

# The World of Falconry

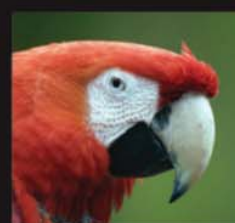
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# The World of Falconry

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April 2010



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## Editorial

What a fantastic response to Issue No 1 of **The World of Falconry**. We would sincerely like to thank all of those who took the trouble to contact us offering their congratulations and to express their satisfaction with the new publication. We would like to assure all our readers that we will endeavour to maintain the high standard we have achieved with this first issue.

May I just remind our readers that editorial contributions are always welcome, as are your comments and suggestions. If you have never considered contributing an article or falconry related photographs to a magazine before, then perhaps now is the time!

We hope to see as many of you as possible at the forthcoming British Falconry and Raptor Fair at Chetwynd Park, near Newport, Shropshire on Bank Holiday weekend (2nd and 3rd May). Please come along to our stand and say 'hello'.

I hope you enjoy this edition as much as you clearly enjoyed the first. Good hawking and reading to all,



The editor

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**Front Cover Photograph:** Bob Dalton

# British Falconry & Raptor Fair

This May Bank Holiday weekend of the 2nd and 3rd will see the 21st consecutive staging of the British Falconry and Raptor Fair, the most prestigious and charismatic event in the falconry calendar. Once again the beautiful backdrop supplied by Chetwynd Park, just outside Newport in Shropshire, will play host to the event and it is expected that falconers from all over the world will gather for this unique celebration of falconry and birds of prey.

The organisers of the Falconry Fair are proud to announce that the event has a new sponsor in the form of the well respected animal food company Kiezebrink UK Ltd. Products related to the company are well known not just to falconers but also to animal and bird owners throughout Europe. As a company Kiezebrink have long been exceedingly enthusiastic supporters of the Falconry Fair as well as donating generously to the campaign for falconry. The splendid company marquee will take pride of place at the event and friends new and old will be assured of a very warm and genuine welcome when they visit.

The organisers in the form of Ron and Cheryl Morris, along with their son Matt, have managed to put together an event this year which should prove to be highly entertaining and an experience not to be missed. A mixture of things old and new will be the order of the day when it comes to the main arena. The emphasis this year will be far more on falconry with the very best of what has gone before coupled with some new and exciting attractions. Jemima Parry-Jones will be giving two displays each day and her faultless performances will no doubt be accompanied by her usual entertaining, educational and highly amusing commentary.



Long time supporters and stalwarts of the Falconry Fair, the South East Falconry Group, will be back giving one of their highly polished and extremely svelte displays accompanied by an excellent commentary given by their chairman, Gary Biddis. The South East Group is an exceedingly active falconry club and always manages to represent themselves and the sport of falconry in an exemplary manner.

The Yorkshire Hawking Club will be new to the main arena this year and they will be giving a demonstration of simulated rabbit hawking which really is very good indeed. A great many falconers will easily identify with the display and should find it both entertaining as well as informative. The Yorkshire club, under the chairmanship of Dale Johnson, is



one that has grown very rapidly since its relatively recent inception.

Another newcomer to the main arena this year will be the very well respected falconer and dog trainer Allan Hender. A practical falconer

Andy Barfield things should run as smoothly as they have done for a great many years now and the organisers of the event would like to publicly thank the club for their continued support and unstinting help.



with a great many years experience in the field, Allan is also currently field secretary for the German Wire Haired Pointer Club of Great Britain. There will be two displays each day given by Allan and his team, one consisting of a practical demonstration of a dog and hawk working together and the other regarding the breeds suitable for falconry and their relative applications. This should prove to be a very good insight as to why even the humblest form of falconry, with just perhaps one or two exceptions, can benefit from the use of a well trained dog.

The weathering ground is always an area that attracts visitors in large numbers and as usual there will be an extremely varied static display of trained raptors on show. Putting on such a show and keeping a constant weather eye on it would not be possible without the help of a group of dedicated volunteers. This year will again see members of the Central Falconry and Raptor Group stepping forward to fill the breach. Under the all seeing eye of

Another new feature this year will be a totally separate weathering and club stand staged and managed by the relatively newly formed UK Eagle Falconry Association. This will be a static display of trained hunting eagles, manned by members of the group, allowing falconers and the public alike to see these magnificent hunters close up. Those falconers that are members of UKEFA, and who are on the stand for the duration of the event, fully understand and fly eagles as they should be flown and they will be on hand to answer questions if need be. This is an opportunity not to be missed.

As well as the main arena there will also be the ever popular mini arena where activities related to falconry will be taking place throughout the day. Basic sessions on hawk training, dog work, the use of ferrets, lure swinging are just a few of the topics that will be covered. Each session will be hosted by a relevant and well known expert in the particular field.

Falconry clubs will be well represented at the fair as usual and these will be made up of regional, national and international clubs. Clubs are a good source of knowledge for the beginner and can be an excellent social vehicle for all the membership. Most clubs put on field meets and some hold training sessions for those that are easing their way into the sport. I would recommend any falconer to join his or her regional club as well as a national club. By being a club member you will enjoy many benefits such as club insurance, meets, journals or newsletter etc. But you will also have on tap a wealth of knowledge from other members that have probably come across just about every problem imaginable in their time. Plus the stronger our clubs are in number the better voice we have when dealing with the authorities.

One of the things that helps the Falconry Fair to be somewhat special is the huge amount of trade stands relating directly to falconry equipment and just about anything to do with raptors in general. It is



possible to see nearly all the current purveyors of falconry equipment side by side, so enabling the falconer to make a direct comparison when it comes to price and quality. Hoods, gloves, bells and swivels will be on sale alongside those selling incubators, specialist vitamin supplements and raptor breeders.

Raptor and Falconry art, my own personal passion, will also be on display and those exhibiting are amongst the finest in the country. People such as Martyn Brook, Carl Bass and others of their ilk will be there, as well as sculptors and falconry orientated photographers. Steve Magennis is just such a photographer and his work always proves to be highly popular amongst falconers and raptor enthusiasts alike.



All in all the 21st British falconry and Raptor Fair is not to be missed by any genuine enthusiast and full details of the event, which runs from 10am till 6pm each day, can be obtained from the show office on 01588 672708 or from the web site [www.countryfairs.info](http://www.countryfairs.info).

As always car parking is free and admission for adults is still only £11. Children under the age of five are admitted free of charge.

It promises to be an excellent event, hope to see you there.

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# A Bat Falcon Experience

Adrian Reuter

11 am, 22°C and a light breeze blowing in a partially clouded sky. Almost out of sight, a tiny frantically flapping black spot cruises the sky covering the area at an amazing speed. After some 40 minutes on the wing, and playing with swifts as well as hunting butterflies and dragonflies, Geisha, the female bat falcon I had the pleasure to fly over several years, flies closer and lowers its pitch in a clear indication she wants me to call her down to the fist for a few minutes rest before the next flight of this training/conditioning session. After a few more flights, some of which end up in her bringing some Monarch butterflies or dragonflies to me so as to eat them on the fist, I let Geisha do some passes at the lure and grab it in mid air. The falcon looks evidently tired but quite proud of its performance, and eagerly eats the rest of its daily ration. The training session is over.

The bat falcon, *Falco rufigularis*, is a highly active, small, and

relatively common falcon distributed throughout the neotropics from Mexico southward throughout the lowland subtropical and tropical forests of Central America, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay, northern Argentina, Brazil and Trinidad. This highly dimorphic (males about 40% lighter than females) essentially resident bird has a very conspicuous whitish-rusty "throat", is blue-black above, with mostly black under parts very narrowly barred with whitish. The "lower belly, thighs and under tail coverts are rufous. (Cade, 1982; Peterson and Chaliff, 1973)

Bat falcons have never been commonly employed in the sport of falconry. Very few people have trained and flown these Neotropical falcons, and even fewer have kept and flown the same bird for more than a single season. Result of this is a lack of falconry related experiences with this specie, and consequently, in my opinion, the relatively few and different approaches and



attempts to use this beautiful little falcon for falconry should be considered as experiments.

