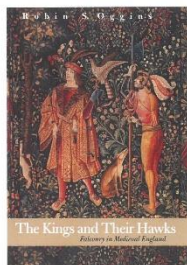
The Royal Mews of Henry III relocation to Brigstock and Geddington. (a personal connection)

Serendipity: the occurrence and development of events by chance in a happy or beneficial way. Serendipitous indeed were the circumstances that led to the writing of this article!

To put the article and its relevance into context. Ever since I was a boy, I have been transfixed by falcons & falconry. Reading Gilbert Blaine's classic tract 'Falconry' repeatedly, borrowing it on a long term basis, much to the consternation of my local library! Continually trying to emulate (quite tricky with the humble Kestrel) the nuances of this most ancient of arts 'Falconry'. This being with my first hawk, Finnegan, a European Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*). Especially since the literature of this time seemed to only deal with the unattainable to myself circa 1975) and mystical higher orders of falcons & hawks.



Being a passionate falconer and ornithologist since childhood, my natural inclination to collect and read books related to falconry, led me to read a fascinating account of medieval falconry, the book in question being 'The Kings and Their Hawks' falconry in medieval England by Robin S. Oggins. A renowned medieval academic and historian. The book was a gift from one of my daughters. On reading through this fascinating historical text, I came across a most interesting and revelatory piece of text 'From the 1230s on, most of the royal falcons were mewed at the King's houses at Brigstock and Geddington, both in Northamptonshire' being relocated from their previous location at Winchester.



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9.90 seconds
Photo 8

Edna climbs too. She has not only managed to match the magpie — but here she is somehow above him. For a second it's just a mash-up of spinning feathers, as if two dusters were being shaken out in the sky. The magpies fourth tactic is hand-to-hand combat in mid-air. They seem to lock feet for a split second — aerial cockfighting — they wheel around. When I zoom right in, the magpie's beak is open, they seem to be treading water in the sky. What an incredible feat to twist, turn, dodge, and fight off Edna.

10.5 seconds
Photo 9

At ten and a half seconds, Edna has been flung out of this aerial feathered washing machine and is below the magpie. Both birds go in opposite directions, so Edna flips over, pulls up, and heads off after the magpie yet again. Across the field they go, heading for a fallen tree by the farm buildings.



12.50 seconds
Photo 10

At twelve and a half seconds, Elise is panning out now as the two of them race low across the field to the lone tree. The magpie makes it, just. At thirteen and a half seconds, he is safe, and the fight is over. Elise is already writing her acceptance speech for Wildlife Filmmaker of the Year, but just before she does, she zooms in and takes a picture. Edna and the magpie had both shot-in just above ground level, but she then worked herself up through the branches. The magpie held tight and reinforcements arrived. The whole magpie clan turned up and started to launt her. We counted eight magpies in the fallen tree. We drove up to the corner of the field, magpies spraying out of the tree in all directions and called Edna back.

Throughout the entire flight I had been cheering, oohing and aahing going through the whole emotional rollercoaster with Edna. In the silence of the disappointment of a missed catch, it was then that Elise spoke the magic words. 'I think I got it all on video'.



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This revelation was of particular of interest to me, as we live at the Old Lodge Farm which is located in the ancient former deer park, known as the Great Park, which is equidistant between Brigstock and Geddington in the rural county of Northamptonshire.

The Great Lodge.

The site of this former hunting Lodge, located in the field next to our current house, was excavated in 1983. The lodge was a rectangular platform with some minor internal features surrounded by a prominent moat or ditch with external banking.

And this brings us on to the Hautvilles.

The Hautvilles family.

Falconers to the Royal Angviline dynasty (the name originates literally from 'Haut Villages' in northern France).

They are an intrinsic part of the history of English falconry throughout the 10th — 13th centuries. The Norman conquests brought them to England where they became part of the Royal establishment. As knights and through their associated 'Serjeanty obligations and duties', they formed a long lineage of royal falconers throughout the Angviline era and beyond. They originally came from Sicily where their lineage was of the house of Hautville, whose long ancestry provided many Falconers to the Royal court.

