

Irish  
Hawking  
Club  
Journal  
2022



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**POLICY & 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 practise 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

Welcome to 2022 IHC Journal, out later than usual as work and life commitments snowballed and I was spinning too many plates to get this out before the close of the year. But I promise you, it's worth the wait!

I've really enjoyed putting this together - great stories and great images. It's an extra faff trying to take pictures or video in the field but if you can, they are great to have to look back on and to share. Falconry is predominantly a solo pursuit, but technology has enabled us to capture and share images of our adventures. I'm not convinced print media isn't being phased out in favour of digital and social media platforms but I still love a magazine in the hand, if you feel the same, try to type out a few paragraphs about something that had you fired up or inspired and along with a few pictures you have a nice piece for the Journal.

I'm always struck by the reverence with which the IHC membership honour our dearly departed members. We've said goodbye to too many in recent years. Yet there are still stories from the IHC members of 1861 in these pages, along with our more recently lost comrades, so if you have any wish to be remembered fondly long after your earthly days, your IHC friends are a good bet. One of our newest members, Dylan Russell, wrote about attending his first field meet at Sneem recently and writes how he '*was intrigued by the sense of tribalism associated with falconry*', and he hits the nail on the head. I think we all know exactly what he is describing. When we come together as a band of misfits and eccentrics all connected by our unusual interest/lifestyle as falconers, there is a definite bond shared, and as is so clearly seen when one of us leaves this earthly life, love for each other.

As there were no takers to replace me as Editor at the recent AGM, I am still holding the position as the committee has now reduced to just the five key positions. The Journal takes about 60 hours work which is just too much on top of everything else in my life, and really too much for one person. However Alan Jackson has kindly offered to assist me to lighten the workload. So keep the articles coming folks, and if anyone wants to consider taking on the role, or assisting, please let the committee know.

Yours truly,

Darry Reed



Cover Art: by Esther van Hulsen.  
Sparrowhawk 'Sarah Green'  
flown by Hilary White



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# Presidents - Old...

**On reading my report I hope that you are all healthy and feeling well and looking forward to another season of hawking, or maybe if you are a beginner to our sport, have found a mentor within the club and are paving your way into the world of falconry. It seems every week we are getting membership requests from people wanting to join the club. Most are newcomers to the sport with little or no falconry experience, maybe they have done a hawk walk or two at one of the ever increasing falconry experience days around the country and want to explore further and at some point maybe own a hawk or falcon of their own, a decision not to be taken lightly as making this commitment is on par with adopting a new family member who is in demand of constant attention from the very day it arrives. If you are a new member and in this category and need help to get going, get in touch with the club either via our club's facebook page or contact any member of the committee and I'm sure someone who has some experience hunting with hawks who lives nearby will step forward to help you on your path to falconry.**

Some of our club members have been successful in breeding hawks and falcons over the summer, an excellent resource to have now that Brexit is making it more difficult to bring in birds from our closest neighbour. Something that we once took for granted, import /export applications and in some circumstances quarantine regulations make it now more convenient and cost effective to look closer to home for a species to fly. Native species are capable of taking native quarry, and we have goshawks and peregrines being bred by club members. Sparrowhawks and kestrels are available on the wild take list and this should be considered so as to keep our right to take a wild bird of prey from the nest or eyrie maintained, other non-native species and hybrid birds are also being produced in Ireland for those who fancy something more exotic or more versatile and gregarious.

My time as president has come to a close. In the past three years a lot of water has gone under the bridge we have lost some good members over the time of my presidency - Rowland Eustace, Johnny Morris, Bruce Wilkie and Mike Nicholls most recently, these have been the sadder times of my tenure, but the good times far outweigh the bad, and we have seen some great falconry and been in great company on many meets. Don Ryan has steered the club almost single handedly for what seems more like a decade and arranged some absolutely brilliant events over this time, such as the international meets in Kerry and the

Midlands, the merlin meets in Sneem and not to mention keeping the Government departments who deal with our ever increasing jungle of legislation under scrutiny. Don's parting shot with his subcommittee was the Falconry Heritage exhibition in the Phoenix Park in Dublin, which was a huge success. It coincided with the AGM and your new committee and officers have been voted in. I hope the new officers elected can carry on with the same, if not more enthusiasm than their predecessors, maintaining our club and its values which it has been such a privilege for me to be a part of.

This brings me to my final paragraph regarding hawking in the future. We are under threat from all angles of our sport - anti-hunt groups, government legislation and most recently avian influenza. What once deemed to be a winter problem now seems to be causing concern in the summer months. I recently saw a news bulletin on the BBC highlighting the plight of seabirds on the north east coast of Scotland where gannet colonies had lost 40% of their population to Avian Flu. During the summer months I fish the Waterford coastline for Bass and recently have been coming across greater numbers of dead and dying sea birds, washed up on the shoreline. Bird flu has scuppered our field meetings recently due to outbreaks in Ireland and biosecurity measures laid out by the department of agriculture. I fear this protocol is here to stay, and planning our calendar of field meetings is going to be very difficult in the future if we fail to get a derogation to allow us to practise falconry in groups, something we have previously taken for granted.

Another point on this subject I would like to make is that of taking in wild injured and sick birds of prey. In the past I have taken in and rehabbed the aforementioned waifs and strays, every now and then some stranger turns up at my door with a cardboard box containing some sort of raptor needing attention, but recently I have come to the conclusion that it is not worth the risk taking in a sick hawk, falcon or owl that may be carrying avian influenza and possibly put in jeopardy the health and wellbeing of my own birds. I do not have a quarantine facility, and therefore have taken the decision not to take these casualties in anymore.

Have a great season and a great future.

Keith Barker

Co. Waterford

# and New...

**It's an honour to be elected President of The Irish Hawking Club at a time when our sport is facing into many challenges and opportunities. Thanks to the efforts of many, the Club is in a strong position to seize the opportunities and if required deal with any threats head on.**

Having been actively involved in field sports for the last 55 years, I guess this passage of time has provided me with many lessons learnt and a sense of perspective. I would like to focus in this piece on just one topic - falconry & conservation - which I passionately believe, given the emerging environmental and anti field sports agenda, will be critical to our survival going forward.

My sense is that for too long a small minority with an anti falconry/field sports agenda that are in positions of power, have kept us away from the table and in addition caused significant problems for individual members. I feel we need to 'dial up the truth' with all significant stakeholders. Our listing by UNESCO as a Intangible Cultural Heritage needs to be acknowledged by Government agencies. We alone are uniquely placed to inform and shape policy and opinion in the area of raptor conservation. Very, very few outside our community have the passion, knowledge or capability to make the practical contribution required. In addition to the sporting aspects of falconry, conservation is what we do. Not a week goes by without one of our members rescuing and rehabilitating sick and injured birds of prey. Our targeted campaigns - for example the kestrel nest box project, have been a raging success. Many of our members are providing valuable bird of prey education to thousands of members of the public every year. Knowledge and research that originated and in many cases was totally funded by falcon breeders, informs every rare and endangered conservation project. The IAF with its depth of expertise, global network and campaigns, has international recognition as the 'go to' agency on all things relating to raptors. I could go on... and on. The simple truth is the demonising of our sport needs to stop and a real constructive partnership that benefits falconry based on mutual trust needs to be developed and maintained.

To close, I would like to acknowledge the significant contribution of the outgoing officers and all members.

Yours in Sport,

Robert Hutchinson

Co. Offaly



Above: Keith Barker  
Below: Robert Hutchinson



# AGM 2022 MINUTES

Sunday 14th August 2022, Phoenix Park Visitor Centre

taken by Keith Barker

**The AGM commenced at 1pm. The meeting was opened by Don Ryan with a minutes silence for members lost in recent years.**

19 members were in attendance: Keith Barker, Eric Witkowski, Don Ryan, Anya Aseeva, Chris Gilfoyle, James King, Caitlin King, Michael Quinn, Trevor Roche, Darry Reed, Christopher Brennan, Liam McGarry, Gary Timbrell, Sinead Timbrell, Hillary White, Graeme Parker, Aodhan Brown, Jason Deasy and Robert Hutchinson.

Apologies for absence were received by: Bill Hammond, Andi Chewning, Eoghan Ryan, Maurice Nicholson, Anthony Doyle, Neal Carrol and Ger Grant.

Outgoing president Keith Barker made his report with an overview of his office term, firstly remembering club members who had passed away over his term, then thanking outgoing officers who gave up their time serving the club: Darry Reed for producing the newsletters and the three excellent journals that would be hard to match from any falconry club, Anya Aseeva was thanked for her sterling work in the treasury department keeping the paperwork and accounts up to date. A full run down of the clubs accounts including paypal can be found in the recently published newsletter. Last but not least Don Ryan was thanked and applauded for his long term as Director, guiding the club diligently over more than three terms of office, overseeing and having a major hand in the planning of some major field meetings, both international and domestic, in his long term directorship. Also for being there for the club in disputes with the NPWS with wild take, licensing and CITES legislation, managing the clubs emails and queries from the general public on our public facebook page and gmail account. The list goes on with the commitment that Don has shown to the club.

A full run down of the minutes of the 2019 AGM held at Larkins Bistro Edenderry was then read out. The minutes were proposed as true and correct by James King and seconded by Gary Timbrell.

Don Ryan proceeded to talk of the Seabhaic Dubh award, a trophy that has been resurrected from an old figurine that once was presented

within the club for practising falconry within the club in an exemplary manner, it was decided that this year Aodhan Brown would be the recipient of the new award and a short presentation was made following by a good round of rapturous applause.

Don Ryan proceeded with matters arising, with FACE Ireland being the first topic of conversation. At the moment we pay 350 euros to FACE with very little to show for our subscription. It was suggested that we stay within FACE Ireland but no further subscriptions should be paid until their internal review takes place. Liam McGarry agreed as our relationship with the Hawk Board and IAF are still strong and are all we require at the moment.

Don Ryan on the subject of Department meetings called for the new to be elected officers to call for a face to face meeting with the NPWS and Minister to thrash out differences we have with the department regarding licensing, wild take and NPWS rangers acting upon their own agendas and making life difficult for practising falconers within the club. Some falconry possession licences applied for in January have still not been issued in August, and falconry inspections have been called for by rangers in the middle of the summer months when birds are half way through the moult and required to be caught up, this is deemed to be totally unacceptable and must be brought to the NPWS attention.

Chris Gilfoyle then took some time to make his presentation regarding problems he has encountered with his local wildlife ranger, following two inspections to his premises one accompanied by our club director, after which the licensing department decided to revoke his falconry possession licence. A formal lengthy letter was read out to the floor which Chris had drafted and sent out to the NPWS licensing department expressing his despair and seeking clarification of the guidelines from which the decision to revoke the licence application was determined. It was proposed by Gary Timbrell that the club take legal advice and with a view to legal action from a legal representative regarding NPWS staff acting above the Minister's guidelines.



Above: Some club members at the Phoenix Park Exhibition/AGM, left to right, Therese Rafter, Eric Witkowski, Gary Timbrell, Robert Hutchinson, Aodhán Brown and Keith Barker  
Below: Don Ryan

# A Decade of Directorship

Don Ryan Co. Dublin

By the time you read this, I will be retired as director, having served just six months short of 10 years - although there was a brief period in-between that I had officially retired the title but not quite the work.

It has been a whirlwind of sorts and I consider it a great honour to have served such a wonderful community of people. I won't look back on those years now as it's something to be done in retrospect - all I will say is that although it has been challenging at times, it has been greatly rewarding. I'd rather use this opportunity to thank all those who have served with me on and off the committee for the betterment of falconry and our club - many thanks to you all - I couldn't have got through it without you. The new committee can be assured of my unwavering support and I look forward to seeing you all in the field where we can continue to make great memories of this wonderful and ancient practice.

I'm going to focus on flying now - see you in the clouds,

Don Ryan

Co. Dublin

## Election of new officers:

Director - Maurice Nicholson proposed by Hillary White, seconded by Eric Witkowski (unopposed).

President - Robert Hutchinson proposed by Keith Barker, seconded by Jason Deasey (unopposed).

Treasurer - Hillary White proposed by Don Ryan, seconded by Eric Witkowski (unopposed).

Secretary - Andi Chewing proposed by Keith Barker, seconded by Don Ryan (unopposed).

Editor - An appeal for a Journal/Newsletter Editor went unanswered and was left as vacant. It was said that the role could be shared between two members and maybe a member or two who were not in attendance at the AGM might take on the role/s at a later date, or maybe an overseas member could take up the position. Darry Reed added that she could help with familiarising the new editor into the new role

The meeting was closed at 14:55.





# THE FALCON AND THE BOG

Hilary White

Co. Dublin

There is a thing they do right before take-off. Standing on the falconer's glove, the peregrine bobs and swivels its head. The eyes - bog-oak black from where I'm standing, several metres away - take readings before the hunt. Then, the chin feathers slowly beard out, breaking the smooth sleek line from lower mandible to chest. The nape follows, and after that, the shoulders and undercarriage. The falcon is changing shape. The set, statuesque, slightly feline, slightly reptilian immaculacy is broken by a vigorous body-wide shudder, as convulsive and involuntary as a sneeze.

The falcon has roused, an Anglo-Norman term for this galvanising tremor. The feathers have been puffed, rumbled, shaken free of any debris, and reordered so that nothing is out of place. Falcons can also rouse in mid-air, often when they have found lift. They close their wings for a second, stalling and falling slightly as they do it, before resuming their wingbeats. Something about the neatness of this, the serious business of in-flight housekeeping, lifts me every time I witness it.

The tiercel now loosens wings and scans the scene a final time. Kevin, the falconer on whose arm it sits, also scans. The crisp blue sheeting of the day is starting to break up. The breeze is just light enough to unsettle the heads of bog cotton. There is a heady pre-hunt tension.

The tiercel's tail slowly lifts and flicks, and an egg cup-full of milky faeces - known as a mute - shoots out on to the bog to relieve the bird of a gram or two of weight before take-off. Another tremble, a half-rouse, seems to erupt the moment his scaly yellow toes break contact with the buckskin glove.

Kevin mumbles something steadying to the pointer aiming a stiff nose at the ground. The dog is physically responding to the scent of a snipe that she detected in a tussock of heather. She will stay there, motionless, as long as the scent retains its proximity and potency, and until Kevin gives the command to flush. Her black and white coat will be a familiar beacon for the falcon to position himself by.

A handful of men and women are assembled near the edge of this bog in County Offaly. Some carry hooded peregrines that have already flown or are awaiting their turn, and there are children and leashed dogs struggling to keep their patience. We all drop into silence as the tiercel begins his climb. It starts out with a couple of low-level swoops and turns, the bird exploring the

currents of breeze moving over the bog. Once or twice, he passes so close you can hear a slight rhythmic heh-heh-heh as sharp wingtips of rigid feather meet air resistance. His circle broadens as he keeps turning, that widening gyre Yeats warned us about. The tiercel finds the wind and rises in steps, then he bends his angle downwind towards papery birches and dark scots pines.

Beating wings up and up involves a huge expenditure of energy, so falcons are always looking for lift. In the absence of rising thermals or a hill on which to ride updrafts, Kevin's tiercel is seeking it in the place where the wind is hitting the treeline. His ultimate aim is to position himself in the sky directly over Kevin and his dog. For both wild and trained peregrines, greater altitude means greater speed in the attacking descent, and a larger cone of command over prey that might emerge beneath.

We will wait as long as it takes. Those of us who have gathered here on this bog - part of Ireland's tiny falconry community - relax and begin to turn our regard from the sky to each other. Falconry is not an exact science, and, children and dogs aside, this small group of enthusiasts understand this.

I can feel the gentle hug of bog water around the ankles of my boots. I bounce myself slightly in this waterlogged sponge, imagine thousands of years of sphagnum moss layered underneath. This soggy, mossy carpeting provides a berth for so much flora and fauna. In summer, resident curlews nest among the hummocks, hares too; and larks, pipits and dragonflies buzz the airspace. Numberless arrays of invertebrate life thrive here, as do a fascinating host of insectivorous plants that dine on them. In wintertime, they extend a cushioned welcome for migratory snipe. These and the open skies overhead are what bring Kevin, his tiercel and his pointer here today.

Late afternoon sun sneaks under the gunmetal streets of cloud. Away at the edge, it makes silver of the rinsed browns of birch and turns the pine bark titian red. Up on the bog mound itself, it splits open the purples of the ling heather, ghosts the bog cotton, and bejewels the sodden russets and greens of the moss pillows underfoot.

The falcon is mounting nicely. He is about half a kilometre downwind from us, and so high up that he is a speck. The pointer is still in position. Kevin's attention moves between the dog a stone's throw away and the falcon in the sky. The bird has found as much lift as it can and is now tracking back towards us at altitude. The

scenario unfolding is routine to both the tiercel and the dog, and each animal has an awareness of the other, even at a great distance. A falcon's eyesight is so acute that it can see the pattern of black splotches on the dog's coat and the lines on Kevin's old tweed cap from several hundred feet up.

A snipe's body is roughly the size of a blackbird's, but its beak, slender and sensitive, nearly doubles its body length. Its mottled plumage, a dizzying array of gold and peat, renders the bird all but invisible on the ground. The old Irish name - Gabhairín reo, or "little goat of the frost" - refers to a tremulous bleating sound the males produce during display flights.

Ireland's resident breeding population of snipe are among a sad list of native species that has undergone a contraction in numbers from habitat loss. But by the light of October's first full moon, their numbers vastly swell with the annual arrival of tens of thousands of relatives from a range spanning Iceland to the Russian tundra, all navigating by way of celestial and geomagnetic mysteries we may never fully understand. Between roads and towns, pasture and forestry, they can make out the moonlit glisten of wet bogland far below. Watery landscapes are where their long bills are able to probe invertebrate-rich mud. They fix wings in a little closer to their small bodies and begin their descent to the springy surface.