Following is an account of some personal experiences and observations over several years of handling these birds. Most bat falcons can become quite tame and man down well in a relatively short time without





too much effort, but most of the bat falcons I've handled do not like or get used to being touched, and a note of caution to any potential handler might be in order so as to avoid any unnecessary and painful reminder of this by their extremely sharp and



powerful beak. Given the very active metabolism of the specie, the almost greedy appetite of these falcons is very useful during the early stages of the training process, when food rewards are constantly used and come in very handy.

Bat falcons can become very good to the hood, but I'd recommend to start hood training them early in the process. However, due to the small size of the bird and for safety reasons, I usually use a "giant hood" or transportation box. This also helps to keep the birds quite relaxed after flying them. It is not uncommon that the bird adopts the box as a refuge, a home away from home, and voluntarily flies or jumps into it once she is tired or fully fed. I always use Aylmeris with all my birds, with soft Kangaroo leather and #0 grommets (1/4 inch diameter opening) working fine for bat falcons.

During the early parts of the training, while manning the bird or still flying her on the creance, I normally use regular leather straps attached to a swivel and leash in a traditional fashion. However, when the time comes to fly the bird free I have found bullet-type jesses quite convenient,

given the restlessness of the falcon previous to the flights. The use of this type of jesses allows me to secure or release the bird very quickly avoiding any unnecessary bating.

Considering the size and strength

of the specie, a thin leather glove similar to what is used for merlins will suffice.

The tail of bat falcons is quite short and with these birds usually very reluctant to being touched, the use of tail mounted bells or transmitters can prove to be a hassle. My preference is to use one bell (smallest useful size possible) on one of the tarsi and the lightest transmitter I can find in the other.

Training of the bat falcon follows the same steps as that of any other falcon. One important consideration is to make sure that the lure being used is light and soft. Even though



the falcon will usually land on or beside the lure that is thrown to the ground on the initial stages of the process, it will be a matter of time before the falcon is stooping at an amazing speed to the swung lure hitting and grabbing it in mid air. The feet of bat falcons have very long and thin petty singles that can easily be hurt if they hit a hard lure. Bat falcon's anatomy resembles that of other fast falcons specialized on flying avian prey items, but this is an opportunistic species, naturally preying on insects and bats as well as birds. The nature of the specie does not make bat falcons particularly suited for falconry. Being a neotropical resident, they can be expected to perform best at very warm climates (approx. 22-32°C). Temperatures below that range generally result in the bird not wanting to fly at all, or circling close to the falconer and never attempting to climb up. From all the trained falcons I've seen, bat falcons are particularly affected by weather temperature. These little birds also have a high metabolism and a lot of care should be taken to control their weight and also to ensure that best quality food is offered to them while in captivity, that is small birds and quail.

Due to their extremely low wing load, bat falcons commonly look for thermals so as to climb up. They are

extremely fast birds and usually cover great distances and very large areas looking for a thermal. This, added to their small size, make it a common occurrence for the falconer to lose sight of the bird, which, on the wing and even at a short distance, due to its coloration can easily be confused with a swift.

Even though through a lot of effort bat falcons can be trained to wait on, my experience has been that they are quite impatient and won't keep the position for long, easily being distracted by butterflies or dragonflies, which constitute easy snacks to catch and eat on the wing. The only exception I've experienced was when, as an experiment, I flushed a mourning dove to Geisha, a large female bat falcon flying at 205g in her third year. She put in a nice stoop at the dove and chased it hard for a few hundred meters before abandoning the attempt. From that flight on, and for the rest of the 2 hours I flew her that day, she stayed in perfect position, exactly over my head at some 80 m height waiting for me to flush her more of these doves. I did find two more that day, which she eagerly stooped at, and tail chased, but completely ignored all other bird species I flushed for her. This behavior was repeated in a few other occasions afterwards, but she never actually hit a mourning dove. Unfortunately, I lost her shortly after. I'm quite certain though, that she would have eventually gotten the hang of this type of prey and would have been successful.

Without any doubt, bat falcons are one of the most beautiful falcon species in the world; they can become quite tame and properly trained are very responsive to the fist and lure. However, they tend to cover great distances and areas when looking for thermals and their performance can only be expected to be good in warm weather. These

falcons are highly specialized in flying prey, but are quite opportunistic, naturally hunting flying insects in significant numbers when flown. This is a major source of distraction when attempts are made to fly them from a waiting on position and also affects their appetite and responsiveness given that most of the insects are eaten on the wing. Even though one of my favorites, I personally do



not consider this species particularly suited for falconry and under no circumstances should be handled by inexperienced people due to its specific requirements as well as very small size and weight where even a minor mistake can be fatal.

**Adrian Reuter** has been a falconer for over 23 years and, as a raptor biologist and former professor of raptor biology, management and

conservation in Mexico's National University (UNAM); has been involved in diverse aspects of raptor research and conservation in Mexico and other countries. Currently, he is working as Mexico's representative of TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade-monitoring program of WWF and the IUCN.

#### **Editors footnote:**

I have enjoyed the pleasure of seeing Geisha fly on a number of occasions whilst visiting falconers, including Adrian, on my many travels to Mexico. I can honestly say I have never seen any falcon as fast in level flight as Geisha or stay on the wing for so long at any one time. Even when waiting on she would be constantly beating her wings hardly ever resting on an up draught. This particular falcon was never very tolerant of other raptors and would chivy Red Tailed and White Tailed Hawks if they intruded on what she considered her air space. She would dash across the sky to them as they soared around and then repeatedly put in short sharp stoops at them until they eventually drifted off.

This ultimately led to her undoing when she tried to do the same thing to a tiercel *Anatum peregrine*. The two falcons rose higher and higher into a clear blue sky and Geisha was never seen again. Her telemetry transmitter stopped working some forty minutes after she disappeared from sight.

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# Complementary Therapy in Croatia

Melinda Terleske

Perhaps I should introduce myself first. I am a registered nurse with an exploring mind and on the constant

encounters with the locals. Within this tiny Centre they have managed to build a surgery and small selec-

ing the war. It also has the voluntary service of two vets who are keen to develop the service further amongst the Croatian wild life services.



I consider that I have always had a healthy scepticism regarding anything other than the conventional and look carefully at what alternative treatments might be available to aid the well being or facilitate health and happiness in any creature's existence. It was to this end that over 12 years ago I took up the mantle of Healer - initially working with people and subsequently formally working with animals as well. The pathway towards Healing was not an easy one as I constantly questioned not only my doubts about its efficacy but whether as a born sceptic, I was truly cut out to work as one. Much of the work involved 'hopeless cases' - the ones where conventional medicine had done all it could and it would seem that there was now only one route - euthanasia. Nothing in life is immortal and Healing doesn't always give the outcome the individual or animal owner is seeking but I would like to think that if nothing else the

look-out for ways to improve the lot of the less advantaged and suffering whether they be human, furred, feathered or covered in scales. It is with this in mind that I took up the challenge to help in whatever way I could when I was invited to visit the only Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre in Croatia. Located in a beautiful and relatively remote place at the foot of the mountains a little way inland from the Dalmation coast, the Rehab Centre is the inspiration of a Croatian couple, Emilio Mendusic and his wife Alemka Skugor. They have been supported over the past few years by a former associate of our UK Falconry world, Biff Norman who lives on site with a selection of her own birds that she drove across Europe with in her ageing pickup truck. This lady certainly knows all about adventure and she enthralled me with her numerous tales of her travels around Croatia and her

tion of mews and aviaries with plans for the future to develop further on a much larger scale. The surgery itself is very impressive - being equipped to the highest standard with equipment bought from hospitals undergoing refurbishment programmes follow-





work I have done has facilitated a Peace of mind and eased the passing (or death from this life as we know it) of each one. There are, however, many exceptional cases where for reasons I cannot explain, strange and wonderful things have occurred - a healthy state has been re-instated and many years of pleasurable life continued.