I can do no better than quote from Littleton on his observations on Serjeanty in:-

The history of English law (1895)

Serjeanty:-

'Is where a man holds his lands or tenements of our Sovereign lord the King by such services as he ought to do in his proper person to the King: as to carry the banner of the King, or his lance, or to lead his army, or to be his marshal, or to carry his sword before him at his Coronation, or to be his sewer at his Coronation, or his carver, or his butler, or to be one of his chamberlains of the receipt of his exchequer, or to do other like services, etc.

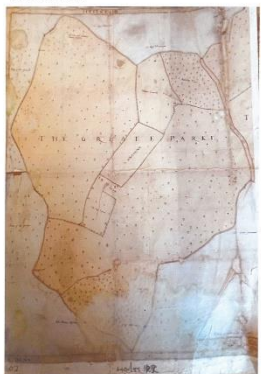
And the cause why this service is called Grand Serjeanty is:-

For that it is a greater and more worthy service than the service in the tenure of escuage. For he which holdeth by escuage is not limited by his tenure to do any more especial service then any other which holdeth by escuage ought to do: but he which holdeth by Grand Serjeanty ought to do some special service to the King, which he that holds by escuage ought not to do.

Serjeantes

'The class of whom these pages treat were those who held their lands 'by serjeanty' that is, by

The Great Park.



The first records of the Great Park are from approximately 1228. When it extended to 580 acres. Adjacent was the Little Park, which was in the dowry of Queen Philippa. The parks were both part of the Royal Forest of Rockingham. It was disparted by the Cecil family in 1602 after being gifted to the family by Queen Elizabeth I.

And then by chance, several months later, a local historian of note, (Burl Bellamy) was passing by. On observing the falcons weathering on the lawn, we became engaged in an amicable conversation which revealed that an archaeological excavation had been carried out next to the present day Old Lodge Farm (dated 1690) in the 1980s, this documented the presence of a much older hunting lodge on the site.

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the performance of some specified service, either at all times or in time of war. In that work which has superseded all that went before it.

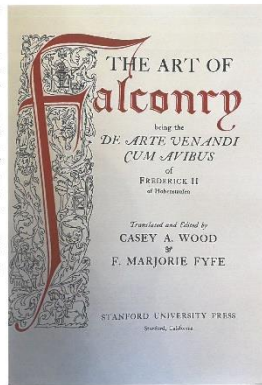
I speak of the history of English Law — its learned authors tell us that in the days of which they write, 'tenures are classified thus: — they are either free or not free; the free tenures are (1) frankalmoyn, (2) military service, (3) serjeanty, (4) free socage; in this order we will speak of them.' It is needful to insist on the position here assigned to serjeanty, because the misconception on the subject is widespread and of old standing. It was a persistent delusion that tenure of grand serjeanty was so noble as to rank above knight-service, and to include, even, all peerage dignities.

Serjeanty, on the contrary, was originally but one tenure; its division into 'grand' and 'petty' serjeanty was of subsequent introduction. All serjeanty ranked below knight-service (servitium militare) and above socage. There were certain rules by means of which tenure by serjeanty was kept apart from tenure by knight's service on the one hand and tenure by socage on the other, and even in the middle of the thirteenth century it still had an importance which is but faintly represented by the well known sections of Littleton's book. The Hautvilles family were engaged in many Serjeanties including providing falconry services to the King, this entailed managing the royal mews. They also had the authority to source and purchase falcons for the King. They were often sent to the ports of Kings Lynn & Yarmouth. These being the principle ports from which the trade in Gyrfalcons flowed. Here they would inspect and select the arriving falcons, mostly Gyr falcons from Norway and Iceland, at the Kings bequest.

For example, in 1223 or 1224 the old Norwegian King, Hakon IV, sent his emissaries to Henry III, King of England with 6 Gyrfalcons and the promise of more when his man next made the trip to England from Iceland.

The relevance to Brigstock is that Henry De Hautville was entrusted with the serjeanty of Brigstock manor while looking after the kings Gyrfalcons.

Another interesting and relevant connection is that Constance, Queen of Sicily of the house of Hauteville, was the mother of Frederick II of Hohenstaufen. Holy Roman Emperor and the author of 'De Arte Venandi cum Avibus'. Being one of the first



treatises on Falconry, and still venerated to this day by falconers.