Of this migrant influx, a fraction of snipe will succumb to the falcon's foot. And a tiny fraction of that fraction will succumb to falcons that wear leather anklets and consume the waking thoughts of their trainers. They are not easy to catch. Snipe have extraordinary upwards propulsion as well as a slippery mid-air jink that can evade a raptor at the very last second. The falcon is the sniper, the sharpshooter trying to fly down something smaller, more nimble, and well used to the threat.

The falconers who hunt them for a dozen weeks of winter in Ireland do so precisely because they are so difficult to catch. While falconry's ancient roots lie in bringing food to the table, it is today merely a drama-delivery device based on a script co-written by a human and a bird. The falcon's storyline follows a routine that leads to a reward - take off from the glove, climb high, chase whatever the dog flushes underneath. Whether the falcon catches its quarry or misses and is called down to be fed by the falconer, there is a meal either way. For the falconer, meanwhile, there is a relationship with a wild animal and the encouraging of its natural instincts to hunt in a way that is spectacular to witness first-hand.

"The falcon is  
mounting nicely.  
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The pointer is  
still in position."

The peregrine's vertical, close-winged "stoop" breaks all speed records in the animal kingdom. Its power and velocity, more than any other trait or behaviour, has secured a prominent place for falcons in human culture over thousands of years. We fashioned gods in their image and incorporated their aerodynamics into fighter jets. We entombed them with our dead and projected their handsome frowns on to Egyptian reliefs and Babylonian statues. Falcons adorn flags, crests, bank notes, business logos and sports jerseys, and are recurring literary symbols everywhere from Mughal epics to Shakespeare to W.B. Yeats.

In Ireland, the earliest known falconry reference is Domnall Mac Murchada, a seventh-century King of Tara and a High King of Ireland, who was said to have had among his possessions "da seabhac selga" - two hunting hawks.

Western falconers obtain most of their birds from aviary breeders nowadays, but traditionally raptors were trapped using lures and nets. The birds were trained and hunted with for the winter before being released in the spring. Without daily interaction with a handler, a bird of prey will revert back to a state of wildness. Because their time in captivity was only temporary, falconry birds never lost their wild inclinations or genetics. Their predatory fire was the very thing man sought from them.

Training techniques for these highly strung creatures were refined over generations. The methods by which present-day falconers train their charges follow the same principles as would have been employed by a falconer in ancient Persia. Trust is built through reward and reinforcement. The bird is then trained to return to a whistle it associates with food. When the time comes to hunt, innate responses spur the raptor to give chase. It is the very same switch that turns young falcons at a nest site from begging their parents for food to pursuing their own. I have seen it in my own hawks down the years, launching themselves after something with speed and guile the very first time they fly

free. It is as pleasing to watch as a cherry tree coming into bloom.

You can't win affection from a hawk as you can from a dog, but you can earn its trust. The falconer tries to establish a smooth, habitual, business-like dynamic, whereby the falcon's drive to hunt is enabled. The birds are leashed, or free in an enclosed aviary, when not in the field, but once their tethers are removed and they take off into the borderless, ungovernable arena of flight, the falconer must trust in the effectiveness of the bird's training. If the relationship experiences a crack, the bird can drift mentally and physically, and decide to go it alone. Nowhere is the balance of trust more delicate than when the falcon is on the ground with prey that it has caught. In the wild, it is where they are most vulnerable to attack from their own kind, and it makes them instinctively defensive when they are in this position. These days, falconry birds are usually let gorge on their kills, but if something ample and flavoursome such as a woodpigeon or pheasant is caught, the falconer might wish it for themselves. In this case, and in all such cases through the long history of hunting with raptors, the falconer kneels down to a low, unthreatening angle and gently offers an exchange for food presented on his or her outstretched glove. The falcon is usually plucking feathers at this point, and the sudden invitation of de-plumed, ready-to-eat meat is so irresistible that it will release its kill and step on to the glove.

Ten thousand years ago, Ireland emerged from the Ice Age with a moderate and stable climate. In the saucer of the midlands, the thaw left behind an expanse of shallow gravelly lakes. These became clogged with sedges and sphagnum over eons, mounding upwards and upwards with the help of drenching south-westerlies and decaying as fibrous black peat.

The word 'bog' comes from the Irish Bogarch - "soft". It has gathered disparaging connotations over the centuries: the primitive, the untameable,

“The tiercel closes its wings  
and dives towards earth. The two  
birds, one seeking safety in height,  
the other descending in  
meteoric pursuit, are the  
fastest things I have seen in weeks.  
My eyes, so used to backtracking  
cursors or the wobbly hallway  
jogs of my son, struggle to  
keep up.”

the unworkable, the other. A by-word for the bathroom, even. Something that lacks distinction is "bog-standard". The imperial slur "Bog-Irish" signified peasant backwardness, preliteracy and even racial inferiority.

There is archaeological evidence of peat being burned over a thousand years ago, and by the seventeenth century it was the main fuel source in Ireland. The Napoleonic Wars saw a commission established to examine how Ireland's bogs could be assimilated to grow hemp and flax for the imperial war effort, but that conflict ended before these plans could be enacted.

In 1934 the independent Irish state established a Turf Development Board (later Bord na Móna) in a bid to properly industrialize extraction. Alongside coal, milled peat became a key fuel source for Irish power stations. The local hand-cutting of turf for domestic heating carried on in parallel.

In recent decades, the environmental costs of all of this - the devastated ecosystems, and the carbon emissions from the burning of the world's least efficient fossil fuel - have been recognized, and the peat-milling industry has been slowly wound down. Drains are being blocked in order to 're-wet', and thereby reactivate, peat-generating bogs. (In January of this year, Bord na Móna confirmed that it was formally ending all peat-harvesting and would now devote itself exclusively to renewables, biodiversity action plans, and reskilling programmes for its sizeable workforce under its 2018 "Brown to Green" strategy.) But much of the ecological damage that has been done cannot be reversed. According to the Irish Peatland Conservation Council, less than 10 per cent of the estimated original 311,000 hectares of raised bog in the Republic is considered to be intact or suitable for restoration works.

To get up on to the bog today meant scrambling up a hacked-away cliff of crumbling chocolate cake. These wounds from centuries of hand-cutting still seep life out of a bog like this. Cutting dehydrates a bog, and releases carbon as well as the nutrients and microbial communities that sustain growth. A wet bog holds these things inside. When I look at this particular patch on satellite imagery, it is an island surrounded by long, gouging claw marks. Not far from here, the damage is even more distressing - black deserts as far as the horizon, broken only by coffin-width drainage channels. Travel down the road a little further, and you see that other horseman of bog extinction, the dark, silent, stultifying monocultures of Sitka spruce plantations.

For Kevin and the half dozen or so other falconers who have organized their lives around flying their birds here, there are no ledgers of fuel extraction or forestry yield or carbon credits or wind farm development. There is only a sky

big enough for falcons to climb and stoop, and, in the patches of living bog that survive, a rich berth for winter guests from the north.

The only part of this picture that doesn't worry me is the peregrine ranging around looking for lift. It is an animal that was nearly wiped out by DDT and other organochloride pesticides in the mid-twentieth century. Decisive action by falconer-scientists, enthusiasts with skin in the game, helped raise a flag in the nick of time. In tandem with the banning of DDT in several countries, wild populations in the US were rebuilt through captive breeding. We have so many peregrines in the wild now that heated battles to stake a claim on urban nest sites are regularly recorded.

Kevin's tiercel has come back overhead. The bird is now "waiting on", fixing itself in the freezing upper headwind. Experience tells him what is likely to follow when he positions himself very high and directly over the dog. The tiercel is not performing a task in service to Kevin. You can't order a falcon (or anything, for that matter) to fly off, climb a thousand feet and wait there. You can only let it discover that when it does, it will be rewarded with the chance to engage its hard-wired drive to hunt for itself.

Just as the falcon's tiny, bracket-shaped profile passes slightly upwind, Kevin huffs a command at the dog to pounce into the tussock. A snipe rockets up out of the cover at shocking speed. The tiercel closes its wings and dives towards earth. The two birds, one seeking safety in height, the other descending in meteoric pursuit, are the fastest things I have seen in weeks. My eyes, so used to backtracking cursors or the wobbly hallway jogs of my son, struggle to keep up.

A millisecond before the peregrine is in striking distance, the snipe jinks expertly. The tiercel skims past and swings upwards again, climbing in the hope of another downward cut; but the snipe has pulled away, clearing the open air and finding thick cover at the edge of the bog. It's over - and probably the umpteenth instance on this island today of a snipe outdoing a falcon. Kevin throws out his lure, a soft leather pad garnished with a quail wing, and the tiercel flutters down onto it. Nothing has been caught but everyone - the falcon, the falconer, and the spectators - is satisfied. The dog was steady, the tiercel flew high and stooped hard, and the snipe was wily and strong. The use of a domesticated dog to detect and flush the snipe teed up the drama, but once the snipe was in the air and the falcon giving chase, the odds were the same as they'd be in the wild. At its most basic, stripped-down level, falconry is a desire to have a front-row seat at a natural spectacle.

The tiercel is back on Kevin's glove, and feeding up on the remainder of the quail. All of the falcons here today have been flown except

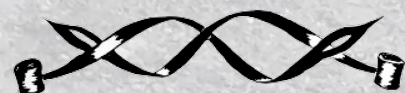
for one young tiercel. I have to get back to Dublin, but I dawdle so that I can watch him be cast off to begin his own climb. The falconer, Don, is opening the braces at the back of his bird's hood in preparation to remove it and set in train those customary pre-flight checks. "Wait!" someone says. "There, over the trees."

We watch a big female peregrine thread herself slowly through the wind out at the edge of the bog. Falconers who hunt regularly in the same location get used to encountering local wild falcons. There have been many cases of them habitually turning up when the falconers arrive and chasing the very same snipe flushed by the dogs. A bigger worry, though, is that falconry birds are always at risk of being attacked as interlopers by their wild, territorial counterparts, and can be injured and even killed by them. Don's tiercel, a callow brown-plumage bird in its first year, could be overwhelmed by this larger female who would always edge it in fitness and strength. Even if the young falcon evaded physical harm, he could still be chased far from the vicinity. Don would then have an evening of fading light and worry as he tracked the GPS signal emitted by the transmitter the bird wears.

I wonder where in this land of flatness the height-loving peregrine could be nesting. The answer blinks red aviation warning lights back at me through the trees: the peat-burning power station, the only tall edifice for miles and miles. Before its construction, peregrines would have passed through here and, finding nothing in the way of a sheltered ledge on a high vantage point, carried on. The old bird books tell you that peregrines belong to upland crags and sea cliffs, but the species' boom since its brush with extinction has enticed it into urban settings. Among cathedral spires, skyscrapers, and industrial relics such as Dublin's Poolbeg chimneys, it finds two of its favourite things in abundance - height and pigeons. Here in the midlands, this big female and her mate have made a home for themselves near these bogs by exploiting a manmade structure, one that happens to be tied to an environmentally problematic past.

Driving home past the black expanses of strip-mined bog, I picture repairs to their hydrology taking hold and the black giving way to green, brown and red. I imagine pouring water out of my son's wellies as a falcon soars above, and bog cotton plucked in small fingers and stashed in a pocket. I place trust in this eventuality from I know not where, like a man willing a bird to return.

First published in the Dublin Review



# BULLET- MY IMPRINT TIERCEL

Trevor Roche

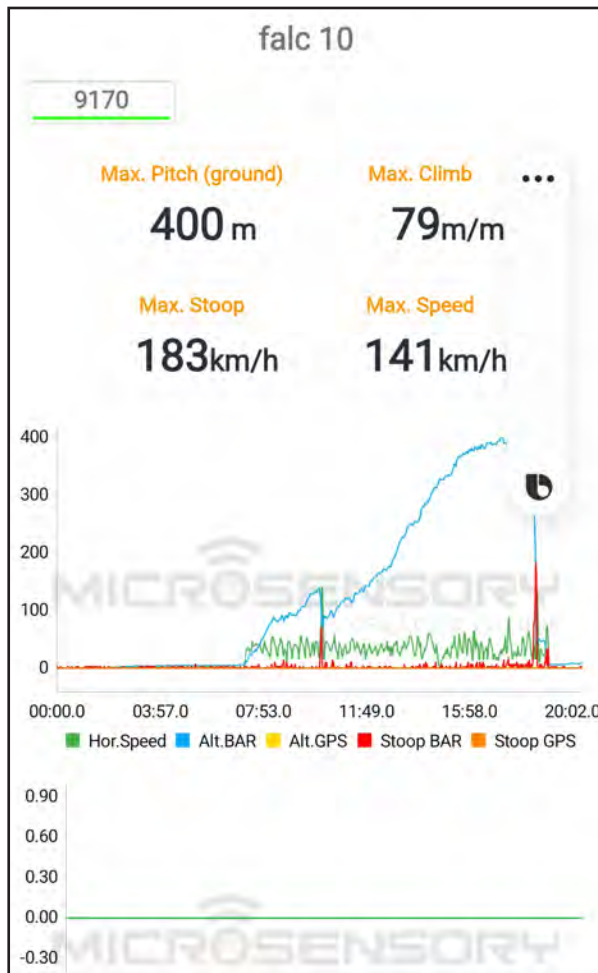
Co. Dublin

The story of Bullet starts back in the summer of 2016 when he was hatched, bred, reared and hacked for a period of four months in Co. Monaghan; this was the road I was going to embark on for my first imprint. I had heard so many things about hacking, and this was my chance to get a falcon that was really muscled up after being out from early morning to late evening in the hills. What was to unfold in the learning about this bird was enough to send me off my rocker with frustration. I had heard he was a high flyer which is a great start, so what worries could I possibly have. I had no GPS transmitter as yet, so the old Luksander crossed with an RT Marshall was going to have to do the job, as this combination had never let me down. So nothing had been done with this eyass peregrine, he was fed half a quail in the morning and called in for half a quail last thing in the evening. On the day of his arrival I noticed he was a good bit smaller than my other tiercel Tucker, who died in November 2015 from a serious collision at high speed with a pigeon. These tiercels were from the same bloodline that I knew had character and good killing qualities.



What was about to unfold over the course of the next few years would make you grey. All new birds are fitted with new anklets and nice bullet jesses. His head was a funny shape and small, so hoods were ordered to fit. So training started, and although he had never seen a hood before, believe it or not, hooding was a simple task and he took to it well. He'd never seen a lure before either, and here's where the trouble started. Nearly every bird takes to a lure handy enough, but this bird refused point blank- to say he would rather suffer death than eat is true. So I used a dead quail on a string and made progress. As soon as he came 50 yards on a creance, it was off to the bogs. The day finally came; not too windy, bright clear sky and the adrenaline was in my body. Like having a new toy, but could he live up to expectations? The time came; I struck the braces, undid his bullets and lifted my hand shoulder high. He roused and off he went, and that was the last I saw of him for at least 3 hours. He rose up and up and up, out of sight, and I couldn't find him with my binoculars.

He was up there as the radio beeps were still heard faintly as I shook my head. Out with the dead bait quail trying to lure him in but not a sign, though I knew he was high in the clouds. At his leisure, the beeps got louder. I knew he was on the return. Still looking up into a vast clear sky, not a cloud



in sight and I caught a glimpse of what I thought was a wild tiercel, he came tearing across the sky at a speed I'd never witnessed before, hence his name - Bullet. He eventually came down for the dead quail but had no appetite, just picked at the breast and stood up on to the fist. It was great to see him back but I was mystified. How can a bird not want to refuel after all that flying. The same happened again, over and over for weeks on his daily exercise. I grew tired of this and started to drop his weight. I knew screaming was on the agenda but if I could get success quickly and then raise his weight again then all would be good. As I dropped him slowly, a quarter ounce each time and fed him day old chicks only, screaming was never an issue. Flown daily and hard, he began to respond, but the loss of height was insane. From 1500 ft plus to 300 ft with an ounce or two off. So here's where it starts. Being an imprint and left to his own devices, fed morning and evening, the only good thing was his flying abilities. He wasn't learning to hunt. He had learned so many things that were bad for a falconry bird, but necessary in the wild. Everytime we were out when he was mounting well, he would see bog water and go straight down for a bath. Despite already bathing two hours prior to flying, this was a habit instilled from his long hack. So that was year one out the door, the frustration of having a super high flying tiercel to a 300 ft mud slider. The pain I endured



was to carry on into year two everytime we hit the bogs. His height was good, I had found a way to stop the bog bathing, but he was now attracting the attention of every wild tiercel and falcon in the country. Even when we went to the field meet in Co. Monaghan, nowhere near breeding season, a wild aggressive female tried to kill him 1000 ft above all the spectators' heads. This was over a period of 50 minutes in sight and then they were gone. Myself and Aodhán searched for hours and missed the club dinner. Up early next morning to get him back as Aodhán had dropped a pin to show me his neck of the woods. These attacks took place everyday for the next two years. By this stage I had a GPS system to help me track down this tiercel time and time again. Three years in, we had a few good stoops but had not yet brought a snipe to the bag. After getting back to a good pitch of 500 ft or so he would never hold the point above the dog, so snipe would break and he never stood a chance. It was just one thing after another, he started to bathe in bog puddles again, and I felt this was the end for him. But two weeks later I was back out as the falconry bug held strong. This time he flew high and strong but started wandering, not holding over the point. I decided to flush, but he hadn't a care in the world and did as he wanted. I decided to walk off the bog as the disappointment was heartbreaking and I felt it was time to let him go. As myself and Martin walked off the bog the snipe were breaking and the tiercel had come over and made a stoop, a good effort but not good enough. We were just off the bog and Bullet was messing about 40 ft over the ground, a snipe broke and he came down at 46 kms and bagged his first snipe. How disappointing, possibly his worst flight ever and it did not bring a stir to my emotions. I thought this might set his sights on the prize, but again to no avail. The mileage, painstaking hours and disappointments carried on. His stoops from 500 ft or so were more frequent but no sign of good footing ability. Back to the drawing board, if you don't foot your food, you're not getting any. I started to throw chick heads as he sat on his block. At last he caught one and a full feed was given. Just like a boxer shadow boxes this was my thought and it paid off. It was season four when all started coming together. The attacks of wild peregrines stopped, he never looked at a bog puddle and started to hold the points. First day of the season he bagged his first in style, then a second in a row. I was on fire and bursting with pride, so it was time to bag three in a row. Not a hope, he flew off and landed high on an aerial mast. This now became the new habit for two weeks or so then came my break and I saw my mistake. He came over and stooped a snipe, right in front of me. This was only 10 ft in front of me and he never once stuck out his foot to take his quarry. That was the day I knew I had

made a mistake with his weight. He was always flown at 1 lb 5 oz. I started reducing again very slowly and at 1 lb 3.5 oz he killed, and again, and again. It appeared his confidence was growing but his flying powers excelled also. He mounted regularly to 800 ft, a bit too high for snipe but at least I was enjoying the flight without a kill. He was now a tiercel I could bring to field meets and go home happy. All the above achieved over a long period of time. Then he started to chase corvids. No one can write on paper what words of disgust I shouted many times. This ritual proceeded but he never caught one thank god, just bully boy tactics because he could. So this brings me to the last flights I had for the shortest hunting season I had due to back spasm. My 2021 season started 10 days before our IHC meet in Sneem. He had been flying so well within days of starting and I felt with the three day meet he would not let me down and I would fly him into condition without a scales.