My initial introduction last year with Biff was via the most modern forms of communication - the internet. She had 'retired' to Croatia following a lifetime working with numerous species of Raptors to assist in the development of A Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre in the mountains behind the well known tourist destination of Sibenik, focussing mainly on the indigenous Raptors of that previously war torn country. We corresponded frequently via the written word and discussed suitable alternative treatments for the physically and

emotionally traumatised birds that found their way into the care of the Centre.

As a relative newcomer to the falconry world I was in awe of this lovely lady who had so much experience and knowledge to offer and grabbed the opportunity to meet up with her on one of her fleeting trips back to the UK last June. We met in a pub car park (of course - isn't that where all prospective friendships start?)

and I had no idea who I should be looking out for. I arrived and instantly took a liking to a lady waiting by her car, knowing instinctively that this was Biff. I hope she would agree that we immediately connected and forged what I hope will be a life-long friendship. Time was not on our side that day as she had to rush back to the airport and I had to get to work that evening. We very briefly chatted about our backgrounds - hers



as a qualified chemist and interest in all pharmaceuticals and mine as a nurse and Healer who liked to explore and research any complimentary treatments available. It was on the back of this meeting I was invited to go out to Croatia, to see what work was going on out there and to see if I could help one of their more seriously ill birds - a Peregrine who was called Mazie - with bilateral bumble foot.

The main purpose of my trips last October and again in December was to work as a Healer, using whatever remedies Biff and I mutually agreed might also benefit. Healing has many misconceptions and I appreciate that too many people have mystified its purpose over the years. Let me explain my take on it. Firstly, I am nothing special and in fact we all possess the ability to channel healing energy but our frenetic lives in the 21st century have far re-



moved us from what our forebears possessed and understood.

Healing is a process whereby a Healer channels a corrective energy force derived from a divine origin. It is considered to be one of the oldest recognised natural therapies and the

evidence for the 'laying on of hands' for healing and pain relief purposes has been found documented in ancient papyrus from Egypt dating back to 1550 BC. It was practised by the Ancient Greeks including Pythagoras to treat medical con-



ditions. Hippocrates recorded its benefits and observed the relief of symptoms after its application. He concluded that healing energy is a vital force of life and this theory continues to be researched today.

The theories for its therapeutic benefits are based on the imbalances of positive and negative energy forces, whereby applying healing energy redresses any imbalance causing illness and disease.

All animals respond very well to Healing. They do not have the preconceived ideas and expectations of humans and tend to relax quickly, facilitating the flow of this vital force energy. Indeed, many animals are Healers in their own right as is proved by many of the schemes that involve taking animals into establishments such as nursing homes and residential sites for the mentally or physically ill.

The opportunity to touch and stroke such an animal provides far more positive response and sensation of well-being than any prescribed medication can offer.

Before I left the UK, I gathered together a collection of potentially useful remedies. Biff and I had discussed what might be the most useful. She had already been using Hypericum with some effect but we both felt that we needed to try a more aggressive approach as the bumble foot had regressed so far and progress had since slowed down. To this end, I took with me

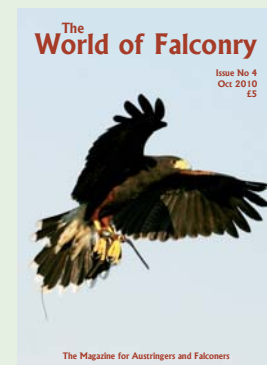
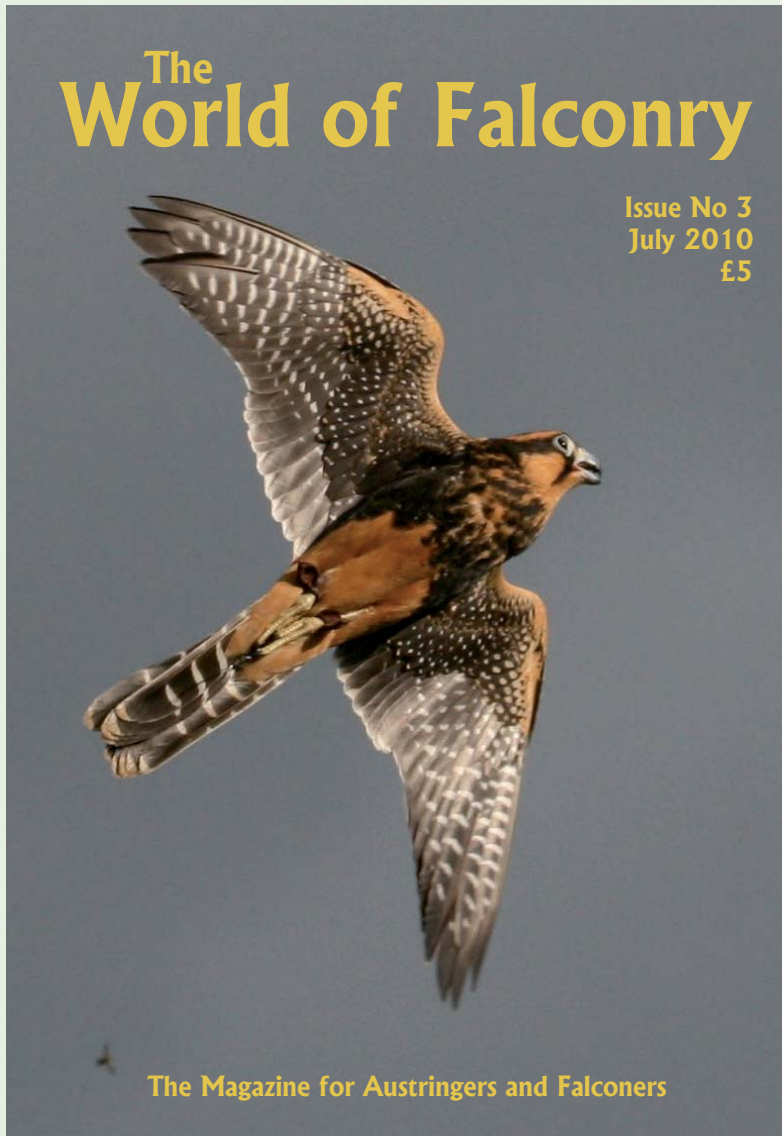


a further supply of Hypericum in various preparations, Calendula - again in various forms, Rhus Tox (for arthritic pain), and a generous supply of Leucaspray (available from Gea Vet - Falconry Vitamins) and containing a mixture of anti bacterial, anti viral and anti fungal agents. The plan was to use this spray liberally over the Peregrines feet to prevent further infection as she was prone to lying down in her mutes. It seemed kinder to spray liberally with this rather than constantly bathe her feet with water, which not only seemed to affect the integrity of the healing skin but also she found particularly un-

comfortable. I should add here that on no occasion do I undertake any complimentary healing treatment without the full knowledge and consent of both owner and veterinary surgeon. It would seem that they had now run out of all options and were happy for anything to be tried if it might afford some relief.

*to be continued/...*

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# Hawking & Hospitality - Texan Style

Bob Dalton



*Mike Wiegel*

Graham and was very eager to take it up. I had been hawking in Texas the previous year, in and around the Houston area, and had made contact with several falconers originally through the good offices of John Graham. The falconers I was fortunate enough to meet on that trip, Chuck Redding, Mike Wiegel and Jim Ince all went out of their way to ensure I saw some good hawking and made a considerable effort to make myself and my companions feel welcome. In the e-mails that flowed back and forth since my initial visit it was suggested many times that if at all possible I should return for the Abilene field meet. Through their services John Graham got in touch and January saw me once again taking part in the long flight to Houston.

I wanted to see some other hawking beside the official meet and also visit the Attwater Prairie Chicken reserve on this trip and accordingly arrived in the States some five days before the official start of the meet. The reserve

The Texas Hawking Association held its 29th annual field meet from January 15th through to the 18th based in Abilene and the surrounding area. The meet was something of a special one in that it marked the 40th year of the THA and quite a number of the fifteen original members were present at the event. The official meet was just three days but a number of falconers had gathered a few days before hand and some were staying for a day or two after the event to get some hawking in.