There were further connections also between the royal household of Henry III and Frederick II. Henry III's sister Isabella, was married to Frederick II of Hohenstaufen in July 1235 at Worms cathedral in Germany. The wedding entourage included Henry de Hautville, one of the King's falconers. And, included as part of her dowry, was a gift of three Gyrfalcons, along with a substantial payment from an unpopular tax levied by Henry III to facilitate the marriage.

The Liberate rolls of Henry III

By researching the Calendar & Close rolls of Henry III at the national archives at Kew, and other sources, illuminating records of royal falconry expenditure were gleaned relating to the falcons and the royal mews at Brigstock & Geddington:

Henry III 1234-1237 (1235 p142)
Mandate of John de Neville in the park of Brigstock.
Henry de Hauville to have timber posts & ralfers for the King's hall at Brigstock.

Henry III 1234-1237 (1235 p446)
Mandate of Walter de Burgh permitting Henry de Hauville to use the King's house at Brigstock for the mewing of the King's hawk's.

Henry III 1237-1242 (1240 p186)
John de Neville (the King's forester) grants Walter de Burgh, timber from the park of Geddington for the repair of the royal mews at Geddington.

Henry III 1245-1251 (1248 p176-77)
The King's falcons which are in the keeping of Gilbert de Hauville to be mewed at Geddington and to find 1/2d daily for 3 Hawks to hunt Hares & Cranes.

Henry III 1245-1251 (1249 p146)
To find 1/2d daily for the 6 Gyrfalcons which are at Brigstock & 1/2d for their keeper.

Henry III 1245-1251 (1250 p281)
To admit 5 Gyrfalcons to Brigstock to be mewed and to find the necessaries for them & their keeper. To admit a Gyrfalcon & 2 Falcons gentle to Geddington to be mewed and to find the necessaries there for them and 3 Greyhounds & their keeper.

Henry III 1251-1260 (1253 p117)
A Gyrfalcon given to the King by Edward his son to be mewed with the 4 Gyrfalcons at Brigstock.

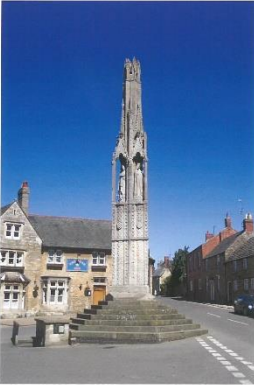
Henry III 1251-1260 (1256 p322)
Six of the King's falcons which are in mout in Geddington and for the Gyrfalcons which are in the keeping of Thomas de Hauville at Brigstock 1/2d daily.

Henry III 1245-1251 (1247 p114)
To repair the King's mews at his manor of Brigstock & to make new ones. Also to mew the King's Gyrfalcons.

Henry III 1245-1251 (1248 p219)
To the Sheriff of Nottingham
To cause 4 of the King's Heron falcons & 4 of Edward, the King's son, one in the keeping of Ralph de Earlharn (changed his name from Ralph de Hautville) to be mewed at Geddington. And to find the necessaries for 3 of the King's Greyhounds, and 3 of the said King's son at 1/2 d daily each.

The current conjecture being that the Angevine monarchy spent a significant amount of time at the royal manors of Brigstock & Geddington. (Parliaments were held at Geddington). Here they would have been training, hunting and flying their falcons in the Great park as well as hunting the resident deer. They would have presumably been dining and sheltering during inclement weather at the Great lodge in the field adjacent to the Old Lodge farm where we live.

Indeed Geddington marks the place where Edward I (son of Henry III) stayed with the funeral cortege of his beloved wife Eleanor, on the journey from Boston in Lincolnshire to Charing Cross in London. Geddington has a particularly fine example of one of the Eleanor crosses built to commemorate his beloved wife, Eleanor of Castile, Countess of Ponthieu.



Geddington Cross



Therefore, in conclusion, I am fortunate to have discovered these unique links between medieval falconry of this period and its salience with my own passion for falconry. To be able fly my falcons in the fields adjacent to essentially the bottom of our garden, where Kings have flown & hunted their hawks is a remarkable privilege and indeed a serendipitous coincidence!

Horace Tarquinius Davis

Old Lodge Farm

Brigstock



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