On day one he flew to 850 ft and had a cracking stoop, I was a happy man. It was then to Glencar to celebrate and pay tribute to Dr Mike Nicholls. The club always does a fine job and made a special memory of Mike's passing. I said my prayer and led the way to fly first as I was in a bad way with my back. Mike must have had a word with Bullet as he took to the skies. He mounted fast and was joined by two ravens, he was so high I could not bend my back to see him. My GPS came into play and I had a fair idea where my tiercel was, only this time I could not find my beloved pointer Pixie. Thankfully Robert Hutchinson was my eyes and helped me locate Pixie just 20 yards away holding a stiff point. Bullet had now mounted to 400 m with the ravens beside him, dog on point, crowd watching. The question was would he leave the ravens to stoop his quarry? Pixie flushed and with that, Bullet dropped like a stone, 183 km/h. You know your tiercel means business when the snipe bails. That was my last flight of 2021, just twelve days in all, but the most memorable of the last five years. That flight was dedicated to my friend and fellow falconer Mike Nicholls, RIP.







# KEZ



## Stephen Power Co. Dublin

**At 6pm on a dark wet Christmas Eve, I had a phone call from a friend at work looking for advice. He told me he found an injured small falcon on his family farm and explained that it was unable to fly and he easily picked it up with little struggle. He asked what he could do to help it?**

I offered to meet him and said I would try my best to help it, and advised him to place the bird in a dark box with some ventilation. I headed off to pick the bird up. As soon as I checked the bird over I found it to be a first year kestrel in very low condition. Wet, cold, with dull eyes and a very sharp keel.

I took her home and promised to keep him updated. Once home I placed her in a large plastic box with some old carpet lining. I offered her some diced day old chick sprinkled with warm water and a glucose mix. She was very weak and almost unable to flap her wings. So I placed her right beside the food and she ate straight away. She pulled gently at first and after a few seconds she got stuck into the warm food. I felt relieved and I thought to myself "Ok, this will work she just needs food and time to gain strength". I gently placed her on the scales and it showed 158g.

Three days passed and she was showing signs

**"I headed off to pick the bird up. As soon as I checked the bird over I found it to be a first year kestrel in very low condition. Wet, cold, with dull eyes and a very sharp keel"**

of perking up with half crops twice a day, of diced pigeon and chick. She was starting to hop around the box but still had very weak wing beats (like a butterfly). So I placed her in a towel and cast her to check her over. I found no broken bones and her feathers were in good condition, so I fitted her with some soft light anklets and jesses. I knew it would take more time to get her fit and healthy before I could release her and it was best to remove her from the plastic box and give her some freedom to stretch her wings etc. As soon as she stood up and regained the glove for the first time, I noticed she wasn't putting weight on her left foot. It was very warm and her outside toe was swollen twice the size of the other toes. I then found a tiny hard black wound on the underside of her foot and she showed discomfort when I touched it. An old puncture wound, likely infected. So after some advice from fellow IHC club members I took her for a vet inspection. He confirmed an infection and gave her a four day course of antibiotics to clear it up.

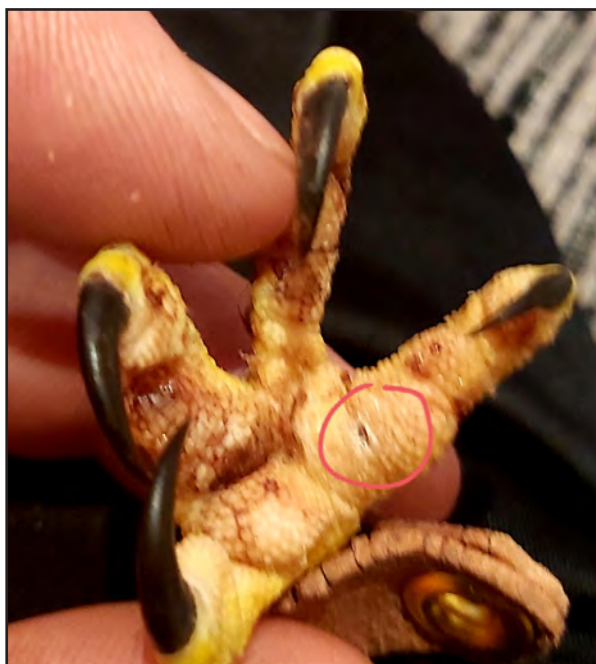


After that she started putting weight on the left foot, it was cool to the touch, she was looking happy, stretching her wings and gaining some strength to her wing beats, regaining the raptor post perch with ease. Still on two half crops of pigeon breast a day, I started asking her to step up to the glove for tidbits, she instantly stepped up, then hopped, and all on the one day flew leash length for her food! She was stepping onto the scales and stepping in and out of the travel box willingly at 170g.

Over the Christmas break I took her to the office in the box and fed her twice a day over 12 hour shifts, spending a lot of time with her, even getting her to fly to me indoors to try add some fitness. She was a lovely little character, very smart and calm. It was brilliant to see her gaining weight and strength in such a short space of time.

As she was looking perky, I attempted to free loft her in my mews for the day but she struggled to fly to and from the perches in the 10 ft space. I watched her attempt over and over again but she often hit and struggled to regain the perches and ended up hopping around the floor unable to fly up the 5 ft. She needed more time and fitness. I phoned the wildlife ranger and explained the case to keep her under a rehab licence until she was fighting fit, as December and January daylight and weather wasn't on her side. He agreed and came out to inspect her, and was happy to let me rehab her under licence and we agreed to aim for a spring time release.

We then had storm after storm, so I flew her indoors up and down the stairs of my house, recalling from perch to glove for pigeon pieces. I increased a few steps at a time, building up to the full height of the stairs after a few days. She was keen at 180g and soon flew up and down the stairs six or seven times easily for a full crop.



So she now spent her time between feeds free lofted in the mews and she happily flew to me for feeding when I went in, so I began to show her the tiny garnished lure I made from bits of old leather, and for the next two days she flew hard up the stairs many times for the thrown out and suspended lure.

It was time to start working her outside to gain distance on the creance, to gauge her stamina over a longer distance and see how she coped facing wind etc. All the time her weight and power was increasing, she was now at 185g.

Although it was great to see her outdoors flying straight to me on the creance, as soon as I whistled or threw out the lure, she wasn't a captive hawk that was to hunt with me for the winter. With her I had a job to do, a promise to keep. So the creance was only on for three days, her response was instant so I discarded the line and the first time she flew free, her tiny body felt the weight difference and up she went, high slicing through the wind like only a wild experienced falcon can. She headed over to a tree line approximately 50 m away. I thought she would never be seen again! But then I saw her turn above the trees and fly back towards me as I awkwardly swung the lure, whistling my head off! As she came at me into the wind she stalled for a brief few seconds and hovered right above me approximately 10 ft away, her wings pumping and her tiny little head



locked onto me, as steady as a rock, before she glided down and plopped onto the thrown out garnished lure. I can't tell you how epic that few seconds were, but it was as though time slowed and I could see every detail in slow motion.

I was hooked! So as the days went by, we flew every day rain, wind or sleet for her food. I worked her hard with my awkward lure swinging and we both learnt new skills. I asked for hints and tips from falconers with more experience, as she was starting to grab the lure too often and I was finding it hard to give her a good workout. As her weight went up to 198g and 200g she flew hard, slicing into the wind and stooping at the lure in a variety of different locations and landscapes, gaining height and ranging out further and further. I found that I could get her to hover right above me and sustain it in almost gale force wind, in fact the stronger the wind the better! She



showed me why kestrels are also known as 'The Wind Hover'.

As the days got brighter and spring was just around the corner she flew every day. I watched how she reacted to the sound of angry crows, as she stood still as a statue, hoping not to be noticed or mobbed. She used the same tactic one time when she noted a wild peregrine flying way up overhead. On another occasion she spotted a large common buzzard flying towards her as she flew the lure. She instantly shot up, gained height and stayed above the slower lumbering buzzard. As she flew hard the buzzard persisted, as both twisted and spiralled down in a mid air dog fight until she flew right into a thick hedge and the buzzard gave up and flew away. I knew she had encountered these hazards everyday in the wild, as she knew just how to deal with them and it made me realise just how hard life is for a tiny wild falcon and it was just bad luck and a foot infection that had made us cross paths and let us both get a glimpse of how the other species lived. She was ready now to go back.

I found a lovely spot where I had planned to release her. It was a wide open countryside valley, with scattered clumps of mature trees, hedge rows, stone walls, tufts of knee high grass, gorse bushes, sandy river banks, tall pylons to perch on and it went on as far as the eye could see. I flew her in this valley for the next two weeks and increased her food intake by feeding her pigeon breast in the mornings and large mice in the evenings as she flew to the lure. I encouraged her to wander further and further off by pushing her weight up to over 220g. I watched her hover in the wind and scan the grass below, often she would stoop down and take a closer look only to use the wind for instant lift to gain height, fly off and repeat. We stayed out longer into the evenings and I only called her back into the lure when the sun was about to set.

I flew her like this at a few locations scattered around this valley, hoping she would get familiar with her soon to be home. I knew it would suit her as one day as I was driving up, I saw a lovely mature blue male kestrel hovering just a few feet above the gorse bush hunting for his next meal.

At last we had a week of clear bright weather forecast ahead. She was ready for action and fighting fit. She had taken all I could throw at her with ease and it was time for her to go back to the wild. So I contacted the wildlife ranger to tell him I was releasing her within the next few days. He wanted to come and see the release, out of interest. So with only a few days to go, she ate as much pigeon breast as she wanted to plump her right up. I got to work on the last piece of the puzzle. I wanted to build and place a kestrel nest box into the clump of trees she liked to perch in at the release site.

When she was free lofted I had noticed her

stashing food in a small nook in the corner of my mews. It was just big enough for a kestrel to squeeze into and I never even thought about it until I witnessed it. Kestrels as some of you know need somewhere like a nook or hollowed out tree, flower box, old disused crow nest, for shelter from the worst of the weather, as a stashing spot for food, and as a safe nest to raise their young. So by building and fitting a nest box I had hoped if she ever needed one, it would be there ready to use, and if not for her then maybe some other struggling kestrel.

On the morning of her release she had a half crop of pigeon and mouse. Then I removed her anklets and she had one last feed on my hand before I placed her on the scales at 240g and placed her into the travel box one last time. I headed to the valley to meet the wildlife ranger.

On a warm bright February morning, I carried the travel box into the fields and opened the door. She hesitated to fly out at first, but after a gentle tap she took off like a rocket, gained height to about 100 ft, did a half circle and headed off out of sight in a few seconds. The wildlife ranger standing beside me said it was great to see her power off like that and he wasn't expecting her to go so fast. He told me that unfortunately in his work he deals with a lot of poisoned or shot birds of prey, and it's the first time he had seen a released bird power off like that.

I had a deep feeling of accomplishment at that stage as we walked back towards the cars, not expecting to see her again. Then we spotted her flying right over our heads at approximately 150 ft up as though she came by to see who this stranger was. Just as that happened, a large hooded crow tried to gain height to intercept her and she gave us one last show of long wing flying skills as she stooped at him pulling up at the last second before a strike! With the crow rolling under her, myself and the ranger gasped and I said "Ahh she's fine, she's well able for him!" (wishing inside that the crow would leave her in peace). She then veered off, gained height and flew far into the distance and out of sight, never looking back! And just like that, she was gone. It was the last I ever saw of her.

I left some day-old chicks at the nest box, and a few days later I returned to check in on her. The chicks were gone but no sign of who had eaten them.

I drive along the valley most days on my way to work hoping one day for a glimpse of her hunting mice above the grass and river banks, just like I had seen the little wild male kestrel do not so long ago.

It was a pleasure to work with her and I did everything I could to get her fit and ready for rewilding. And she repaid me with a reminder that it wasn't just hunting that attracted me to falconry, but a lifelong fascination of birds of prey and



simply being 'in the moment', watching them fly and seeing how they react to their environment, living life on a knife edge one day at a time.

Hopefully luck will be on her side this time and she will live a long life in the wild and pair up with a mate to help boost the dwindling kestrel numbers. Super little birds, great little flyers, and I hope they make a good comeback.



# Remembering Mike Nicholls

1952 - 2021



## Kevin Marron

Dr Mike Nicholls was born in Stockport in the north of England in 1952. Mike's interest in birds of prey began early following a visit to Philip Glasier's bird of prey centre with his father. It wasn't long before he had his first kestrel at the age of 15. Mike soon progressed onto a sparrowhawk and then onto goshawks. A fine young scholar, he went on to study Genetics and Ecology at Liverpool University and eventually completed his doctorate in genetics of grasses. Mike went on to lecture in many universities. His work was published and referred to in many papers and publications. Later on in life Mike shifted his academic focus to include the study of raptors and especially the little merlin. In recent years Mike was involved in the gathering of DNA samples with the help of falconers from wild take and wild injured peregrines to discover the history of the population along the Sussex coastline. Recently Mike had been working tirelessly helping to record the life story of his lifelong friend and mentor Ronnie Moore which was only completed as of late.

I first met Mike a decade ago when he arrived in Ireland a few days early as a guest for Robert Hutchinson's third International Snipe Hawking Meet in 2012. I, on the other hand, was kind of gate crashing the event. I had no official invite but my young once intermewed tiercel (Fagen) and I felt like we were up for the challenge. Mike was flying a male Barbery which decided to go up

on the soar on the first official day of the meet. Despite multiple mornings spent searching with Martin Brereton, the bird was unfortunately never recovered. That didn't put Mike off and he continued to travel to most of the snipe meets held in every corner of this island.

It was over the next few years that I really got to know him. He often took a little cottage not too far from myself and Martin and we would arrange to meet for a days hawking or I'd pick him up on the way. I found Mike great company and he didn't mind me giving him some short Irish history lessons on those journeys to and from the bog. Mike wasn't really a drinker of alcohol but after a good days flying he liked nothing better than a pint of the black stuff as he warmed himself on a turf fire in Roches, the sinking pub. He had a grá for Ireland that probably came from one of his grandmothers who hailed from here. I also discovered that as little boys, the highlight of both our week was to go into Manchester city centre to the then famous Tib Street, just to visit all the pet shops and gaze at the exotic birds.

Mike's passion for birds didn't stop with birds of prey. He was also an avid finch and canary breeder. Mike's big involvement with the setting up of Lantra always came back to haunt him. Any time he was out with me I couldn't wait to see some little error when flying only to ask him jokingly "did you do that Lantra course Mike?". I remember he had a little health scare a few years back and I wondered if he would still be travelling



Right: Kevin Marron & Vincent Ducrot with Mike Nicholls.



## Maurice Nicholson

Dr Mike Nicholls passed away at the Pilgrims Hospice in Canterbury on the 9 November 2021 after a long battle with cancer, leaving behind his wife Margaret and sons Tom and Ben. Born in 1952 in Stockport in the north of England, Mike had an early introduction to falconry when, as a teenager, his father took him to visit Philip Glasier's Bird of Prey Centre at Newent. That day in Gloucestershire proved to be his initiation into a lifelong passion for raptors and soon he was flying a kestrel and later a sparrowhawk and learning the rudiments of falconry. His life soon became centred around this new passion. From then on, he had to have a mews in his garden and all his free time and holidays were spent flying his hawks. When he married Margaret and had his boys, Ben and Tom, they too were inducted into this hawking world. Goshawks, merlins, red naped shaheens and peregrines were all flown with great endeavour as the years moved on.

Mike was a fine scholar and completed his MSc in Ecology and Genetics at Liverpool University, later earning his doctorate there for his work on the genetics of grasses. In time, he was to meld his passion for falconry into his fine academic career in which he had much work published and had received many citations for his expertise. His teaching life was largely based at Canterbury Christ Church as well as Greenwich and the University of Kent. He lectured not only in ecology, biodiversity and genetics but he became an expert also in work based and distance learning programs. Merlins initially were at the centre of his raptor academic studies; later he used his expertise in genetics when he undertook a study of the DNA of the British peregrine falcon.