I was fortunate enough to receive an invitation to the meet from the president of the association John



*Tariq*



Tariq

at Attwater is an absolute haven for birds of prey and on my last visit I saw ten different species of raptor in one day, never saw even hide or hair of a Prairie Chicken though.

My first two days back in Houston were spent hawking with Mike Wiegel who is currently flying a superb parent reared Barbary Tiercel of the year. It is a stunning looking falcon with a particularly light coloured head for such a young falcon. Tariq, as the tiercel is known, has a number of kills to his credit although he is still very much on a learning curve. His principal quarry is Morning and Collared Doves with a smattering of Sparrows and Blackbirds making up the numbers. The manner in which the tiercel is flown is that Mike scans a promising looking area with binoculars. If Doves are present then the tiercel is unhooded and allowed to take to the air when he really is good and ready. There is never any suggestion that he should leave the fist hurriedly. On being unhooded the tiercel normally has

a good look round, a mute, a rouse another look round then leisurely flies off to the nearest telephone pole where the whole process is slowly but surely repeated. Mike has learned that if you rush the Barbary he does not fly well but if left to his own devices once he does eventually take to the air it is with a sense of purpose and he is happy to be on the wing for a considerable length of time.

On my first day hawking with Mike and Tariq I patiently waited whilst the tiercel performed his ritual and whilst waiting Mike and I did our best to accurately mark down some doves that would give the tiercel a decent chance of success. Eventually the falcon took to the air with a very positive wing beat and started to mount as he circled us. Unfortunately he wandered quite wide as he mounted and a number of the doves we had so carefully selected took the opportunity to fly off with absolute impunity. This movement focused the Barbary on us and he made his

way back overhead and circled us in a far better position for any flush we could manage. Before we could a group of small birds, too quick and fast moving to be identified but probably Sparrows, took to the wing and crossed a small strip of open ground between two patches of quite dense cover. The Barbary turned over and stooped immediately and was oh so very close to catching one. The throw up was superb and at its apex he turned over and went for a Meadow Lark that was also trying to make good its escape. Again the little tiercel was just inches away from success, but a miss is as good as a mile they say.

The following day we all went to some different Sorghum fields that are known to normally hold quite large flocks of Blackbirds, as well as Doves and Meadow Larks. Tariq was allowed to take to the wing in his own time and went off half a mile or so and sat in a tree. After what seemed an absolute age, but in all probability was only four or five minutes, the Barbary completed his morning ablutions and took to the air. No sooner had he done so that an adult male American Kestrel came over to investigate and soon the two were engaged in an exceedingly deadly game of tag. The Barbary was very





*Steve Boydd with Mapache*

serious about wanting to kill the Kestrel and the little falcon had to, quite literally, fly for its life. The display of flying for us mere mortals on the ground was absolutely superb and showed just how supremely fit and agile the Barbary and Kestrel were. On four separate occasions the Barbary managed to get the upper hand with the Kestrel and put in short stoops at it, which most certainly were not play and really were meant to deliver the killer blow. Four times the Kestrel managed somehow to avoid the unwanted attentions of its larger cousin and eventually made the safety of a belt of trees.

Having finished the aerial battle with the Kestrel the Barbary then decided to get back to work, remounted and came back overhead looking to be served. The Doves and Blackbirds in the field had taken advantage of the dog fight situation and moved on during its occurrence. We managed to flush a meadow Lark which bailed out as the Barbary closed on from an almost vertical stoop. So we drew a blank on the mornings hawking but had seen some incredible flying.

The next couple of days were spent slowly drifting from Houston to Abilene, via the back roads as opposed to the interstate, and vis-

iting the Attwater Prairie Chicken reserve on the way. As much as I like Prairie Chickens the reason for the visit to the reserve was not to see them but the wide and abundant range of birds of prey that also live there. These range from Bald Eagle and Cooper's Hawks through to Caracaras and Harriers. Particularly strong in numbers on the reserve are White Tailed Hawks and Red Shouldered Hawks. Whilst the use of Red Tailed hawks is very wide spread in North American falconry I know of no one using White Tailed Hawks for the sport. Yet in Central and South America they are quite commonly used and the ones I have seen flown have certainly impressed me. About the same size and weight as a Red Tail the adult White Tailed Hawk is a stunningly beautiful hawk and must have a serious potential as a hunting hawk suitable for falconry.

Anyone who has ever driven any distance in North America will be only too aware that it is possible to see very large numbers of raptors on any journey of any significant length. Telegraph poles and pylons are amongst the favourite perches for a great many wild raptors and have the added benefit of making them easy to spot for us humans. As with all raptor watching it does pay to look carefully at a large raptor sitting on top of a pole and not just assume it is the ubiquitous Red Tailed hawk. Red Shouldered Hawks, Swainsons and White Tailed Hawks can quite freely be seen particularly in the Southern States. In fact whilst driving from Houston to Attwater my travelling companion and I enjoyed a particularly satisfying hawk moment.

We had spotted a Black Vulture on a telegraph pole but rather unusually it was lying down. We pulled over on the opposite side of the road and thrust the camera out of the window to get a photograph. As I focused on the Vulture my friend said there was

a Harris Hawk in the tree just behind it. I took some shots of the Vulture and then swung the camera onto the tree where the lens was immediately filled with a Red Tailed Hawk. I was just about to comment on this when the Red Tail bobbed its head and called and I moved my lens slightly and then had it filled with two Caracaras. I took the camera away from my eye and saw there was also an adult female Harris Hawk sitting right in the crown of the tree. Five birds of prey, four different species, all within twenty feet of each other, amazing.

A little later on that same day we pulled off the road to park beside a lake to enjoy a salad lunch we had purchased earlier from a super-market. As we sat there eating and enjoying watching Coots and White Herons going about their business on the water's edge a movement slightly to one side of my vision caught my eye. Less than thirty feet from our vehicle a pair of Red Shouldered Hawks were indulging in some mutual preening. They



*Jack Brady with Maverick*

seemed almost oblivious to us and carried on as I lowered the window and took some photographs. Unfortunately I only had the standard lens fitted and as I moved to get the telephoto one from the back seat the hawks became aware of our presence and departed rapidly.

Once we finally reached the Attwater reserve we were certainly

not disappointed and saw many birds of prey. American kestrels and Caracaras were there in abundance and we actually saw a Bald Eagle land on fallen tree with a fish in its talons which it then proceeded to eat. The whole time that the Eagle was leisurely consuming its meal it had the constant attention of five Caracaras focused on it, not that it





Jerkin

paid them any attention at all. We witnessed an adult female Coopers Hawk attack a small group of ducks on a pond and saw several Marsh Harriers in both mature and immature plumage. The two undoubted highlights of the visit were when two immature White Tailed Hawks had an aerial squabble that brought them within twenty feet of us. They were so intent on getting rid of each other that they totally failed to notice us. The other was when five Bald Eagles put on a superb flying display for us as four mature males did their very best to impress a solitary female.

The following day we continued

our leisurely journey and eventually arrived at the meet hotel in Abilene by mid afternoon, just in time to meet up with a group of falconers returning from a day's hawking. Quite a number of falconers had arrived a few days early to get some hawking in and turn the meeting into a weeklong event. Amongst them was a falconer and game hawk I have known for a great many years, Ed Pitcher. Undoubtedly one of the most respected longwingers in the States, Ed always breeds and flies stunningly good falcons. But unfortunately he had just suffered a tragedy in that his eyass tiercel Cassini Peregrine

had been grabbed by a wild Red Tail whilst on the ground with his kill a couple of days previously and had died that morning as a result of his wounds. Although Ed had two more falcons with him he had decided to just spectate for the next few days which was a perfectly understandable reaction to the tragedy. It was good to see him again however and we spent an hour or so going over old times and discussing both our new books that had recently been published.