Early in the new millennium, Mike came over to Ireland to see the newly evolving sport of snipe hawking and soon he was hooked. From then on, Mike arrived on the ferry from the United Kingdom a few times a year during the snipe hawking season, usually taking in an Irish Hawking Club field meet during his stay. He always brought with him a copious supply of his home made elixirs of life which he dispensed to all and sundry. He was a wonderful hawking companion and always full of fascinating information on the natural world he loved so well. Above all, he was a man of great kindness and generosity and with an easy manner that endeared him to everyone he met.

On the 20 of November 2021, just eleven days after Mike's passing, we gathered on Glencar Bog in Co. Kerry during our field meet and built a cairn in his honour. Some beautiful words were spoken, some tears were shed but there were plenty of smiles too as we toasted the memory of our friend before we moved off to hawk the elusive Kerry snipe. Glencar is in an area of outstanding natural beauty and had been a favourite snipe hawking haunt of Mike's. As the years pass, we

over but thankfully Mike came back fitter than ever. The daunting challenge of taking a snipe with a trained bird of prey never deterred him and on the day he finally caught his first snipe, myself and Bruce couldn't help but smile as Martin gave him the traditional bleeding. Mike attended many meets here over the years, and whether he was flying or not I always felt he was an integral part of what was a golden age of snipe-hawking in Irish falconry. Mike hadn't a bad bone in his body and kept to that old adage of "*if you've nothing nice to say, say nothing*". I'd also go as far as saying that he was generous to a fault. Down through the years Mike has been known for gifting young eyasses to friends both here and at home and I've heard that there's a pair of merlins on the way to the IHC. And of course those little bottles of Sloe gin and cherry brandy that we all looked forward to receiving annually. I have to say what impressed me the most about Mike was his ability to talk to anybody and at any level and without doubt he never looked down his nose at anyone. The falconry community has lost some great people as of late and it's sad to say that Mike has now been added to that list.

Mike's legacy won't be forgotten and I personally will cherish all the days I spent in his company traipsing the bogs of Ireland. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a hanam dílis.

will continue to add our rocks to the cairn on our hawking visits there and remember with great affection our brother in falconry.

### **Ronnie Moore**

My friend Mike Nicholls, sadly passed away on the 9 November 2021, who died at the relatively young age of 69. To the falconry world, he was simply known as just 'Mike'; although we always acknowledged his academic standing within the scientific fraternity, and we have often seen through these pages of *The Falconer*, his scientific-based articles on raptor biology, especially with peregrines and merlins.

I first met Mike at a BFC field meet in North Yorkshire, when I was acting as the field master. Watching Mike, I could see he was very nervous, so I thought the best thing to do was to offer him the first flight with his female goshawk, thinking it may help to relax him a little by getting it out of the way and not having to wait nervously for as to when it would be his turn. As he was removing the retaining clip on his flying jesses, he stumbled with his goshawk slipping out of his hand and landing on the floor in front of him. Wanting to make light of the situation, I quipped for him to quickly grab his goshawk before it flew away. Luckily there was no problem, as the hawk just hopped back up to his fist, and he asked me if I still wanted him to continue, which I did of course. Mike promptly cast out 'Sally' his clumber spaniel

and the days hawking began. The dog worked methodically but started to work too far in front of the field, and eventually flushed a pheasant that his goshawk (and all the other hawks in the field) ignored due to the distance. I then told Mike to call his dog in, for which he told me later, he was expecting a reprimand for his dog's behaviour. I reassured him, to continue with his hawking team, but maybe to try and keep his dog working a bit closer to him and his hawk.

From that day on we became good friends, continuing to do so for 42 years until the very sad day he passed away. Mike wanted to speak to me just three hours before he died, a very sad time, which even now moves me to tears. I lost a very good friend, but his children, Margaret, Thomas and Benjamin, with his partner Anne Maria, have lost an exceptional father and spouse.

Mike, by his own admission, was not a natural falconer or dog handler, but he more than made up for this with his interest and enthusiasm, which he had in abundance. He would do or try anything to get the best out of his hawks and dogs. In the time we spent together in the field, I watched him take quarry with goshawks, sparrowhawks, Harris hawks, merlins and hybrid merlins, as well as a tiercel peregrine. It may have taken him a while to find what he wanted in falconry, but to my mind he found his falconry niche with the small falcons. Alongside his hawks, were his dogs, starting with clumber spaniels, then Brittany spaniels, before finding the working dog breed that best suited

Left: Mike Nicholls & Maurice Nicholson





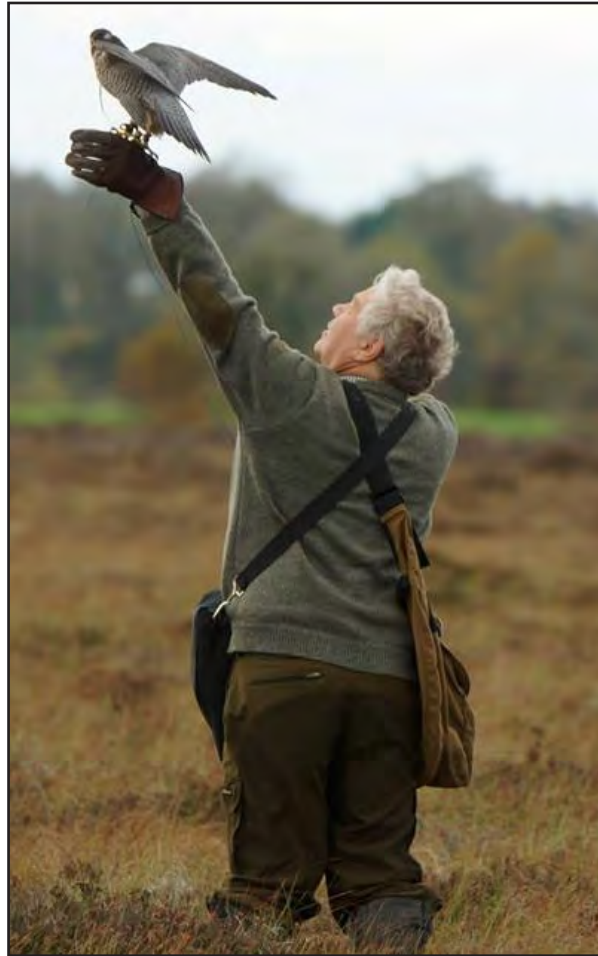
him. This was his beloved Braques Francais (type Pyrenees), which are a popular French hunting dog, and seldom seen outside of France. Mike brought his latest one down to us in Dorset before the Covid lockdown. We went for an afternoon's training on a shooting estate and his bitch worked stunningly well, a credit to him and all the hard work he had put into her.

We all knew Mike, as he was such a well-known figure in British falconry. He was also a highly respected academic, liaising with various universities around the world, working on the conservation genetics of birds of prey. Working with the Sussex Peregrine Study, investigating the genetic origination of the Sussex peregrines. We were able to read some of his findings in last year's edition of *The Falconer* (2021), in his article '*Relationships between wild free-living and domestic peregrines in the UK*'.

As well as being a frequent contributor to *The Falconer*, he would sometimes be asked, in the absence of an editor, to assist, as part of an editorial team with the Journal and Newsletter. Mike also assisted me when I was cajoled into writing a book on my falconry career and life; he kindly offered to edit what can only be described as one long sentence of 147,644 words. He, in fact, completely edited my draft manuscript into a working title, correcting all my English and arranging it so it could be presented for publication, a task he completed just three weeks before he died. Mike would not accept any payment or any other form of remuneration. It is hoped that the book will be published sometime in the near future, and on publication the book will be dedicated to his memory. Mike also made a significant contribution to the clubs he was a member of, including the IHC. We will miss him in the field, within council, and other positions of office he has held over the years. We have lost a stalwart of the highest order in the world of falconry, and I have lost a very dear friend. Mike was a wonderful and kind human being, and the world will be a poorer place without his presence, but his memory and what he has given to falconry, will continue to live on.

### **Trevor Roche**

Just a few words about a true gent of our beloved field sport, Mike Nicholls. Mike was a fellow falconer, an encyclopaedia of knowledge and a very dear friend with a smile you could never forget. Always someone that was willing to share the vast scope of knowledge he had acquired which he would relay with ease and affection. His texts on messenger were always greatly appreciated, they kept our friendship alive until he arrived for the next field meet. Caring, enthusiastic, great fun, with a bad pair of knees that never stopped him. A very great friend that will be dearly missed. RIP Mike.



### **Martin Brereton**

Mick Nicholls was a gentleman and a good friend and anybody that met him, loved him. Mike was not the one that was going to kill snipe every day, but he was the one you wanted to go hunting with for so many reasons. Easy going, relaxed, great to chat with, and loved good falconry. Mike was one of the first to come from the UK for snipe hawking and continued to come every year thereafter and always brought a bird. He struggled across the soft bogs but never gave up and always had a smile on his face, especially when he got stuck- he did get bogged down on many occasions but there was always a friendly hand to pull him out.

Down through the years we hunted all over the country from Kerry to Galway, Moate, Edenderry and everywhere in-between. We had great craic and so many laughs in the field and pubs. Mike sometimes came twice a year in November and January and stayed with me now and then and also with friends he had got to know through snipe hawking.

Mike and Margaret came over to stay at my house when my son got married abroad; they looked after birds and dogs for two weeks and during that time, he travelled every day to different parts of the country. He loved Ireland and the IHC and was a very interesting man to talk to - a wealth of knowledge on nearly any subject. He was a great family man and spoke proudly of

them all the time. Every Christmas his card arrived that always featured a falconry theme.

I spoke to Mike during his last few weeks and days and I was so sad to realise he was not going to make the January trip as his health deteriorated. Mike passed away after a hard fight with cancer with his family around him. Mike, my good friend; we miss you but will never forget you and the time we spent together. It was our great pleasure to know you and thank you for coming to fly snipe with us for so many years.

### **Darren and Sharron Redington**

It's with a heavy heart we heard of the passing of Dr. Mike Nicholls. He was not only a highly skilled and discerning falconer, but to us a very dear friend. Someone whose presence brought us laughter and joy and his passing brings an insurmountable loss to not only ourselves but to the wider sport. In his professional life as a raptor biologist, he led the charge. In his home life he was an authority on the red naped shaheen, a merlin fanatic and a long time enthusiast for the Braque Francais (French Pointer). It was through his annual migration to Ireland in the pursuit of snipe that we got to know him. He became a great friend to us, with us looking forward to these outings in the Autumn and Winter of each year. He will be greatly missed but his legacy will endure through the memories we shared. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam.

### **Don Ryan**

They say the full impact of a good friend passing doesn't really hit you till well after the occurrence. For me, it was three weeks later when I drove into the Sneem Hotel to our field meet in late November and spotted a red Yeti parked in front of the hotel (the car we had come to associate Mike with in recent years). My first thought was; 'great, Mike's here already..'. And then it hit me. Whether it was the four hour drive or wherever my mind was for the briefest of moments, I'll never know, but I do remember that awful sinking feeling when I realised Mike wouldn't be there and I would never get to see his thoughtful, cheerful face again.

I'm not sure exactly when I first met Mike which is not surprising as he didn't impose himself. There was no grand entry of Mike into your life; just a gentle familiar presence as if he was always there. Recent years have been a muddle but I guess it must have been in 2014 at our International Snipe Hawking Meet when we first met. Since then, I looked forward to his visits each year as I know many members did. He had a wide network of friends all over the world that he communicated with regularly and I know he made each of us feel we had a special connection. Mike was a great support to me in my role as director in many ways;

from his insightful presentations at our meets, to advice both scientific and practical and he had no hesitation in accepting my invite to attend a meeting with the NIEA in Belfast to discuss our wild take applications - the science behind it, the practicalities and the benefits.

Although I can't remember our first meeting, I do remember our last. It was at our midlands field meet in January 2020. Mike stayed with me on the evening before he travelled home and as always, we talked of many things; from Brexit, which he abhorred, to his scientific studies, dogs and falconry, which he savoured. We made our plans for the following season which included merlin meets, gin recipes, dogs and falcons and said goodbye the following morning. We communicated regularly during the merlin breeding and flying season of 2020/21 and were both disappointed that he couldn't make it back over due to COVID and other health issues. And then the worst happened. I'm not a religious man but I need to believe Mother Nature takes people like Mike before their time because she needs them more than we do. And we do need people like Mike. But that's the way life is - as falconers, we know the circle. It doesn't make it easier and it certainly can't be easy for the family he left behind.

As a mark of respect and to show how much Mike meant to us, falconers from all over Ireland, the UK and Europe brought stones to build a cairn

Right: Don Ryan & Mike Nicholls





on the wild mountain bog in Glencar, Co. Kerry. In recent years, this bog has been a popular location where we shared good times with Mike watching scintillating flights, exceptional dog work and all interspersed with much mirth as falconers sank thigh deep into bog pools. It was a golden age for Irish falconry made all the more special with Mike's presence.

In January 2022, we got word from Mike's wife, Margaret Nicholls, that Mike had generously left the IHC his male and female merlin. We had little idea at the time what bureaucracy we'd meet in trying to get them over to Ireland. However, this is not the time to share those details. Suffice to say, it was a source of great pride and respect for Mike's last wishes that 'Madge' and 'Mikey' did arrive in Ireland and were both flown at our merlin meet in September at Glencar. Indeed, Madge was the star of the meet and put in a tremendous effort to chase a snipe out of sight. One can only hope that our dear friend was looking on.

RIP Mike, you are greatly missed.

### **Kenyon Homfrey**

In the 1970s in England and Wales there was a fairly tight community of young falconers. We were 18 - 20 years old. In those days, we were young and tough and we hunted hard with our hawks; we enjoyed each other's company, we were discovering the world. I suppose on the whole we hunted with sparrowhawks, some of whom were utterly outstanding. Although we

should not say it - discreetly we could hunt far and wide.

In those days finding falconers' furniture such as gloves and hoods was quite hard. At 16 years of age I began to make my own furniture. At 19, our only method of communicating availability was via '*Cage and Aviary Birds*', where I advertised. Mike ordered a glove from me, by post. John Morris also inquired, and I cannot remember if I made a glove for him in the days when we were all flying spars. Maybe I did.

There was a falconers' meet at Harewood House in Yorkshire. Mike, at that time, was writing his doctoral thesis at Liverpool University on grass research and development. Grass, of course, is the basic feed of cattle and sheep.

At the same time Mike Dallimore was reading for a veterinary science degree at Liverpool. Mike and I were at school together at Colwyn Bay - a fee paying school where one was expected to play rugby four days a week in winter and the same amount of cricket in summer. Mike and I were obstreperous and refused to play these games. Instead each afternoon we went hawking and shooting rabbits.

At Harewood House Mike Dallimore told me Mike Nicholls was there - and that he was a 'substantial' man. Indeed he was. Short in height. Broad in beam. By look, pugnacious. Mike Nicholls had ordered and paid for the glove. I had yet to deliver. And so we met. From that day on Mike Nicholls was a constant friend, through the

thick and the thin of this troublesome world. We both lost our marriages. When we had no hawks we both bred canaries. Somehow, wherever I was in Ireland, there was a mutual friend, and Mike would send me years of back copies of 'Cage and Aviary Birds' via that friend. And whenever I needed a friend in my vicissitudes of this life, Mike was there. Between us we perfected many hood patterns.

Mike died of cancer last year. It was in three places in his body, and he was tired and ragged from it. For me it is a great sadness to lose a good friend. For him as a falconer, for me as a falconer, for us as friends, I think we supported each other in bad times. We humans will all suffer. We find our consolation in hawks.

Mike, in heaven there are no laws. Find a male gos, or a beautiful merlin. Hunt, my friend. All the dogs are perfect. And we shall meet again.

### Keith Barker

At an IHC three day meet in the company of friends of Mike Nicholls who had recently passed away, a good standard of falconry and commitment was shown, as Mike himself was well accustomed. A candle and photograph burned overlooking the weathering area in Sneem to remember him by.

We drove to Glencar on Saturday and there at the meet we erected a cairn of rocks that we had

brought with us. Carine Troudart had brought hers from France which was a wonderful gesture. We each took a shot of Mike's home brewed sloe gin that he gave to our members on numerous field meetings throughout Ireland.

Robert Hutchinson made a tear jerking speech. I looked around through my watering eyes and I was not alone; it was a truly emotional moment that brought out the grief into that wild and unforgiving landscape.

Trevor Roche lofted his tiercel peregrine later, he climbed into the heavens to be joined by a raven all dressed in black and they quarrelled for a while. Then bullet came over at an altitude of 400m followed by a vertical, neck breaking stoop that we all aspire to seeing from our peregrines. This flight was dedicated by Trevor to the memory of Mike.

Eric Witkowski provided a picnic for the falconers and field and we shared a lot of memories and traded banter as we ate, celebrating the life of our good friend who will be missed so much. God bless you Mike Nicholls.



Right: At Mike's cairn at Glencar with the merlins. Standing L to R, Keith Barker, Aodhán Brown, Wayne Davis, Don Ryan, Veronique Blontrock, Willem Vrijenhoak. Kneeling - Jamesie King.



# HUMBLE PIE HAWKING

Don Ryan

Co. Dublin



Left: Magpie  
Hawking Print  
1856

**Two of the great challenges facing long wing falconers are the availability of quarry and access to suitable ground to fly them. There is a widely held belief that falcons need open country to be flown safely. This is largely true, particularly in relation to 'waiting on' game hawking. However the much overlooked 'out of the hood' style flight has the benefits of offering more choice of quarry and less demands on the need for open landscapes.**

In regards to quarry, we are all guilty of not appreciating what's under our nose in many aspects of our lives and in this instance, it's what flies past us many times a day in a whirl of black and white in our streets, gardens, and open countryside. I am, of course, talking about the humble magpie, mag, maggie or pie as it is often known. It's fair to say, there isn't a corner in Ireland where magpies aren't present, albeit they may not be in what many consider ideal flying country but that's a discussion for another time and for someone more qualified. The object of this article is to consider the prospect of flying longwings on magpies.

The Eurasian magpie is thought to rank among

the world's most intelligent creatures and is one of the few non-mammal species able to recognize itself in a mirror test. They are a cheeky much loved/much hated bird with a unique style of flight and an unmistakable vocal chattering. Their human-like qualities of greed and curiosity get them into fierce trouble every year when they fall foul to Larsen Traps put out by those who refuse to overlook their destructive nature on game and songbird species. I had one cheeky young pie slip through the bars of my tiercel's pen earlier this year in an attempt to rob a day old chick from the front perch. He was almost successful until he discovered he couldn't get back out. After a protracted chase around the pen, the tiercel finally caught him and proceeded to rearrange his head feathers. I traded his unfortunate life from the bemused tiercel for a day old chick and released his sorry ass back into the neighbourhood. He never robbed chicks again but for many weeks after was easily recognised by his bald head.

My own experience with magpie hawking is limited as I only ever caught one with a male goshawk after a brief unexciting flight. In his early years, when the opportunity arose, I slipped

him on every magpie that presented itself but as his attempts became more half-hearted, I gave up - as did he - it seems that once the magpie gains control of the air, he knows he has the goshawk beat. After the initial explosive burst, if the goshawk hasn't gained sufficient ground to control the magpie's escape, he accepts the outcome and doesn't expend too much effort in further pursuit, preferring to glide to the nearest tree.

A more formidable accipiter for the pie is the fearless and more agile sparrowhawk. They appear to be fully aware of each other's abilities as the magpie takes the spar's sudden appearance far more seriously than the appearance of a goshawk. I had the pleasure one fine day while out with Rowland Eustace to witness Hilary White's spar 'Sarah Green', corkscrew up a tree in a most impressive display of agility to mop one up. Passionate sparrowviter Aodhán Brown, has had considerable success with spars on a variety of prey and maintains that there is no safe distance or space for a magpie to hide from a committed spar and they are a lot of fun to fly. In Aodhán's experience, some hawks love them while others will only take them if flown at a tight flying weight and then there are those who will not even acknowledge them if there are other options such as jackdaws around. But they are great at building fitness and filling in the days before the game hawking days start.

As far as I'm aware, but happy to be corrected, there is no one flying magpies deliberately as a target species with falcons since the 1970's in Ireland. Sparrowhawks have been the hawk of choice for magpies from the 80's onwards. Thelma Mansfield had great success with her spar Alanna, in the 1980s taking 12 magpies in three weeks with a personal best of four in one day. This was a golden era for flying sparrowhawks in Ireland. It may have been due to the lack of access to falcons during that period when wild take falcon licences were suspended due to a review by the

“Together, these articles span over a century of hawking for the ‘humble pie’ in Ireland and offer a fascinating insight into a much overlooked quarry”

Right: Aodhán Brown's spar on a magpie by John Moore





Left: Magpie Hawking 1890  
Print from A Familiar History of Birds by Edward Stanley.

Right: Bobby Spens with 'Rufus'

limited knowledge, I'm going to pass you over to three more experienced longwing 'pie' hawkers in the following articles on magpie hawking in Ireland by Bobby Spens (1937), John Morris (1969) and John Greaves (1970). I'd also like to draw your attention to 'A Hawking Tour of Ireland' featured elsewhere in this journal that gives an account of Francis Henry Salvin's adventure where they caught 52 magpies with two tiercels during the month of April in 1861.

Together, these articles span over a century of hawking for the 'humble pie' in Ireland and offer a fascinating insight into a much overlooked quarry.

### MAGPIE HAWKING

R.R.P.S. (Bobby Spens)

*The Falconer*, Number 1 May 1937

(Republished by kind permission of the BFC)

**Having seen only 11 magpies killed with one cast of tiercels, I am hardly in a position to offer any very valuable observations on this sport, which does not seem to have been practised at all during the last 60 years. However, for the sake of those who own tiercels, and (because they are unable for one reason or another to fly them at partridges) are looking for a suitable quarry I will endeavour to point out some of the mistakes which we made and the best method we have yet found of flying this difficult quarry.**

If the eyrie from which the young tiercels come is early enough, it is of great advantage to hack the young birds, although this is by no means necessary. The chief advantage gained from hacking the hawks is that they will be less likely to crab later on. The hawks should be trained as if for a combination of game hawking and rook hawking. The tiercels should wait on, but at no very great height - steadiness is of far more value than a high pitch, and good footing is also of great importance. Whenever possible, the young birds should be flown together.

With the hawks trained, suitable country must now be found. It must be very open, though not so open as is necessary for rook-hawking and there must be magpies. Parts of the West of Ireland are the best, as the banks afford good though not too thick cover for the magpies, and there are plenty of them.

When we first started looking for magpies to fly we tried to do so by car. We were told by the local inhabitants that there were plenty about, and we thought that, owing to the open nature of the land, we would easily spot them from the car. Consequently we had two or three days when we did not even slip the hawks. Unlike rook hawking, where the quarry is always spotted from the car, we found that the only way to find the magpies was to drive to a likely spot and then get out and walk. A flicker of black and white or the familiar

Department on the status of peregrines.

As the availability of falcons are no longer an issue and particularly as magpies are still an abundant species, perhaps it's time to review this quarry that can combine both waiting on and out of the hood style flights. Tiercels are the gender of choice so you don't have to worry about committing your prize falcon gentle. It also carries the exciting prospect of flying falcons in a cast. Past falconers considered magpie hawking very worthy of consideration: In *Observations upon Hawking* (1826), Sir John Sebright, wrote that 'Nothing can be more animating than this sport: it is, in my opinion, far superior to every other kind of hawking'. E. B. Michell was also complimentary of its qualities when he wrote in *The Art and Practice of Hawking* (1900): 'But for those who like bustle and excitement, and hard exercise for the legs and voice, few things will beat magpie-hawking'.

We are also reliably informed by past stalwarts of the practice, that Ireland has all the essential qualities for magpie hawking or at least, once did. Jack Mavrogordato wrote: 'The best country for magpie hawking is downland with scattered bushes or discontinuous hedges or bogland interspersed with gorse and alder such as is to be found in the west of Ireland'. Charles Hawkins Fisher was even more complimentary when he wrote: 'Ireland is the paradise of magpie-hawking'

Rather than prattle on about a subject I have

"chatter-chatter" showed us where our quarry was to be found.

September seems to be the best month for the flight as it is the earliest that the hawks can be trained to wait on with sufficient steadiness; later on, in the winter, the weather in the West of Ireland is so unpleasant that magpie hawking would be hardly pleasant. In September the magpies are still flying about in family groups, usually of about seven: we first made the mistake of slipping both hawks together at such families. With both hawks in the air at once, we soon found it impossible to separate out one magpie from the flock: they would bunch together and follow each other from bush to bush. With only one hawk in the air, it was very much easier to get one magpie away from the others.

And so we decided to keep one hawk hooded until the magpie was singled out. The one whose job it was to slip the second hawk then had the difficult task of timing the slip accurately. If he slipped as the magpie left cover, the hawk waiting on would very likely stoop at the other hawk, which would probably mean that the flight would end there and then. Again, if he waited too long, the magpie would get to cover before the second hawk could be of any use at all. Then while the two hawks were waiting for the falconers to come up, having nothing else to do, they would very likely crab, with the same result as before. For the very second that the two hawks met and locked in the air, the magpie would be away from his hiding place and lost.

Another fault we made sometimes, was to try to drive the magpies out from bad into better country. It is possible by sending beaters a long way round, to drive the magpies towards the falconers. But if the falconers try to drive the magpies before them, they will nearly always fail. The magpie appears to move very slowly across the country, only moving a few hundred yards at a time. It looks very easy and tempting to follow on foot in the hope of catching him up or heading him off. But once he realises that he is being followed and he does so very soon, he travels a good deal faster than anyone on foot. As soon, therefore, as the magpie starts to move away from the party one hawk must be slipped. The very fact of a hawk being in the air even if he does not see his quarry will keep the magpie still, wherever he may be.

I will now describe one of the flights in which we took part which is typical of most of the flights which we saw.

There was a stiff wind blowing, which was useful, particularly with a small field of only three or four in that no magpie can fly against the wind when pressed by a hawk. Even if there is thick cover a hundred yards up wind, he cannot reach it. On this occasion we saw the magpies from the car by the side of the road. We stopped the cars well short



of the place where the magpies were seen, and took a circle round on foot, to take advantage of some high ground on the left of the road. As soon as one of them started to move, one hawk was slipped, the beaters running down the hill to put the magpies out. The tiercel chased two or three, and eventually put one into the bank some three or four hundred yards farther along the road. As the magpie was some way ahead, the tiercel was taken down to the lure and one falconer, with the hawk hooded on the fist was then sent on by a detour to the far end of the bank of gorse, the other beating up towards him. The magpie was then flushed between the two hawks and as he went out both were slipped. He was then chased by the beaters from bush to bush, with both tiercels stooping whenever possible. Eventually he got into a bank with a beater at both ends. They both beat along towards him, so that for the first time he was forced out across the open, with the hawks waiting on low and steady overhead. Both hawks stooped in turn, forcing him to drop into a hollow in the ground, when both hawks came down on him. One of the hawks was taken off on a lure as quickly as possible.

The special appeal of magpie hawking is that the hawks are quite unable to catch their quarry without considerable assistance from the falconers and field. In rook or game hawking, once the hawk is slipped, the falconer is generally an idle



spectator, and is very often in the worst position to see the flight. As often as not a member of the field must take the hawk down to the lure after an unsuccessful flight, or make in to kill the rook after a successful one. With magpie hawking, on the other hand, the hawks are of no use on their own. Also it is essential to have two hawks for the job. However much one hawk is assisted, he is apparently unable to catch a magpie on his own. It is certainly a difficult flight to accomplish, although once the hawks understand what is happening it becomes fairly simple. With young hawks, it is necessary continually to be looking up to see where they are. When they have killed a few magpies this is no longer necessary. As soon as they see you running shouting towards a bush, they will come up overhead, knowing a magpie will be put out. The lure need only be used to take them down after an unsuccessful flight. To start with they will crab at every opportunity. Later on, if they have put a magpie into thick cover, they can be kept waiting on for some minutes while the cover is being beaten below them.

The magpie as a quarry is the most clear headed of them all. When a lark drops into cover it lands with a thump, as if a stone had been thrown into the cover. When a magpie reaches cover even if the hawk is close behind, he will spread his wings and land in a perfectly easy and unhurried manner I have seen a magpie hard pressed into a gorse bush: when he got there with the hawk waiting on overhead, he sat on the branch cleaning his beak. When he flies he makes use of every bit of cover there is; a tuft of grass in an open field will enable him to throw out a hawk with ease. On one occasion I saw one slip underneath a sheep while it grazed, and everywhere the sheep went the magpie hopped between its feet. He takes advantage of every opportunity given him and

always appears to be at his best. We never came across a 'dud', as so often happens in rook or lark hawking. Although it is not as spectacular as the best rook flight, it is well worth going to Ireland to see it.

### MAGPIE HAWKING IN IRELAND 1969

By The Hon. John Morris

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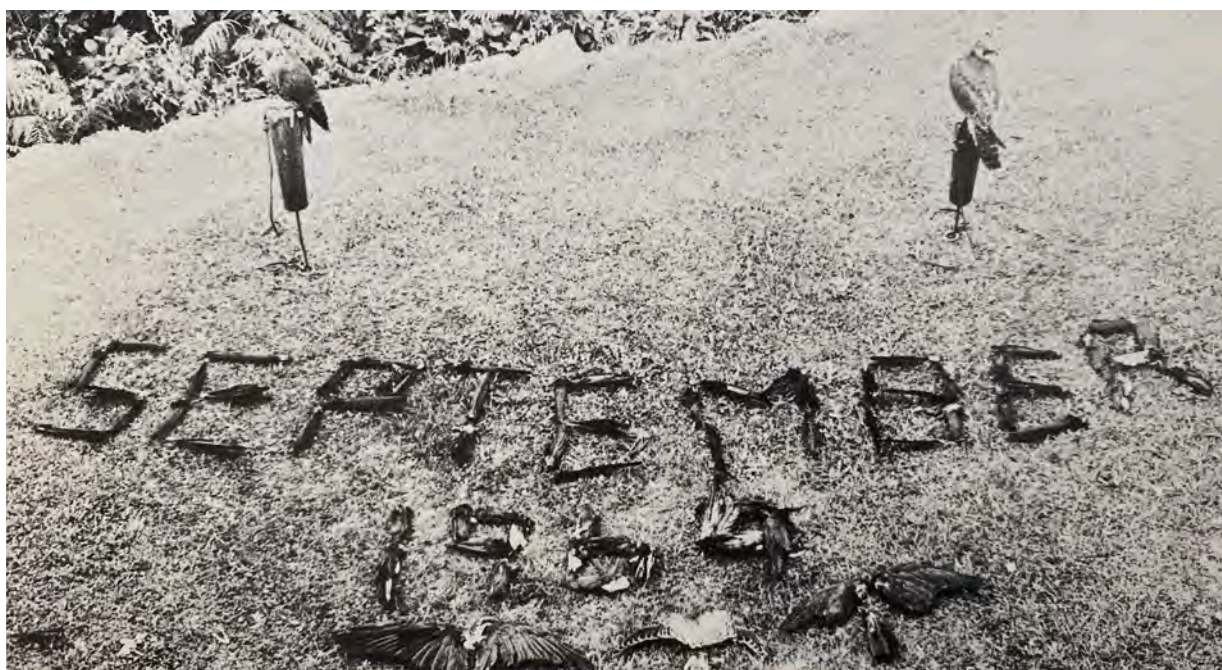
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**Ireland has always been famous for its Magpie Hawking which was largely practised up until the middle of the nineteenth century. With its great expanse of open bogland it is a paradise for the practice of this sport.**

Magpies were unknown in Ireland before the seventeenth century, when to quote one Robert Leigh writing of Co. Wexford in 1684 - *"About eight years ago there appeared in these parts . . . a parcel of magpies which now breed"*.

In 1851 Captain Salvin records that he killed 184 magpies during a stay of four months near Fermoy, Co. Tipperary with two peregrine tiercels, killing as many as eight a day. In 1873 Captain Salvin, this time with the help of his friend the Hon. Gerald Lascelles, took twenty-eight magpies and three spars, and about the same number of rooks and other quarry in the space of one month. It is also recorded that in 1879 members of the Old Hawking Club, flying their falcons in Co. Kildare and Co. Tipperary, succeeded in killing 58 head of quarry in three weeks. Two of their best tiercels killed 44 magpies in 13 days.

Nearer the present day, magpies have been flown by members of both the British Falconers' Club and the Irish Hawking Club without the success there had been in the past. However in



Left: A memorable Bag of magpies with a cast of falcons - Hon John Morris

Right: Victoria and Albert - Hon John Morris



1969, carrying on the magpie-hawking tradition in a new location, we had better luck.

Our base was my country home in a small village called Spiddal, on the west coast just inside the Connemara Gaeltacht (Irish speaking area), which is surrounded by flat bogland, sprinkled with clumps of gorse, deep narrow trenches, rivers and small farms surrounded by trees which offer the magpie much shelter. Ronald Stevens the famous falconer lives only fifteen miles west of this location.

We were flying eyass peregrine falcons, which are considered by most falconers inadequate for this flight on account of their large size and inexperience in the field. They were not hacked in the usual way but by a process we called 'accompanied hack', i.e. they were taken to the same part of the bog every day early in the morning and released. They would first of all have a bath in one of the many turf cuttings and when they were dry they would follow us across the bog for miles. If they tired of this a lure was produced in order to gain their interest again. They were then taken down to the lure late in the evening and placed in the mews after feeding.

With the help of my two friends Alec Phinn from Rotherham and Robert Nairac from Gloucestershire we built up their stooping power to fifty stoops at the minimum at one time. Our signal telling us that they were ready for magpies came when together they caught a pipit in the air proving to us that they could work as a team and that their footwork was good. We called the falcons 'Victoria' and 'Albert' disregarding their sex!

Now that they were ready for entering we had to find a young magpie which would normally have little experience in flying or evading a

hawk. It would also have a short tail which would make it less manoeuvrable. To complete the correct conditions it had to be alone and in good coverless country. Although we searched for hours driving towards Moycullen we failed to see a single 'pie'. They may have all been on the ground out of sight, for magpies are rarely seen except when they show, then conspicuous uniform flying from bush to bush or appear on a rock near the ground where they have been for some time already.

However after three hours we did 'spy a pie', in fact a family party of about seven in and around an empty schoolhouse. There was also bad cover consisting of a small wood on a hill behind the school. In desperation and contrary to all the rules in magpie-hawking we slipped both falcons from behind the cover of the wood. The resulting confusion was incredible. Both hawks chased about five different magpies one after the other round and round the schoolhouse until they were both completely exhausted, having sent one magpie in through an open window of the school, another over the top of the door of the outside lavatory and the rest panicking for cover in the wood where we were screaming in order to keep them out. Although this did not do the hawks' morale any good since it was their first day out, we did have better luck the following day.