As we stood talking other falconers were arriving and I eventually got to meet the president of the Texas Hawking Association, John Graham, face to face. He and his delightful wife went out of their way to make us welcome and introduce us to the other falconers. I have to say I have been fortunate enough to attend a great number of falconry meetings around the world but none have ever made me feel as genuinely welcome as the Texans did. Before this meet even got under way properly I had made up my mind to attend the next one the following year. All those attending the meet that were present on the first night went out to dinner together and we more or less took over a local steak house for the evening. The food was excellent as was the company. Joining us part way through the dinner was Kent Carnie the Emeritus Curator of the Archives of Falconry, which is based in Boise, Idaho. Kent probably knows more about the history of modern falconry than any other living soul. Any conversation with him is always absolutely fascinating and totally absorbing.

The following morning saw the meet proper begin and a group of falconers flying ducks with falcons very kindly invited us to join them. The party would consist of one Jerkin, one Gyr/Prairie hybrid falcon and a Gyr/Peales Peregrine hybrid

tiercel. Three anatum Peregrines, two falcons and a tiercel and last but no means least a hacked Peales Peregrine Falcon. The falconers were Jim Robinson, Steve Boyd, Jack Brady and Jeremy Kessler. With me and a couple of other spectators thrown in we made quite a sizeable party. Despite everyone being loaded up and ready to go out hawking at eight am sharp the weather had decided it was going to do its best to delay us. For once bright and sunny Texas was anything but and a heavy mist hung in the air reducing visibility to a point where flying longwings was out of the question. The forecast was that the mist would gradually lift and that by mid morning it would be more or less gone.

It was decided to head out in the direction of the flying ground and then stop and have some coffee and wait there for the weather to clear, so that once it did we could get straight on with hawking. Very good plan except that the mist didn't co-operate and it thinned in some places and thickened in others. After a great deal of deliberation it was decided to start checking out duck ponds and see how the mist affected them individually. The first couple we checked were shrouded in heavy mist but the next one was certainly flyable. Steve Boyd elected to fly first and readied "Mapache" an intermewed female Gyr/Prairie hybrid. This falcon knew exactly what to do and on leaving the fist flew off downwind and quickly made some height. When she had taken her pitch she came back overhead and the ducks were flushed. The falcon put in a long shallow stoop and bound to one of the leading group of ducks to leave the water. Not an overly stylish fight but certainly a very effective one. The ducks on the pond had been a mixture of Gadwall and Teal and it was the former that "Mapache" happily sat astride when we reached her.

Next up was Jeremy Kessler with his Gyr/Peales hybrid tiercel "Chester". The hawk was still learning his craft and had developed a habit of sitting. Jeremy informed us that when he did so the best thing is to ignore him and even walk away from him. Obviously if you called him to the lure to get him to move you are simply rewarding him for sitting down. So the thing to do was to make the falcon think you were leaving him and accordingly his food source was also leaving. It certainly worked. After sitting briefly a couple of times "Chester" switched into serious mode and mounted over the pond. He didn't take a very high

pitch but then he is still a youngster and very much a tyro. When he was in a suitable position the ducks were flushed and the tiercel rolled over and cut down a Teal as easy as rolling off a log.

In between bouts of heavy mist we managed to get four more flights in during the course of the morning. Jack Brady flew his five times intermewed hacked Peales Peregrine "Holly" twice and "Maverick" a five year old anatum tiercel once. All three flights were successful and added three more Teal to our morning's total. One other tiercel was put on the wing when we had spotted a



group of Gadwall on a pond but as the tiercel started to mount the mist descended and he had to be called back down quickly to the lure before being swallowed up by the conditions.

The Jerkin that was in the party had been flown mainly at Sage Grouse back in his home state of Montana and was a particularly high mounting falcon. It was felt that to put such a falcon on the wing in the conditions we were experiencing was nothing

ing was a fresh casting. So fresh in fact that it was still glistening with moisture. Breaking it open we found the lower beak of the Harrier.

At the end of our hawking session it was time to return to the meet hotel, get changed and grab some dinner so as to be in time for the guest speaker that had been laid on for the evening. This was to be Dave Stevens, one of North America's foremost eagle falconers, and Dave specialises in flying passage male Golden

appreciative audience.

The following day saw a complete change of hawking style and venue with me making two trips out with falconers that were flying Red Tailed Hawks in Pecan groves where the quarry was squirrels. The morning session was to be in the company of Manny Carrasco who has made something of a speciality of hunting squirrels over the past few years. Manny, who hails from Austin Texas, was flying his seven year old



**Steve Boydd with Daisy**

short of fool hardiness. Accordingly the Jerkin was not flown and the weather robbed us of the opportunity to see a really fine game hawk do its thing.

One interesting discovery we made when out hawking were the relatively fresh remains of an immature Marsh Harrier, which had obviously been eaten by another bird of prey. As we scouted round looking for clues we disturbed a female Great Horned Owl and where she had been roost-

Eagles at Jack Rabbits. Even though Eagles are not what fires my personal passion when it comes to falconry I have to admire those that fly them well and Dave is without doubt a man who brings the best out in his eagles. The talk was highly informative as well as being extremely entertaining. As seems to be the way with many American speakers Dave employed an easy going no nonsense style and the talk went down very well with an informed and

passage female Red Tail "Dakota". I have never seen this style of hawking before and have to admit that back home in England do my very best to avoid squirrels when out hawking with my female Harris Hawk. I have known of too many hawks that have suffered bad bites from these arboreal rodents ending up with the hawk losing the use of or even losing a toe itself as a result. The area we would be hunting did not contain Grey Squirrels but the rather attrac-

tive looking Fox Squirrel. Manny informed me that this particular species can grow quite large and indeed he had a stuffed one at home that one of his hawks had caught and it weighed almost two pounds when taken.

I have to say I thoroughly enjoyed the mornings sport and, although I have absolutely no desire what so ever to do it myself, I found it good fun and at times extremely exhilarat

once found and to try and prevent them crossing open ground for the safety of another batch of trees. I had never realised that hunting such a humble adversary could be turned into such an art form. Manny had a specially adapted hawking vest and tool belt to hold his myriad hawking accessories. These include squirrel calls of every type and description as well as a catapult and a bag of marbles to aid with persuading squir-

the hawk off of its stride momentarily and this was all the chance the squirrel needed to make good its escape.

The next chase didn't end quite so well for the squirrel. It tried the same tactics when under severe pressure and leapt from the tree and tried to make it across open ground to another group of trees. But the reactions of the Red Tail were far too quick and the hawk had the squirrel in her feet before it had covered forty

**The Old Guard:**  
**Bob Dalton**  
**Diana Durman-Walters**  
**Kent Carnie**  
**Jim Ince**



ing. There are little pockets of explosive action when the hawk is in hot pursuit and then things quieten down again until another squirrel is found then for a couple of minutes all hell lets loose again. It was interesting to note that the hawk thoroughly knew its part in the proceedings and would deliberately fly to any structure that resembled a dray and pull them apart looking for squirrels.

Manny was accompanied by TJ a Yorkshire terrier whose job it was to help keep the squirrels on the move

rels to move when found. The first chase saw the squirrel and hawk do battle through five trees before the squirrel decided to get down to the ground and make a dash for another clump of trees no too far away. As the squirrel hit the ground the hawk was out of the trees and after it instantly. Unfortunately Manny decided to jump into the path of the oncoming hawk at precisely the wrong moment and received a very healthy clout round the head from a somewhat ticked off Red Tailed Hawk. This incident put

feet. This particular hawk has killed, quite literally, hundreds of squirrels and as we got to her in what could only have been a matter of seconds she had already despatched her quarry.

In the afternoon it was time to go out with my good friend Chuck Redding from Houston who would be pursuing squirrels with his five year old male Red Tailed Hawk "Cisco". This particular hawk is a real all rounder and I have been lucky enough to see it catch rats, cotton tail rabbits, swamp





rabbits and pursue squirrels with vigour, but not as of yet actually catch one. A small party of us worked the Pecan groves that afternoon but except for one fleeting glimpse of a

tail disappearing into a hole we did not see squirrels. Accordingly we drew a complete blank and had to head off long before sunset as the meet was holding its official banquet

that evening and Kent Carnie was to be the key note speaker.