Robert spotted just the 'pie' we required about fifty yards off the road away from cover. Having stopped the car behind a roadside gorse we unhooded the falcons shouting as we did so. The 'pie' taken by surprise, made straight back to the gorse beside the car, having easily evaded the inexperienced falcons. In the excitement of the chase I jumped screaming like a madman into the middle of the gorse in order to flush the 'pie'. This I



Left: Thelma Mansfield and Alanna

did very successfully and just at the right moment and 'Victoria' nabbed him just before he made it to another bush. 'Albert' joined in on the kill to receive her reward. They were both given plenty to encourage them. Knowing they did little in the way of exercise we decided to fly them again. This time it was no 'pie' but a small party of rooks not far off the road. We slipped both falcons together hoping they would not mind flying something that was not a 'pie'. They did not seem to mind at all and went like rockets up wind both flying different rooks. However, 'Albert' spotted an old slow one and had it beaten in the air when 'Victoria' chucked hers and joined in. By this stage the rook was on the ground dodging in and out of an iron gate. However, the late appearance of 'Victoria' put an end to his tricks when there was a hawk on each side of the gate, 'Albert' had him and we ended our first real day's hawking with two kills.

After the first week we had caught eight magpies and two rooks, and the falcons were now really working as a team. We soon got to know the different tactics of the magpie, for this was our first attempt at this flight, and named them as in lark-hawking, 'grounders,' 'dodgers' and 'mounter's'.

A 'grounder' when flown would just disappear into cover like a drain or a rabbit hole and no amount of shouting would flush them. The hawks did learn to wait on at about 50 ft over the spot where the 'pie' had just put in waiting for it to reappear. If he did not they would rest on a nearby rock or go after a bird they spotted down wind. For this reason we developed two hunting cries. One for flushing the 'pie' out of cover and the other to call up the falcons when the 'pie' was eventually flushed.

The 'dodger's' tactics were used when the 'pie' realised he would have no chance if he panicked for cover. He would dodge in and out of rocks, tiring the hawk who could not get a good crack at him. His stoops were evaded by the pie suddenly

crouching down in the long grass just in the nick of time. The hawk, tired of this game, would land out of breath beside the 'pie' after maybe forty attempts. The 'pie' then taking advantage of his manoeuvrability on his legs and also his quicker take off would make cover. This only happens when flying one falcon at a time with no beaters.

The 'mounter' is a very sporting magpie. On seeing the hawk he shoots up into the sky on his tail and tries to beat the hawk in the air. These 'pies' rarely escape because the hawk either flew under it waiting for it to come down or followed it up and caught it on its headlong dive for cover. After about two weeks of flying them in a cast, we had to fly them separately since one used to do twice as much work as the other with the result that they started to crab.

Our best day occurred when Robert, Alec and I flew the falcons separately. With only two beaters (the other falconer carrying the hawk that was not being flown) we caught four magpies. The hawks caught two each including one in the air each. The most exciting flight was that at a hooded crow. Having failed to kill anything with 'Albert' after three very good flights at magpies, we slipped at a group of six hooded crows. 'Albert', to our amazement, went after the strongest and put in stoop after stoop which the hooded crow seemed to evade very easily. After ten minutes they were lost from sight downwind. I ran as fast as I could towards a lake in the distance to see something flapping in the water about fifteen yards from the shore. I was so exhausted I could only walk even as the thought crossed my mind that maybe the splashing was 'Albert' drowning. By the time I got to the lake edge I saw 'Albert' sitting on top of a dead hooded crow having paddled all the way to the shore. According to two local people who saw her, she had knocked it down into the water with a stoop and had bound onto it refusing to let go.

With a combination of one hawk and the falconer beating and the two hawks and three beaters, in 42 days we bagged four magpies, ten rooks, two hooded crows, one young raven, one kestrel, and a pipit.

## MAGPIE HAWKING IN IRELAND

By J. W. Greaves

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As a quarry, magpie are one of the most difficult a trained hawk can fly over. Magpies don't panic. Whilst they may scream a lot and occasionally look remarkably untidy, they never seem to lose control and are capable of the most astonishing manoeuvres. The successful hawk must be capable of countering such evasive actions as helicopter-type rises, sudden seeming reverses

in mid flight and perhaps an aerial somersault or two. Magpies can drop like a stone to cover, or to no cover and sprint like an ostrich to cover. Cover to a magpie can be heather, a grass bunch, a tyre rut, a prominent stone, a rabbit hole or even a plain flat grass field into which it will try and bury itself, pushing its way into the grass roots head first, leaving nothing but its tail sticking out at an angle. Magpies rarely try to get above a hawk. They seem to realise that this is not really on, and save themselves for a flat-out down-wind break to refuge. Only once did I ever see a magpie definitely miscalculate. Whilst the majority seem to be able to look at three things at once – the two hawks above and at the same time keep an eye on where they are going – this one did a neat flip over a bank, presumably to cower beneath it for a breather, where it found itself up to its neck in water and being carried down-stream at a high rate of knots. And still we didn't catch him. To fly magpie successfully therefore, one needs an adept hawk of a particular style in flight.

As to the hawk and its training there are several differing schools of thought, and several major considerations to be held in mind. A 'pie rarely goes up or breaks hard so there is no need for a high pitch, rather for a steady pitch of about 50 feet, on many occasions less. A 'pie will, as aforesaid, duck, dart, twist, run, skitter about and at times go jolly fast, so what is needed is a hawk that has the ability of stalling in mid-flight, braking hard – and doing so sometimes in mid-stoop – and capable of very sudden acceleration. Some swear by the speed and agility of the peregrine tiercel, my good friend Ronald Stevens decided to try luggers and I felt that lanners were remarkably suited. A lanner, with its broad desert wings, is extremely able and in control of its flight; it can stall, twist, turn, brake and yet with just a few 'flicks' can come onto very level terms with a fleeing magpie. Add to this the advantage of a hawk that does not balk at the prospect of going to ground for a kill and you have, as Jack Mavrogordato recognised (which is where I got the idea) a pretty effective magpie hawk.

One last consideration is the country to be flown over. To do the flight justice to gain stoop after stoop at a ducking, hopping, weaving and perpetually squawking magpie one must have open country and the 'pie sitting out where he can be got at. To fly in enclosed country where the falconer and a team of helpers (for he will surely need them) are perpetually throwing sticks and clods of earth at a treed 'pie, shouting themselves hoarse, is fun of a sort and certainly energetic, but too often results in a frustrated hawk waiting on over the wrong side of a hedge from which bolts a knowing magpie, turning the whole thing into a rat race. Better by far is a field, a good dog for flushing, two well-conditioned hawks to be flown singly turn about, or perhaps in a cast, and plenty

of open space. Admittedly such places are few in England, but Ireland holds many – and Ireland holds many magpies.

In September 1966, Jack Mavrogordato, Michael and June Woodford came over to Ireland. Also in the party were two peregrines owned by Michael and June, brought along for the express purpose of flying at magpie. Unfortunately the weather proved unkind and for some reason or other there were no magpies where there should have been a great many. Things, it appears, never got really started and my main recollection of their visit (I only joined them for an afternoon and evening) was Jack Mavrogordato expressing great pleasure at the speed in which his trousers had dried out after he had had to wade waist deep in a pond to flush out a teal for his waiting on falcon to take (successfully). In October 1966 I called in to see Ronald Stevens, whom the aforementioned had called upon during their stay, and the talk quite naturally drifted to magpie-hawking. Ronald and I decided that it might just be the thing for our respective hawking areas and tentatively discussed hawks and prospects. I thus have no hesitation in naming Jack Mavrogordato, Michael and June Woodford as the instigators of nearly three years of frustration, worry and nerve-racking tension from which I emerge a mere shadow of my former self.

A period of time after the above conversation, a friend in Rhodesia very kindly made me a present of a beautiful passage lanner and lanneret, of the South African nominate form *F. biarmicus biarmicus*. In the meantime Ronald had decided to pin his faith on luggers and in one lugger in particular called 'Plunkett'. Along came the hawking season of 1968, and put back were my holidays. Instead of hawking I spent a period of field work catching starfish and other such marine creepy crawlies as the museum desired and then had to go off to Sicily (where incidentally there are some beautiful Eleonoras) during the latter half of September. I returned to a cast of fat, wild and out of condition lanners and to the prospect of October as a hawking month. The only bright ray in the sky was that Ronald's 'Plunkett', who was flying free around his house and murdering his free-flying parakeets, was flying magpies, catching them and then letting them go again. Coupled with this, however, the grapevine held the ominous note that he had recently acquired two peregrines for grouse.

In my frustrated eye I could see Ronald, after an unsuccessful try by 'Plunkett', bringing out his two 'grouse' hawks and with a "*Don't suppose they will really do anything, but we can just try them. . .*" proceed to astound me with two deadly mad magpie hawks. Happily not everyone's mind runs along the same devious lines as does my own and Ronald really did want his peregrines for grouse. I then repaired to Ballymote and to a stretch of

hill called Curlew Mountain, an area crawling with magpies.

I won't dwell upon the rain, the 90 mph winds which swept the Mullet, the one flight at magpie (missed) and 'Ghillie' and 'Lady Jane', for so I had named my lanners, deciding to end matters by each dropping a cart load of primaries and trains. So ended 1968.

1969 dawned and circumstances took a twist. Fortune, it seemed, was beginning to smile. I took up a cast of clean moulted lanners at just about the same time that everybody else was putting up for the moult, giving myself a very large slice of hawking pie (pardon the pun) that was to stretch from April and good starters at young magpie, to September – some six months in all.

We started off very well with 'Ghillie' (the lanneret) taking his first 'pie from his first slip; a very young magpie but as it was his first I counted it. 'Lady Jane' however, refused. It was weeks before she scored – and that was at rook. She was severely battered in that and loath I am to say, was rather a disappointment. 'Ghillie' was rather small for the job and in spite of numerous battles kept going on sheer pluck. He had the stickiest feet and, at quarry, the heaviest feet, which eventually proved fatal. In the beginning he caught one 'pie in about every five flights, his third kill bringing the start of his troubles. He had flown the 'pie to ground in two stoops, had cut it hard, knocking the squawking bundle about two yards from where it was trying to bury itself in the grass. He curled over after his second stoop and put in on top of it. It was an adult 'pie and from the crabbing that was going on as I ran up, seemed determined to sell itself dearly. 'Ghillie' was bound side-on to the rump, and the 'pie had got the points of its slightly open beak embedded in his right carpal joint. I dispatched 'Mr. Pie' but 'Ghillie' was not at all pleased. His wing drooped and although nothing seemed to be broken, I took him home in a far from stable state of mind. It took him two days to get over it and the alula never did go back along the wing again, but always stuck out at a slight angle. He refused his next offered 'pie but took the one after that in a very no-nonsense manner; one foot over the head, the other over its back, and his head down grasping the underside of the neck, he straightened up and by lever action ended the matter in seconds. Number five was also taken in fine style, if somewhat desperately. After five short, hard and near vertical stoops he caught it on the throw-up about ten feet up, binding to the underside of its head he took it up another ten feet before dropping it. It was dead before it hit the ground.

Then came number six, taken in England, and with it, near disaster. The 'pie had made a break down hill. It was a hot summer afternoon with no wind and, filled with lethargy, I had not really

wanted to go out anyway. 'Ghillie' caught up with his 'pie, a very ordinary flight, and bound to its backside. They both came down in a bundle, and by the time I got there a ding-dong battle was in full swing. The 'pie had hit 'Ghillie' several times in the breast, on his head and under the wing and he was gasping, with his wings thrown back and hanging on like grim death. The 'pie was sent off to perhaps happier hunting grounds and I tried to take 'Ghillie' up. With his big sticky feet he had taken the rump in his right and his left had closed upon nothing but tail feathers. He lay winded, there seemed to be an awful lot of blood about from somewhere and he wouldn't open his left foot. I pulled the tail feathers of the dead 'pie out of his clenched foot only to find that he had driven his hind pounce into the bottom of his foot. He had driven it in so far that he couldn't get it out again and I had to pull and lever it out with a marlin spike (the dispatcher) on my pocket knife. It is the first time that I've known this to happen with any trained hawk. I took him home, bathed his foot and left him on an indoor block for the night. The next morning there was a little seepage of puss which I cleaned off, after which I washed the wound with Dettol, and in the afternoon he was standing up on it well enough. That was on the Tuesday before the Game Fair. On Friday morning 'Ghillie' sat in the weathering enclosure at Stamford, seeming none the worse for wear and happily drinking in all that was going on about him. At twelve o'clock he was still fine, but at half-past-twelve he was lying down on the top of his block. I took him into the club tent and was horrified to find both of his feet swelling and very hot. Worse however, was a thin blue line going up the tarsus of his injured foot. Many were the friends-in-a-storm on that occasion, particularly Ridley MacPhail, who gave me an urgent prescription for an antibiotic, and David Reid-Henry who took care of 'Ghillie' whilst I went into Rugby for a chemist. I would like to thank everybody for all of the good gestures, advice and active help which I received at that time. 'Ghillie' pulled through nicely.

From the Game Fair we returned to Ireland, where we were fortunate enough to spend two and a half months in the wilds of Co. Tyrone. 'Ghillie' was soon going again, and celebrated his arrival by taking three magpies in succession, all in excellent style. 'Lady Jane' also seemed pleased at the reunion (she had been staying with a friend whilst we were in England), and very competently took a rook, a feat at which I feel she was more surprised than I.

About this time I again started exercising them both in a cast, a procedure which I had discontinued for some reason at the start of the moult the previous year. They worked well enough together at the lure so I decided to try them at quarry, 'Ghillie' playing the part of a make

hawk. Unfortunately this never really worked. They were both as good as gold together, with never so much as a hint at a crab, but the fact of it was that 'Lady Jane' was just bone idle. She would just slip and slide about whilst 'Ghillie' did all the work until the 'pie' would perhaps come within range, then followed a very half-hearted stoop, the general effect of which was a lost quarry. In eight flights they took only one 'pie as a cast, which was flown to ground by 'Ghillie' and dropped on by 'Lady Jane'. Despite the fact that I think the 'pie was about half dead with rheumatism before ever it was flown, I awarded them half a kill each and discontinued flying in a cast. It seemed to have done some good however, because about a week later she did manage to take a magpie all by herself. It was her only one. She was, as has by now probably been gathered, inconsistent.

Right: John Greaves



We would go for a walk over the hill with the dog flushing the occasional moulting lark or pipit, usually only a matter of a dozen yards or so, and she would be off the fist after them. An incorrigible habit, she would take them just as they were about to put in and pull their heads off, many times jumping back to the fist to do so. She must have taken about fifty of them altogether – and once I think we had a flight of at least twelve yards. But her main forte seemed to be duck. She killed three teal from a reasonable pitch with a good first-time stoop. A grouse getting up anywhere in our vicinity was chased madly by her, though if she were waiting on she proved hopeless at grouse flushed beneath her. On one occasion she missed twice at no more than a cheeper, which on the third occasion was taken by the dog. Oh, the shame of it!

'Ghillie' in the meantime was doing extremely well. We began to run out of available magpies; inconsiderate brutes just would not hang about to be flown at. A slip ceased to have all meaning. 'Ghillie' would see them long before I and he would be off after them. It only needed a magpie to call outside of the Lodge and his head would be craning all around the mews looking for it. His best flight was at a grounded 'pie' at about 50 or so yards. He left the fist flat-out after it and cut underneath it after which he immediately threw up to about 50 feet and turned to stoop at it. The most interesting part of these flights was that he always seemed to know if the 'pie was going to turn and in which direction. He cut down onto the 'pie, which slipped him, but was up again for another go before it could collect itself. In all he put in 16 stoops at that magpie, at times seeming to go up and down, like a yo-yo. He hit it about six or seven times before coming up underneath as the 'pie tried quite desperately to break, and binding to it from an upside down position. That time the 'pie was dead, and he was a little puffed when I reached him. He had several more tousles on the ground but always seemed to get away

with it, or, if not at the time, a few days rest put him right.

His last flight was a fairly normal one in that he had his 'pie scuttling about on the ground whilst he stooped and raked at it. I thought at the time that he had hit it several fairish clouts before eventually going down to a virtually dead magpie. It was his last one. I put him into the mews that night as usual, but on the following morning when I went to take him to weather, his feet were about four times their natural size. Puffy balloons with no real shape. His eyes were lack lustre and his wings drooped slightly. I administered the antibiotic, gave him something in his crop, and put him on a low padded indoor block close to the fire. By lunch time that day he had died.

Three days later I lost 'Lady Jane' in the mist. She was chasing a grouse. The mist stayed for five days (it may have been longer, I don't know) and on the fifth day I heard hawk bells outside of the Lodge. I searched for her and found her perched on the lower branches of a stunted tree which grew across the track from the main gate. She was little more than a bag of bones, obviously had not killed whilst she had been out and her main standby of moulting larks and pipits had completed the moult and dispersed. How she found her way back in the mist from nearly two miles away where I had lost her, I don't know. I gave her a half crop, nursed her for a while and left her on the same low indoor block close to the fire for the night. She was dead the next morning.

Total counted quarry for both hawks was 'Ghillie', 17½ magpies, 'Lady Jane', 3 teal, 2 rook and 1 ½ magpies.





# KEEPING THE FAITH

Keith Barker

Co. Waterford

**Faith is a pure Irish female peregrine; she was bred at home in 2019 from a wild-taken eyass that was taken from an eyrie on the banks of the river Funshion at Glanworth in the county of Cork in 2011.**

She is my first home bred female youngster from this wild taken falcon, fathered by an F1 tiercel by artificial insemination. Her temperament is very laid back, and although a food imprint she was not very vocal. Faith was very loyal in her early training, loving to chase and when the chasing was done showed great promise as a waiting on falcon.

I also have a brother to Faith from the previous year, Jürgen, again a food imprint. He was the first peregrine I ever hatched and hunted with. His quarry is snipe but he sometimes takes a fancy to crows, pigeons, larks, pipits – he is a hunter and not a specialist. I like his style and commitment, loyalty and easy going nature.

In 2019 I tried to fly both falcons at snipe. The pair of them are both triers, the female was more stubborn but as the season progressed she sort of slipped into a groove that I liked, stooping small quarry items flushed from my pointing dog.

I am not going to recount over the countless head of quarry they killed or the out of the stratosphere stoops they performed, but a day that stood out of the rest for so many reasons good and bad. A day that started off well and ended in despair, a day that we have all been to and come away from a little more knowledgeable and thankful that it worked out ok.

I live in a beautiful townland in west Co. Waterford, nestled in the Blackwater Valley. The landscape is rolling with a mixture of mountain, forestry, grassland and tillage; sandwiched between two rivers, we have lots of marginal bogland, a haven for wintering common snipe. Most of the landowners are big into dairy, some with huge herds of milkers, and with huge herds

come lots of grass pasture. In the winter months the pastures are rested and void of cattle and hold plenty of snipe.

One day in particular last season was most memorable. I can't remember the date but I know it was a Sunday as it was a hunt day and due to the state of the ground the hunting had been cancelled for the horses but still going ahead on foot to get the harriers out of the kennels, a day we in the club all look forward to. I am a Joint Master of the Lismore Harriers Hunt Club, a small Sunday pack with approximately 20 odd couple of Irish Harriers. Our quarry is fox, a cunning character, he twists and turns to avoid capture and knows every trick in the book to do so, just like the common snipe.

Hunting with hounds usually begins at noon at this time of the year. In January you get four hours hunting at best before dusk, which is plenty for horse, hound or fox. The hounds were hunting at Ballinvella, in a glen that runs down onto the bank of the river Bride. You can draw this glen and never leave it, with the fox twisting and turning up and down for hours, and spectating is good when you are on foot because you are unlikely to go far.

I had decided to hawk on the other side of the river that morning at Sapperton, this land is owned by the Maxwell family who are milking around a thousand cows. The pastures are huge, plenty of space for a peregrine to stoop a snipe. I arranged to meet my friend Clive Piper who likes to spectate, at eleven o' clock, giving me plenty of time to fly two falcons and drive the short distance across the river to Ballinvella for the hound work.

There is a pigeon fancier at Sapperton whose name is Alan. We get on well, and if I am hawking in his area I let him know well in advance and he keeps his prize pigeons locked in. That day was no exception, I had called him beforehand. We decided to fly Faith first. The sun was shining, the sky was clear blue with no wind, the dog was cast



and at no less than 200 yards, she came solid on point in the grass pasture by some large roadside beech trees. I immediately thought this could be a pheasant feeding on the scattered beech masts, so I held the falcon aloft and away she went climbing steadily into the blue. The dog remained in position, then drifted off to regain her quest for game all the while Faith climbing above us.

The dog hunted up and down quartering her ground searching for snipe, the falcon way up there above us just a dot in the sky, waiting for her hunting companions below her to flush something for her to chase but we failed to provide for her. It is such a pity when this happens but the sight of a falcon waiting on in that position is still a pleasure to behold. I called her down and she came in reluctantly, as this was not what she was expecting.

We walked back to the truck and decided to move further down to the townland of Janeville, still on land belonging to Mr. Maxwell, huge grassland and right beside Alan and the pigeon loft. It was Jurgen's time to shine, the dog hunted up and down, we found a point and the hawk was lofted and climbed to a reasonable pitch. When in position the flush was called and the snipe was lifted only to jink at the very last second, resulting in a tail chase up high into the sky. At this point I pushed on with the dog frantically searching for more, and eventually we secured a second point right behind the pigeon fancier's house. Alan was in his back garden watching Jurgen high above him - who knows what was going through his mind? I can have a good guess.

Now there is a critical point for flushing snipe for your peregrine, slightly upwind of the pointer is better, but when there are no winds I would say directly above. This is where the falconer reminds me of the goal kicker at a rugby match... He looks at the ball, then looks at the posts, then looks at the ball and then the posts again. I guess he is

**“I was elated over the result, but not at the resting place of my falcon who was plucking his meal on the house roof”**

trying to imagine the trajectory of the ball through the sticks. The falconer looks at the pointer then quickly gazes up above him to see where the tiercel is, if he is out of position he waits, glancing at the dog then back into the sky. He could be alone but still has his arms slightly outstretched at either side as if to say *“keep back I'm going in to flush”*, all the time looking up then down then up again, then *“whoooahhh!”* and the quarry is flushed.

The pointer flushed a pipit, Jurgen came hurtling down and clipped the little bird who fell helplessly down to earth with Jurgen claiming his meal. A shout of jubilation from myself, Clive and the pigeon fancier who had witnessed it all, then Jurgen took flight, carrying his winnings onto the apex roof of a nearby two story house.

I was elated over the result, but not at the resting place of my falcon who was plucking his meal on the house roof. There was no other option but to wait it out and then lure him down. Time was marching onto nearly noon, and I heard



a distinctive voice. It was Countess, one of our harriers. She is a sandy coloured bitch with an annoying habit of when boxed, hanging out of the back door of the hound trailer barking non stop from the hunt kennels to the meet, much to the dismay of the kennel man. I could hear her clearly as the hunt staff wound their way over the hill in the distance toward the meeting point. I was going to be late, but Jurgen finished his meal and I successfully lured him down.

I met Clive at my truck. We were all smiles, as it had been a good morning. I fumbled in my pockets for my car keys, but I had lost them! A sickening feeling ran right through me, my falcon was in the truck locked in, she had not been fed, and we were locked out. I did not have a spare set at home. What a dilemma!

We started to search, following our tracks through the grassland. We could see where we had walked with a trail on the ground. I could hear the sound of the harriers hunting on the other side of the river. The sound was deafening, they were having a ball and I was having a nightmare.

We ended up back at the pigeon loft where the tiercel caught the pipit. Alan came out and joined the search but it was no use. It was like trying to find a needle in a haystack. At dusk I called off my search and called a recovery truck who arrived two hours later. By this time the hounds were back in the kennels, fed and watered, and I had missed a great days hunting.

My truck was dragged onto the lorry and taken to my local garage. I had given up the thought of ever finding my car keys again so I instructed my mechanic to have a new set made. They were going to be expensive, like all modern day technology that you just can't do without. It was going to be

the bones of 600 euros to get my motor back on the road. It would take nearly a week for the new set to be made and programmed.

Then just after lunch my telephone rang, it was a number I did not recognise. I answered, to be spoken to by the pigeon fancier's wife who told me that Alan had found my keys. I couldn't believe my luck! He had taken his dog for a walk, the dog lay down in the field behind his house and would not come when called, so he walked over and low and behold the dog was lying beside the keys!

It is Spring now and we are locked down due to the Covid 19 pandemic that has swept the world, our freedom to come and go and do what we all love and took for granted has been taken away from us. No hunting of any form at the moment, and it is unclear what the future will hold, until a satisfactory cure has been found to get things back to normality again. Faith has been put away into her moulting chamber to fatten up and have a clean moult, Jurgen the same and he is now a semen donor.

I plan to keep a half sister to Faith this summer if we are lucky to breed some more, and if I do I will call her 'Hope', never give up hope.

Carpe Diem.

Keith Barker



# DAMIEN WALSH - OBITUARY

Don Ryan      Co. Dublin

**Although Damien Walsh was not a falconer, it is important we do not let his name pass without mention as he was a fellow country sportsman and a great friend to the Irish Hawking Club and the small falconry community in Ireland. Always welcoming, always willing to talk about country pursuits of which he held a great store of knowledge, Damien was sadly and suddenly killed in a horrific tragedy on 28 June 2021. A lovable rogue with an infectious laugh, his passion for country life was voracious - a true character that loved all field sports and had a story and anecdote for every occasion.**

As chairman of Killeel Gun Club, he always welcomed falconers onto their ground and did his utmost to ensure we enjoyed our day's sport. It was this hospitality and camaraderie at my first IHC field meet organised by Eoghan Ryan and facilitated by Damien in Killeel in 2010 that inspired me to join the Killeel Gun Club. I remained a member for nearly 10 years and it was a great honour to serve as secretary under Damien as chairman.

To illustrate his knowledge of the countryside, his eagerness to ensure good sport was had and his generosity in time to make it happen, I can recount the time during our international IAF meet in November 2016, when we transferred to the midlands from Co. Kerry. One of our overseas guests was eager for an opportunity to fly his crowned eagle at Irish hares as we had failed to come across any up to that point. Rather than let him return home without ever seeing an Irish hare,

I contacted Damien as I knew if anyone could find a hare, it was Damien, and he didn't disappoint. He brought them out in Killeel producing four flights on hares and although there was nothing caught, they had a fantastic day.

I remember the day that the accompanying picture was taken clearly. It was Saturday 9 January 2016 and it turned out to be a red letter day of sorts. I had asked Damien (left) to take Peter Metzner (right), President of the Austrian Falconry Club and myself out to find a pheasant (which isn't easy on club ground in January) for my brown goshawk, Buddy. After trailing around for some time, a cock pheasant broke about 150 yards ahead and I decided to slip Buddy as it may have been the only pheasant we'd see that day. After a flight of several hundred yards, Buddy only went and caught it, much to Peter's surprise. We then went snipe hawking with my tiercel on the land beside the quarry above Damien's house. The results can be seen in the photo. A memorable day not easily forgotten, and great to still have the picture of a wonderful snapshot in time of a country gentleman with incredible wit and charm that can never be replaced. Our thoughts are with his wife and four young children.

RIP Damien Walsh - you are greatly missed.



# KESTREL - A FALCONRY STORY

Heather McNemar

West Virginia USA



*Editor's note - After reading Heather McNemar's excellent book 'Squirrel Hawking in Appalachia', I made contact with her on social media. She kindly sent me this article to read and gave permission for it to be printed in the IHC Journal. It gives an interesting insight into the tenacity of American kestrels compared to their European counterparts, and to American falconry practices, where falconry laws differ significantly from our own.*



**Success in falconry is not instant. It's hard-earned, most often over the course of several seasons. My first successful micro season was no different: three birds, three seasons, countless mistakes and a slew of unavoidable mishaps. Throw in everything else that goes on in the chaos of everyday life, and it's no wonder most falconers don't stick it out in the long run. For me though, it's those precious moments of success that keep me coming back for more.**

While there are many things that are critical in being a responsible sponsor, I've always believed having flown a micro successfully to be one of them. My list is long and would easily fill another article. In the interest of time, let's just sum it up by saying I hold myself to a high standard, and successfully flying a micro was necessary for me to personally feel qualified to sponsor someone someday.

Now, let's go back to January 2019. In the midst of one heck of a squirrel hawking season, I decided to trap a kestrel so I'd be ready for my first micro season. That micro season would be short-lived. I decided to keep the first bird that hit the trap. She was 143g, with an empty crop and a four on the keel. She was big, healthy and feather-perfect. My mentor, Ray, and I figured we wouldn't catch anything better. Giving no regard to the fact she was a haggard, we both made the conscious decision for me to keep her.

Despite the fact she was with me nearly 24 hours a day over the next three months, she never manned down and yakked incessantly. These are things I could live with had she been deadly on starlings. Unfortunately, she was not. While she

had many starling baggies during training, she refused to take them in the wild, even at her bottom end flight weight.

While ageing kestrels is an art, and I had no way of knowing exactly how old she was. We believe she was an older gal who had lived on grasshoppers and voles for several years, so she was inclined to refuse a quarry that rivalled her in size. After spending several months with her, that's our theory anyway.

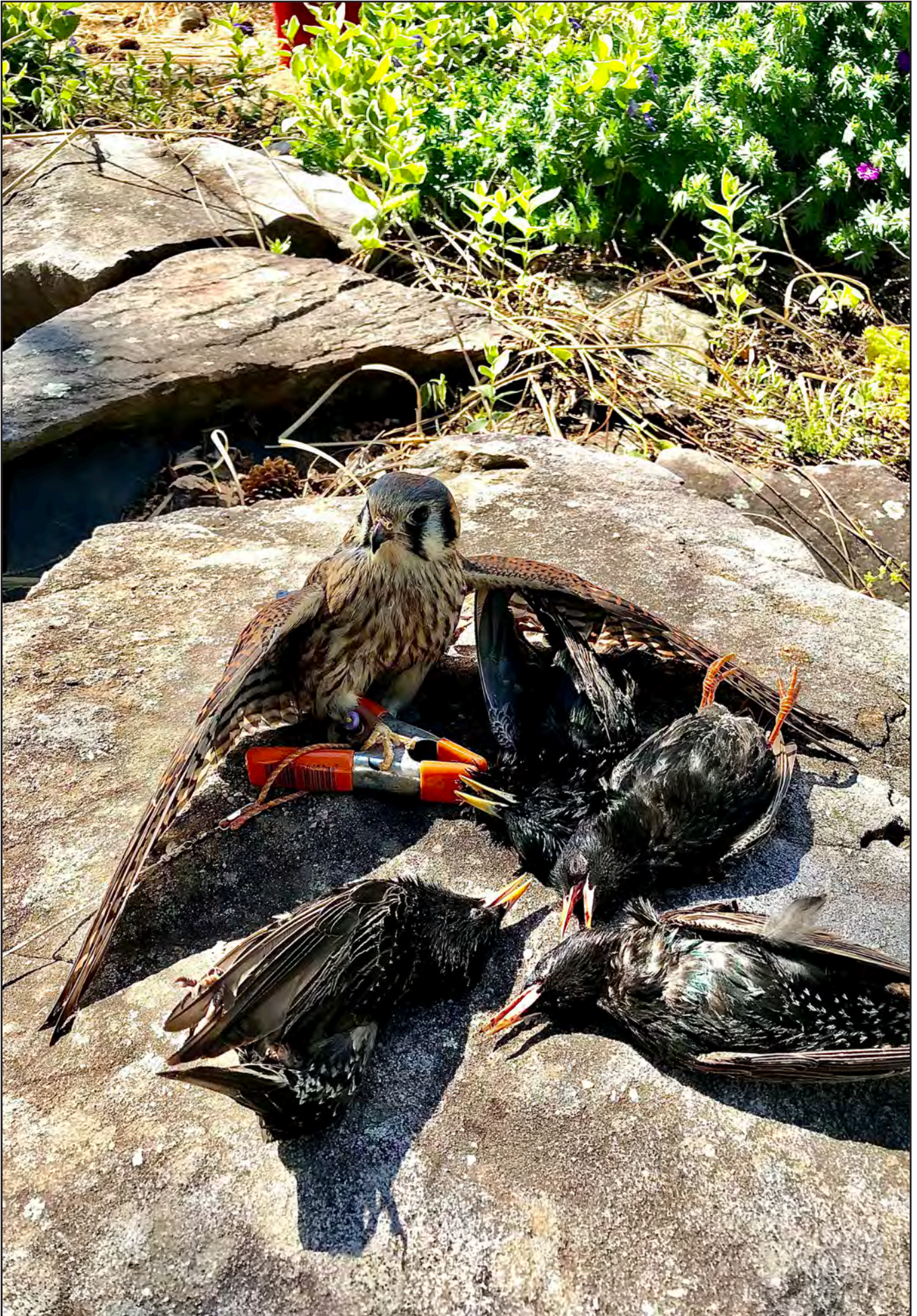
But the bottom line is this: a loud, wild, haggard kestrel is not a falconry bird. I cut her loose long before the slips got good. I lost months of training and an entire micro season, but it was far from all for not. Building on Ray's past experience flying both a haggard and a passage kestrel (his haggard also being noisy) and based on my new experience flying a haggard, we knew the next kestrel either of us flew would be a passage bird. This lesson alone was worth the time put into that season.

January 2020. I took on a tiercel Cooper's hawk for the upcoming micro season. I was not prepared for the intensity that is a passage Coopers. Take everything about a buteo or a falcon, and crank it up to 100. Every movement, even their smallest ones, is like watching a movie on fast forward. Even when manned, they still forget who you are and act wild for a second when you first pick them up in the morning. The husbandry required in order to keep them in condition is like nothing I had ever experienced, but if I could get this bird going, it would be worth the investment of time and worth the mess in the house. Slips that even a solid kestrel would miss, would be attainable with this little accipiter.

I put countless hours into manning that Coopers down, and he actually turned out to be a fairly calm passage bird as long as he was satisfying his need to kill on a regular basis. After a bit of a struggle with nailing his weight down at the beginning of the season, the starlings were starting to pair off, and the slips were starting to get good. They weren't great yet, but they were improving. The Coopers had just taken his first two head of pigeons at a warehouse. He was so close to really getting going. Then, I slipped him out the truck at a starling in the cemetery, he missed the starling, slammed into a headstone, broke his toe and died a couple months later following a lengthy and pricey attempt to save him through medication and surgery.

Some things can be prevented in falconry. Some things can't. When it came to that injury in the field, I couldn't have prevented it. That's falconry. All we can do is learn from the things we can control and let go of the things we can't. It was another season 'lost', but I knew it wasn't a waste.

That season, I learned that falconry does not discriminate. Sometimes falconry just happens to



us, and we can't control it. I learned that everyone will lose a bird under their care, and this doesn't necessarily mean that the falconer has been negligent. I learned that my failures do not define me. I learned that some things I consider failures just need a different perspective.

Admittedly, I did not learn these things gracefully. Nor did I learn them immediately. It took me some time to get over the experience, and let these lessons sink in, but I felt worse for Ray than I did myself. He had to listen to me whine about how bad of a falconer I thought I was and about how sorry I felt for myself. A little smack on top of the head is what I really needed, but he patiently let me work through it in my own time. I'm grateful for that. In the end, that short micro season forced me to find grit and determination within myself. This was invaluable. After all, no falconer can survive this sport long without the ability to dust himself off, and get back on the horse.