The evening gathering was a very pleasant and extremely sociable





*Manny Carrasco with Dakota*

affair and once official club business was out of the way it was time for Kent to give club members a fascinating talk relating directly to the history and growth of the Texas Hawking Association. Kent was one of the original founding members of the organisation and was called upon by the federal government at that time to help draft the original legislation controlling falconry in Texas. Without the work of such stalwarts as Kent, American Falconry would not be in the extremely healthy shape that it is today. When the talk was finished Kent, quite rightly, received a standing ovation which lasted several minutes. It was very evident that the man is held in very high esteem by falconers of all generations.

Following the talk was a raffle with more than one hundred prizes; it really did seem to go forever. But with the first prize being a brand new telemetry set ticket sales had been extremely brisk.

The following morning saw us out with a falconer who was flying a cast of male Harris Hawks but unfortunately we did not come across anything for them to chase. The afternoon saw another foray to the Pecan groves with a Red Tail but this time the hawk was an eighteen year old female called "Mariah" and was being flown by veteran falconer Laura Culley. Squirrels were once

again thin on the ground or in our case thin in the trees, and despite several near misses we failed to actually put one in the bag. But the flying was good and both the sport and company were most certainly enjoyable.

That evening saw the final get together of participating falconers and spectators over one last meal together and then goodbyes were



*Laura Culley*



made and promises to keep in touch liberally spread around. Since returning to England I have been in contact with a great many of the falconers I was fortunate enough to meet and will most certainly be attending next year's gathering. I would unreservedly recommend anyone who enjoys falconry to attend this meet. No matter how hard I try I cannot ever remember so many people taking so much trouble to ensure that visitors were made to feel welcome and that they received every possible opportunity to enjoy themselves. There are a great many clubs and meets that could learn a lot from the warm and generous Texas Hawking Association.





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# Problem Hawk ... Not a Problem!

The Apprentice

As a falconer, or at least an apprentice to the sport, it is inevitable that one will run into fellow falconers on the road to achieving those perfect flights that we all aspire to. As with any sport, the participants, in this case falconers and austringers, tend to be passionate to the point of being obsessed and undoubtedly conver

this question, had a very disappointing response on more than one or two occasions...in fact it occurs with sickening regularity. It's that brief moment when you've asked that all-important question - your subject rolls his eyes, shrugs and then replies 'Only a Harris Hawk.' Only a Harris Hawk? Following this all too

anyone who responds to such a question in this way ought to seriously reconsider his or her choice of sport. I believe this all too common statement arises from the fact that people simply regard the Harris Hawk, due to their alleged simplicity to train, as a stepping-stone into the world of falconry. Is it perhaps time we



sation will quickly be fired up on the subject. It is the usual custom to ascertain firstly if your newfound companion is a falconer or an austringer. After this the conversation usually swings in the direction of what hawk you both fly. Of course, this is of great interest to any falconer and great pleasure can be taken in finding out what sport others favour and with what charge they achieve this. Unfortunately, I have upon asking

common statement I am left feeling totally and completely nonplussed and wondering if it's really as bad as they make it sound? It's said with such disdain and displeasure that it leads me to think that these people truly believe there's something fundamentally wrong with flying a Harris! Is there?

Is it some big secret in falconry circles that I've not been let in on yet? In my humble opinion,

admitted that we're seeing them in the wrong light and hence overlooking their true potential? Have we thus far been mistaking their unique adaptability as an easy ride and stopping short of the mark with them? Perhaps we should all take a minute or so to review the Harris Hawk, stop trying to make them into something else and realise that they are, in fact, superb at what they do, just the way they are. It is down to us to bring out



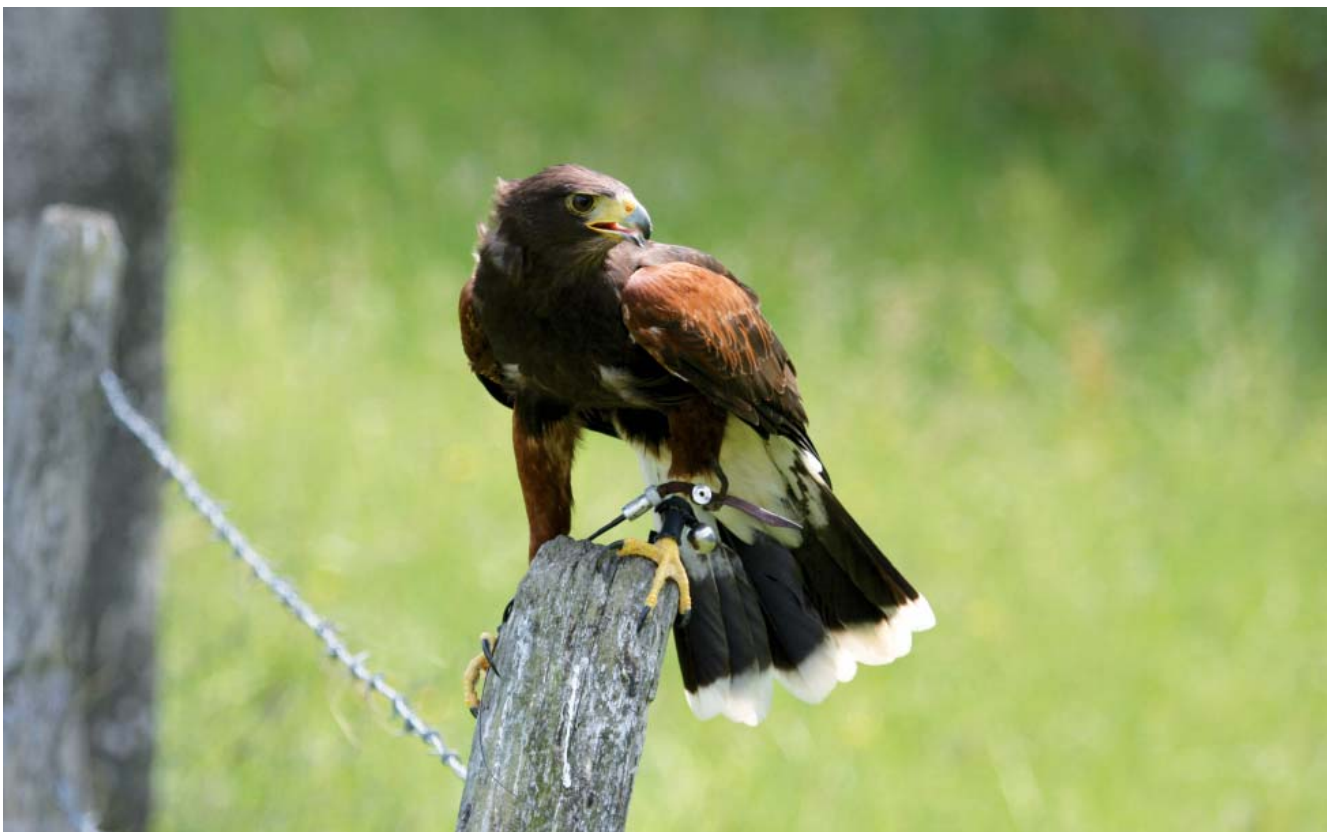
*Louise Boyer with Jameson*

the full potential of those that are kept in captivity and this in itself can present challenge upon challenge and hence shine light on a sport that can take a lifetime to master.

It almost goes without saying that the best way of getting your hawk to reach its full potential and capability

is to understand its natural behaviours. I, myself, have not yet had the opportunity to observe Harris Hawks in their native state, but I have been lucky enough to be taught by someone who has and his first hand accounts have proven a valuable learning tool, as have his books and

articles. This is especially so since I have been training my own hawk, a 5-6 year old male that now flies well at 11lb 5 ½ oz. It's not always been plain sailing though. My hawk comes with a somewhat sad story, as he was a 'rescue', confiscated from his previous owner along with around 30



other birds of prey following a period of mistreatment. He was then passed onto Jemima Parry-Jones. Though I wasn't really in the market for a hawk he was brought to my attention during a visit to her Bird of Prey Centre in Newent. Jemima explained his story and told us that he needed a new home due to some rather undesirable behavioural problems he'd developed that needed some long term one-to-one attention, rather than a quick fix. To cut a long story short, as it was breeding season meaning that Jemima and her team were run off their feet, I decided that I'd take him on - I didn't have any other hawks at the time and felt I could really put in the time with him to make a difference and give him some sort of life again.

In writing this I hope to give anyone reading it some insight into how I managed to overcome certain obstacles and how to understand certain behavioural patterns - I make no claim to this being the only way to do things, but hopefully it may prove useful to some of you and allow you to avoid major problems that may prevent you from progressing in your falconry adventures.

My male Harris, affectionately known as Jameson, really is a very pleasant hawk. He has accepted his travel box from the offing and actually travels beautifully. His temperament is lovely and he genuinely seems glad to be in the company of people, but other parts of his demeanour have been verging on nightmarish, as I soon discovered after I brought him home! His one huge flaw was his constant bating off of the glove. There's no simple way of getting over this, especially when a hawk has retained these sorts of habits for such a prolonged period of time. First port of call was to get him used to me. Being a friendly hawk this took practically no time at all and within a day or so he was stepping up to the glove



happily enough. When training a hawk it's all about tactics. You have to stay within positive boundaries, meaning that every move you make with them has to be a positive one. Any negativity can ruin your chances of having a nicely mannered hawk for some considerable time to come, in extreme cases maybe even forever. Of course, in terms of training having a greedy hawk is far better than having a picky one. In Jameson's case as long as he has food then nothing else matters. During the process of manning I noticed very early on that the bating only really became a problem when I walked anywhere with him. I have no idea why or how

he'd started doing this, but my intention was to hunt him, to give him the chance to actually be a proper hawk, so knew that if we were ever going to master the element of surprise we'd have to address this issue as soon as possible.

I found that tiring in the form of quail wings helped no end with achieving the desired effects. If used before the hawk has been given his daily ration of food then he will spend a long time picking at it on the glove to get the few morsels of meat that sit around the bone. It keeps the hawks' interest for a prolonged period of time and if they finish one off then another can be offered, as

the amount of meat that can be taken from a quail wing is nowhere near enough to ruin a hawk's appetite. I found that after only a few days of repeating this exercise my hawk's behaviour improved greatly. Saying this we all have to remember that birds of prey are all individuals and the time it takes for the effects of this process to become notable will vary accordingly, so be patient. Tiring is also a good thing to consider even when

the hawk isn't being trained or flown. For Harris Hawks, due to their sheer intelligence, it's an especially good idea to offer them as it will keep them occupied for a larger amount of time than their normal food rations will, hence helping to prevent behaviours such as aggression, which often comes as a side effect of boredom.

The next stage of training, once the hawk will jump leash length to the glove for a piece of food without

hesitation is to increase the distance he must come for his reward. To do this a suitable piece of land is needed, away from main roads, housing estates, railway lines and anywhere where a dog may be turned out loose for a run. A creance, which, for those who are just starting out, is a specialised safety line with a suitable breaking strain is used when first training a hawk. Hopefully it will help to avoid situations where you expect him to land on your glove but end up watching in dismay as he flies away to the horizon in totally the opposite direction! These can be purchased for a few pounds from any reputable seller of falconry equipment and are worth their weight in gold. Again the time it takes a hawk to come instantly over greater and greater distances will vary according to the individual, though it seems to take youngsters more time to find their confidence. With Jameson being mature already he responded well and after the first two or three days he was coming to the glove pretty much instantly. It's important not to expect too much from a hawk too soon and, as always, patience pays dividends. Start off with a hop to the glove from the T-perch and then increase the distance by a few feet each time. I always use a quick whistle so that the hawk may have something to associate being fed with, very much like Pavlov's Dogs. Before long the hawk should be flying backwards and forwards like a rocket.



*to be continued/...*



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# Xena the Lanner Falcon

Dale Fairbrass



This article is a tribute to, and a celebration of, a wonderful Lanner Falcon called Xena who enriched my life and those of many others for a decade. After many happy and glorious seasons hawking together, Xena unfortunately passed away on the 21st March 2009. To say that her death came as a shock would be something of an understatement.

After eight glorious and not so glorious seasons hawking together I wanted to see if I could get daughter of Xena and accordingly from May 2008 she had been placed in a breeding chamber with a suitable male. It was my own personal dream to breed some eyass Lanners from Xena and her partner. She was an exceptional rook hawk, which is to say the least somewhat unusual for a lanner. My hope was to breed a Lanner Falcon and see if we could train another one to be as equally as

good as Xena. It would have been so interesting to see if Xena's genes could produce another falcon capable of taking rook.

From May until Christmas 2008 Xena and her chosen partner sat at opposite ends of their aviary and pretty much ignored each other. By mid February 2009 I had witnessed them sitting together more with the male

chupping and bowing. I guessed things were starting to develop and when I glanced at the camera in early March 2009. I witnessed the male feeding her and I really thought we had game on. This was my first attempt at breeding falcons, so I do not pretend to be an expert. I just set them up in a suitable aviary, and allowed nature to take its course.



My camera on the nest ledge was slightly out of position, and for around a week before the 21st March I could just see Xena's tail, with the falcon herself only moving occasionally. She appeared to be sitting tight and things were generally looking good. Then on the run up to that tragic day I had not seen her all day. I knew something was wrong when all the food was not being eaten. I was in two minds as what to do for the best. I was aware that entering the

eventuality.

But then that's enough of the morbid stuff, let's get on and celebrate her life which was a full and action packed one.

Xena was my very first true falcon. As a teenager I had trained a kestrel and a common buzzard; however my circumstances prevented me from continuing with falconry until much later. In 1999 my situation had changed and I decided to get back

I put my order into the breeder. On reflection now I can only smile because I actually ordered a male, but as the breeder only produced females that year it was Xena that ended up in my weathering. All those years ago, but I still remember how excited I was when I collected her from the breeder. She was the first falcon I had ever held hooded on my fist.



aviary could disturb them but in the end I knew I had to look. My worst fears came true when I discovered Xena dead, just out of sight of the camera.

She was on the nest ledge in a scrape with what appeared to be an undeveloped egg hanging from her cloaca, so I believe she was egg bound. Mere words fail adequately to express what you feel when you lose a treasured falcon and of course you cannot plan for this type of

into the sport. My job meant I worked an afternoon shift and so had every morning free to fly. I have always had a soft spot for lanners; they always seem to fly so well, certainly, that is, the ones I'd seen at the country shows. They generally seemed to make height nicely, wait on, and can be stooped to the lure.

I thought if I could train a falcon to emulate this then I would be a happy man. So a Lanner Falcon was what I decided to try next and accordingly

## **SEASON ONE JULY 1999-APRIL 2000**

In our first season together, I really just flew her in the style I had seen at the country fairs. Once she was up and running I would just cast her off and she would normally disappear into the distance. Eventually she would reappear, often soaring at height, depending on the weather. After she had floated around for a while I would call her in and work her to the lure. She was my very own little display falcon. The

only real setback we had in season one was when she broke her leg, she clipped some overhead power lines. I hasten to add these were a good half mile away, which shows how far she ranged out. We got her straight to the vet, the leg was pinned and she was regrettably out of action for 6 weeks. She recovered well and I flew her again that season. Even with this major obstacle we still managed 167 trips out. We flew from July 1999 until April 2000.

## **SEASON TWO AUGUST 2000 - MARCH 2001**

I started retraining Xena at the end of August 2000 having waited for her to finish her moult. She was such an easy going falcon and even being moulted out free loft style, she was soon flying free again. Then in November I had a bit of luck, and obtained permission to fly over a large pig farm, which was set in a valley. With so much space, and the hilly terrain, Xena's aerial skills excelled here. The farmer was so pleased that we would scare the rooks off which swarmed this area, scavenging for pig nuts. We flew Xena at the pigs feeding time; this meant that the pigs could get to their dinner before the rooks did, saving the farmer a small fortune in pig feed. Up to this point I was never interested in hunting with Xena, I was quite content to enjoy watching her fly. But one day late in November she disappeared on me, this was the first time this had happened, and I had to track her down. After one and a half hours searching I came across her on the wing. I lured her in and could not believe she already had a full crop. A big black pellet the next day told me it probably had to be a rook, although I would never know for sure.

As the season progressed I witnessed Xena becoming particularly more aggressive towards the



rooks. On the whole she floated about as before, but occasionally she would put in a chase. She always looked like she was not really trying, and at this point I could not put my finger on what triggered her to hunt. By the end of this season she went onto take 4 more rooks. I never witnessed any of the kills, only finding her on them after tracking. We flew from August 2000 to March 2001 and had 121 trips out with 5 kills in total.

## **SEASON THREE SEPTEMBER 2001 - MARCH 2002**

This season I started retraining at the end of September 2001; again she manned down and retrained with no problems. We carried on as before, we had a real strong bond together now. Although she would fly far and wide and often sky out, it never crossed my mind about losing her. She was so trustworthy, a complete pleasure to fly. This season really echoed the last; I was taking the hunting side a little more seriously. By the end of the season we had managed 13 kills, this time including jackdaw and pigeon. Again on the whole she was happy to float around and take pleasure in her flying. This time I did get to witness some of the kills, I was surprised at her hunting

techniques. Sometimes she would fly straight out of the hood off of the fist. Sometimes she would make height first, in a waiting on style, then power off after her intended victim. We flew from September 2001 to March 2002 with 97 trips out altogether.

## **SEASON FOUR SEPTEMBER 2002 – APRIL 2003**

Season four and I started flying again mid September 2002. By the end of October we already had eleven rooks in the bag. Unbelievable. Xena was such a fit little falcon. She only flew at 1lb-4oz, so rook is a tough quarry for her. Now she was in a genuine hunting mood, I could see she was getting pushed off of a lot of the rooks she caught. So I soon learnt that I had to get to her quickly when she had caught one, because if I did not, the rest of the flock would gang up on her, and push her off of her prey. We had a rather enlarged forced break this season when the telemetry packed in, so I lost December and January with no flying. When we started up again she was not performing at her best. I flew from September 2002 until April 2003 with 115 trips out, ending with 17 kills.

## SEASON FIVE

SEPTEMBER 2003 – APRIL 2004

I followed the normal routine and started retraining in September 2003. This turned out to be a funny season. She was a nightmare to retrain from the moment I took her up from her moult. She had a two week tantrum where she had a right strop on. For some reason she resented me and was hard work to hood, and very cagey on her lure. God knows why, especially after the fantastic start we had had the previous season. After a couple of months she calmed down and became the Xena we knew and loved again. In retrospect I can now see I flew her overweight, I had pushed her weight up to around 11lb-5oz this season. This certainly showed in her temperament, resulting in a disappointing season. We flew from September 2003 until April 2004, with a total of 7 kills and 87 trips out.

## SEASON SIX

MAY 2005 – SEPTEMBER 2005

I changed things around a bit this year. During the proper season I concentrated on flying my female Harris Hawk (Anita). Then while Anita moulted in the summer I thought I would fly Xena through the summer months for a change. This turned out to be a smart move. Xena surpassed herself in the nicer weather. By now, I had also become good friends with Bob Dalton, who had recently moved into my area. We started to do a lot of hawking together (and cake eating). With his advice we really turned Xena around as a hunting falcon. With tips on weight control, conditioning and the best places to slip from, Xena went from strength to strength. Also getting to know Bob meant I could fly Xena as a display falcon. Bob allowed me to join in with some of his display work, something I thoroughly enjoyed. Xena took to

this like a duck to water; she was not fazed at all by the public. She never let me down, always putting in a good performance (which is more than could be said for me?). To this day I like nothing more than a trip out on display days, we really do have a good laugh. The only downside to the summer time hawking was that Xena seemed to become slightly imprinted on me. Now I'm going to show my ignorance here, I really thought that once you got past that first season whilst the falcon was still young and impressionable, this form of imprinting could not happen. So, I don't know? Unless as she had matured to breeding age and 'that time of the year' played havoc with her hormones. Perhaps she saw me as a potential partner. However, she did become a bit of a screamer, although it has to be said only when blocked out in the garden; she was fine in the field. A total this season of 77 trips out, with 35 kills, made this our best to date.

## SEASON SEVEN

MARCH 2006 – SEPTEMBER 2006

Once again I flew Anita through the winter months, picking Xena up for retraining in March 2006. After nine days of retraining she took her first rook on the tenth day. She never

looked back. She became so deadly that we actually started doubling up; on some single trips we were in fact catching two rooks. Every flight, every slip she chased and catching a rook became her priority. She was totally wedded on rook, crow or jackdaw. She ignored passing pigeons and opportunities at partridge, etc. We had some fantastic and thoroughly enjoyable flights. I took some criticism from some of my not so well informed falconer friends, who said she only picked off the weak and wounded from the flock. To a point this was true. But is this not what most of the wild falcons do? Also this season I could tell by the rook's reaction to Xena flying, exactly what was going to happen next. The rooks knew if Xena was in the mood to hunt, or not. For display days I only needed to raise her weight a little and we never had any mishaps. 102 trips out, including display days with 57 kills, this was Xena at her best.

## SEASON EIGHT

MARCH 2007 – SEPTEMBER 2007

Season eight was more summer time fun. I did not manage to get out as much as I would have liked, I had a bout of Sciatica and just could not



*Dale with Anita*

get around quickly enough to keep up with the action. As I mentioned earlier you needed to get to her quickly on a kill, or she risked getting pushed off by the rest of the rooks. Once again she always performed favourably on the days we did get out. She flew so well, on warm breezy days she made good height, sometimes 'specking out'. That first stoop into the lure was spectacular. I am trying my hardest not to recount our days only through the glow of rose tinted spectacles. Of course there were days not to write home about, although these were few and far between. We got involved in a lot more display days with Bob, which again were good fun. We ended in September with 41 kills, after 69 trips out.

## CONCLUSION

I will always carry an element of guilt. If I had not been so captivated with breeding her, Xena may well still be sat on her block today. Even now I weigh up the pros and cons, but what is done is done, I cannot keep on beating myself up over it. I still have my folder where I recorded every wing beat. A lot of my falconer friends think I'm a little sad for keeping a record of my hawking days. Nevertheless, I do get as much pleasure from writing about a day's hawking as I do participating in it. It is useful to look back on. Usually once I have read the first sentence of a particular hawking day, the whole days memories come flooding back to me. Now that I am a little older and a little wiser I can appreciate what a good little flyer Xena was. I have tried a few falcons now and can see how naturally gifted she was. No messing about with kites or training aids, all she needed was a lure and she was away. I certainly clung onto her coat tails.

When she was flying at her best I would invite anyone I could get my

hands on to come and observe her fly. From work colleagues who would just be impressed with the height she gained, and how far she could range out. They would be mesmerised by her first stoop in from great height, once I had started luring. To fellow falconers who would just not believe that a Lanner Falcon was capable of taking rook. I must admit I liked to show her off. I think all the great falconers from days gone by to the present have tended to make their reputations on a particularly exceptional falcon or hawk. I am convinced that unless I am remarkably lucky Xena will be my exceptional falcon. She is the one they all will remember me by.

## Editors note:

It has been my exceedingly good fortune to accompany Dale and Xena on a good number of their hawking sorties and not once was I ever denied the opportunity to view some excellent sporting flights. In my opinion Dale sells himself short in the above article. Xena was an exceptional falcon that tackled rooks without hesitation and her tenacity and aggressiveness towards them served her well. But Xena was brought to the field in superb condition both mentally and physically and that was purely down to the skills of the falconer in question. I regard myself extremely fortunate to be able to count Dale amongst my closest of friends and hold him in very high regard as a fellow falconer.



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