January 2021. Everything leading up to this point had been crucial. I'd learned a lot over the last two micro seasons, and I was ready to get back on the horse. While I'm not sure exactly how many kestrels we trapped, I know we trapped over ten before finding the one I wanted to keep. She wasn't big. She was only 115.4g off the trap with an empty crop and the fattest keel I'd ever felt on a kestrel, but she was a passage bird.

During trapping, especially now that we were focused on getting a passage bird, we began to realise that most passagers on the trap acted differently than haggards. We got to where we could identify a passage kestrel before we even got them in the truck nearly every time just based on the trap behaviour. Once on the trap, passage birds rarely bumped when a vehicle would pass by. Once caught, passage birds rarely tried to fly away when you approached them.

This was true of the female I kept. Several vehicles drove by her before we knew she was caught. Not a single one of them bumped her off the trap. Once she was caught, she just stared at me as I approached her. She made no attempt to fly. In the coming months, this attitude would transfer into one of the tamest little birds of prey I've ever seen. She made it easy to see why spouses and children of falconers often develop a soft spot for these little falcons.

I've never seen a tamer kestrel. She was as close to an imprint as she could be and still be wild. She gave the companion call to me every time I was in the room – a welcome change from the haggard that yakked at me all the time. I never figured out if I was her nest mate or her man, but she became very attached to me.

The best part? Thanks to a strict regimen of jump-ups and baggies, when she saw black, she was out the window immediately, and she was deadly. Of course, just when things are going

**“There were slips everywhere that day. It was the best and most fun hunting day of the season. We came home with our first quadruple, and I couldn't have been happier”**

good, that's generally when falconry throws you another punch to the gut. This season was no exception.

She'd taken about 20 starlings and was almost healed from a very minor starling scratch on the toe when I tossed her out the truck on a typical starling slip. She missed and landed on a headstone. When I went to recall her, I noticed she was looking down in the grass. I didn't like it. She jumped down to the ground and grabbed something just as I started running towards her. When I got to her, the garter snake had already wrapped itself around one of her legs and was working its way up her body.

I wasn't afraid of the snake, but I wasn't sure what to do. I didn't want to kill the snake if I didn't have to, but my bird came first, and right now, I'd kill it if I couldn't safely remove it from my bird. Still not sure the best thing to try, I did the only thing I know to do when I get myself into a situation like that. I hollered for Ray. Loud and frantic. *“Boss, I need help. Hurry!”*

He was out of the truck and headed towards us before I even finished yelling. Together we were able to untangle the snake and set it loose. But not before it sprayed musk all over the falcon. Neither of us thought much of it. We kept hawking and ended up with two starlings that day. When I got home that evening, I gave her a bath before putting her to bed. She stunk so bad. She'd go on to smell faintly of snake musk the rest of the season.

The next morning when I got her out of her box to weigh her, I noticed her toe was swollen. There wasn't any heat in it until that evening, but by evening, she was also tucking it. Cue the first round of sulfatrim. Two weeks of sulfatrim, and she seemed to be doing well, so we took her out again and nabbed a couple more head of starling. A couple days later, her toe was swelling again.

Cue the second round of sulfatrim. Apparently, even though her toe appeared to be healed, there was some lingering bacteria that was still brooding. After another round, she was looking good and ready to go hawking again.

There were slips everywhere that day. It was the best and most fun hunting day of the season. We came home with our first quadruple, and I couldn't have been happier. All of that hard work had paid off. This little falcon was a falconry bird. But then, another gut punch.

When I took her out of her box the morning after the quadruple, she was tucking her foot on the scale, her toe was swollen again. I took her into Dr. Jesse Fallon for x-rays and what I assumed would end up being a debridement of something stuck in the toe. Luckily, there was no fracture or any foreign matter in the wound though. She just required a broader spectrum antibiotic more time off. This time, it was four weeks of Baytril.

I was losing so much time from this little starling scratch this season, and now, I was about to lose another month during the best time for hawking, but that's falconry. I waited patiently and maintained her fitness with jump-ups. At the end of the treatment, she was finally healed, and the swelling didn't return. She went on to take another nine starlings, but the slips just weren't there like they were the month before. On 11 July, we threw in the towel after four hunts in a row with only one slip per hour, and bad slips at that. We

were getting eight to twelve slips every two hours before when the hawking was good. It just wasn't worth it to drive around when there weren't any slips. The season was done.

Still, the little falcon ended up with 30 head over 29 hunts and took multiples eight times. We missed 49 days in total due to her toe. That was 49 days in what is already a very short season here in West Virginia. I am very proud of the falconry bird she became, and while most people expect triple digits season counts for successful kestrels, given her injury and the fact that we don't have as many starlings here as other places, I consider her a successful falconry bird. In the end, she consistently took game when we were hawking, and that is success.

I fed her up, and cut her loose yesterday. It was bittersweet. Admittedly, I had become a bit attached to her, but I'm a falconer. It doesn't make much sense for me to intermew a kestrel when I might not even want to fly one next year. They are much easier and more plentiful to trap than a big female red-tail, so it just made sense to give her back to the wild.

The hard part was releasing her with my son Gunner. Gunner has grown up around falconry. There has never been a time he can remember when falconry wasn't a part of our lifestyle. He's now eight years old. He's seen many birds come and go, but this kestrel was the first one he helped me man and train. He spent a lot of time with her and became very attached. Gunner is also very soft-hearted, which is a tough character trait in a falconry household.

A home with falconry in it is a home with birds of prey that come and go and the hawk food that is required to sustain those birds of prey. I know many kids grow up around hunting and become hunters themselves. Many kids embrace it. It just hasn't been Gunner's thing though, and we've never forced it on him. This was the first time he asked to become involved with falconry, and I was proud of the strides he made in understanding the process. In the end, he put on his big boy pants and insisted on releasing the kestrel himself.

I was proud of him that day. He released the little falcon back into the wild and waved as she flew up into a tree. He tried so hard not to cry, but I saw that bottom lip quivering just before he lost his composure and held his arms up to me to hold him. My little boy had come full circle with a bird for the first time, albeit with a few tears. The next day at breakfast, he said, "*The little falcon is going to be happy in the wild. I bet she's hunting mice in the field.*"

*"I bet so, too buddy. I bet so, too."*



# Matt Gage

1967 -2022



by Hilary White  
Co. Dublin

**At the top of the Glencree valley in Co Wicklow, the twin lakes of Lough Bray Upper and Lower are tucked into the hillside under the summit of Kippure, each scooped out of the mountain by the glaciers that smoothed these uplands. Peregrines have nested here for as long as I can remember, alternating between these two corries separated by a jutting chin of granite. You'd be hard pushed to find a more sublime setting for an eyrie.**

Where the peatland gives way to hillside farms further down the valley, there is a privately owned tract of land known simply as Aurora. These 40 acres are a recreational and education centre for scouts and youth groups, with a beautiful outdoor classroom in a wooded glade by a stream. It is also used by the Tree Council of Ireland to plant native mixed woodland as part of biodiversity efforts. Through its website, members of the public can have a tree planted for a loved one. If you go there today, keep an eye out for tree No. 1856, an alder planted on a suitably damp section. A tiercel bell dangles from a ribbon around it. It might even be tinkling if there's a breeze.

The tree was planted in memory of Matt Gage, an English falconer who passed away in January

just days after his 55th birthday following a battle with illness.

Matt had many friends on this island. For the falconry community here, his name will be known as the backyard breeder of some of the best snipe hawks to ever fly over Irish bogs. Up North on Rathlin Island, meanwhile, his family has long connections going back generations, granting him the status of a beloved local.

But it's fair to say that anywhere Matt went, he left a mark. Completely uninterested in limelight, backslaps, or falconry egotism of any kind, his values lay in support, kindness, mischief, and laughter. He had a quick-draw wit to rival any stand-up comedian as well as a generosity of spirit that could permeate a group and part the clouds above them.

The sorrow felt by the falconry world following Matt's death was equalled by the scientific community at University of East Anglia. Many were left reeling by the news as he had not disclosed his illness to most people and kept working right up until the end. As a professor of evolutionary biology (specialising in sperm competition and sexual selection), he was adored by his students and colleagues. His peers, meanwhile, regarded





him as one of the most respected leading lights in his field, one who had conducted “ground-breaking research” according to a lengthy obituary in the scientific journal *Nature Ecology & Evolution*.

I first met him at the IAF Council of Delegates meeting in Cezanne, France in 2007. It was my first meeting as Irish delegate and I was out of my depth. Matt was one of the IAF’s chief scientific advisors, and his report on hybrids informed the organisation’s official position on their use in falconry. He was one of a small cluster of heads I followed around for the week. We stayed in touch, our correspondence about IAF business usually just an excuse to impersonate people we knew and indulge in some piss-taking. We shared a love for absurdist British comedy, especially *The Fast Show*. Over a beer, he could easily expand your mind about raptors, their conservation or training, or some other area of natural science, but you’d have to draw this stuff out of him. Matt wore his scientific brilliance lightly, never lauding it about, and this was a symptom of his other great quality - his emotional intelligence. His ability to be interested in people, to read them and the rest of the room, was off the charts. It made his friendship a thing to be savoured.

Matt invited me to Scotland several years ago to join him, his grouse-hawking partner-in-crime

Bob Green, and Nick Curry. At Glutt, a grouse moor and hunting lodge deep in the far-north Highlands, I witnessed some of the most sublime falconry I have ever seen thanks to Matt’s prized tiercel Bertie and his pointer Rex. One day, we were joined by a seasoned spectator who had flown with grouse-hawking luminaries such as Stephen Frank and Geoffrey Pollard back in the day. Bertie was plucking the final grouse of the afternoon, a stunning strike that we had watched from a hillside above the point of impact. We lounged on heather tussocks, fussing over the dogs, and passing hipflasks to the next smiling recipient. Our guest was very interested to learn that I had never been grouse hawking in Scotland before. Quietly, without any hyperbole, he told me that what we’d just seen was the pinnacle of the sport.

Other memories stand out from Matt’s singular brand of hospitality. On the first night there, we ate locally caught wild salmon. On the second, lobsters that I pulled up myself from the closest bay. On the third and final night, to the sound of clinking glasses, roaring laughing, and friends sharing openly with one another, we ate grouse flecked with talon scars.

I visited the lads a couple of Augusts later and the standards hadn’t dipped. Outside of IAF get-togethers in various parts of the world,

Matt and I would stay in touch by way of long, irreverent, gossip-laced emails and WhatsApp missives. Speaking last Christmas, with the seriousness of his illness kept at arm's reach from the conversation, we made tentative plans to reunite once again at Glutt in what was coming to look like a less hectic summer ahead. And then a couple of weeks later, the world suddenly lost several degrees of wattage.

The certificate for the young alder in Glencree

is kept by Matt's wife Silvie and daughters Lily and Tess, to whom we as a club extend our profound sympathies. My hope is that someday they will be able to visit this valley beneath the lakes where the falcons fly, and maybe even find tree No. 1856 by the sound of its bell.



**Tree Council of Ireland**

**A Native Irish Tree**

will be planted in the Woodland Forest of  
**Aurora, Glencree, Co. Wicklow**

for

**Matt Gage**

*Planted in loving memory by his many friends in Ireland*

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**Éanna Ní Lamhna**  
**PRESIDENT**  
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# BLITZ

Stephen Power Co. Dublin



**The season of 2021 saw me pick up my first goshawk, a parent reared male, bred by Keith Barker. I decided to take on a male as I had planned on hunting mainly rook with the odd game bird if I could find one; most of my best rabbit ground has sadly been built on for housing.**

I remember the moment myself and Keith caught the hawk up, hooded, checked him over, weighed him and kitted him up with anklets, tail bell and jesses. As soon as we placed him on my glove, that first wild bate! Raw goshawk power! It was a nice shock, hard to describe how explosive it felt.

It had been a few months since I had a hawk on the fist since the death of my male Harris. I felt excited and nervous at the same time. The time had come for me to find out if these dreaded goshawks were as hard to manage as I had read about in books and online.

I couldn't wait to drive home and get manning straight away. I had prepared my shed with curtains to block out the daylight and had a radio and comfy swivel chair in place for the initial manning. I sat down with the gos hooded on the glove with a juicy chicken neck under his gripping feet, and popped the hood off in the darkened room. I could still make out his piercing yellow eyes as his pupils dilated trying to grasp what was around him. I barely moved at all, over-thinking every breath, trying to be a statue. He looked down at the food under his feet and almost made an effort to eat. But still very aware of me, he tried to focus on his new surroundings, and we sat for maybe 30 minutes before the first of many powerful bates. Over time I gradually eased the curtains open, one inch at a time to increase the brightness. Over the space of an hour, each movement was like he had never seen me before. Even the slightest twitch made him bate wildly, and hang upside down. I very slowly helped him regain the glove as he acted paralysed and almost comically fell backwards off the glove each time like he had lost the use of his legs! He was now the one trying to be a statue!

On and on we went for hours in a now brightly lit shed, he constantly looked at the food and eventually took a few tiny nibbles - seconds later he was devouring it, pulling hard, and I was fascinated at how fast his moments were. Everything down to how his pupils changed size in a microsecond, as I had never noticed any of this with the Harris hawk's dark brown eyes. There was something magic about it, almost prehistoric.

With him eating on the glove so soon, I thought to myself "*Ah this will be ok, no major challenge!*"

And as soon as he swallowed the last piece of the chicken neck he darted his head around in every direction and bated off again and again, hanging upside down, very un-Harris like! I only wanted to associate myself positively with him so as quickly as I could I popped his hood on and set

him on the loop perch for the night, ready to start again in the morning.

This went on for about two more days, not gaining much in steadiness like I did with the Harris hawk. No matter how slowly I moved (and I mean slow motion) he would bate wildly at the slightest change in body position or turning of my head, but with his willingness to eat on the glove was it going to be ok.

After a few more days I got to the stage where I could pick him up, weigh him and pop him back on the loop perch with only the odd bate every five minutes. He seemed very content on the loop perch, fluffing up on one foot, as only seeing the inside of the shed put him at ease.

On around day five we had some luck feeding at the shed door with the door open, he could see glimpses of the dogs and children in the garden, so I took him out in the sun for some manning. But it was like he had never seen me before, bating wildly, hanging upside down, acting lifeless again. It was at around this stage, I was making sense of all the stories I had heard about nervous skittish and hard to man accipiters!

As time and manning went on, he had no problems around noisy kids, curious dogs, and clothes lines after the initial fright. It's hard to explain, but each and every time he saw one of these things each day, he would initially go wild - bating and panting. But at this stage he was stepping up and jumping leash length for food. I couldn't seem to get him steady like my old Harris at this same stage of manning. In fact it took him two weeks to regain the high ring perch on his own, even though he was quite happy when perched on it until he spooked and bated off. I think because of the explosive speed, power and super awareness that is part of what makes accipiters so exciting is at the same time a handful!

One part of training I found very frustrating was carriage (walking around with the young hawk on the glove). For days on end I could barely take more than four or five steps without the hawk bating wildly. Even with a juicy neck or wing used as a tiring, he was hard work to keep calm even in secluded fields. I won him over with persistence but it was a definite challenge. I questioned his weight but his response was as good as it could be, so I just battled on. This seems to be a common issue with traditionally manned parent reared goshawks.

I won't bore you with the creance and first free flight, but it was steady paced and took much more effort at each stage to keep him focused compared with my old Harris. It was as if he took his time to work out if it was worth his while to recall at all, but when he did he came to the glove and lure with a 'whack'. I was beginning to understand his mind set at this stage. He was very much no nonsense and all business; unlike the

“this time the gos  
singled out a  
rook and stuck to it like  
a heat seeking missile,  
snatching it clean out  
of the air”

cooperative and social Harris that was quick to come at any opportunity.

It was 30 days before I felt he was ready to remove the creance for his first free flight. It felt that I needed him to be more responsive to my call, but that was never to be. In the end, I had to be content with a serviceable recall to the swung lure.

After daily training on the Remote Bull X Lure, chasing magpie and crow carcasses with a few feed ups, we moved on to the real deal - crow slips. From the start he was amazing! I couldn't believe just how keen he was at taking on 100 m+ slips on feeding crows. Explosive, fast, low, cover hugging flights that would always end with the flock going skyward and the gos gaining ground but never connecting. This went on and on with him always pumping to gain ground - each time never failing to put in a serious effort, and I would finish each unsuccessful hunt with a pull and feed up on the Bull X lure - I swear this tool was a major factor in keeping him motivated.

I decided to guarantee him some close range slips from the cover of a car. He had no problem at this stage with catching crows and feeding up



on his first warm catch. I quickly moved back to walked up long slips that had given him a better challenge. Just like before, we went sneaking up to low hedges with crows feeding out 60-70 m. Off he went like a rocket from the fist, hugging the ground low with powerful relentless pumping of his wings. As the alarm calls went out, the crows lifted but this time the gos singled out a rook and stuck to it like a heat seeking missile, snatching it clean out of the air approximately 15 ft up, taking it on the rise. As I gasped and watched them fall to earth, the flock started to mob the gos to help their comrade. I scaled the hedge as fast as I could; clapping my hands and running as fast as my wellington boots would allow, to scare off the mobbing crows and assist my hawk. He had a good hold of the rook so I quickly dispatched it, and just like we had been practising for weeks on the lure machine, I opened the rook to show him the juicy parts so he was used to my hands assisting while feeding.

Although it wasn't his first kill, for me it was our first real success, so I sat there and patiently watched him pluck and enjoy his fill. This was the type of flight I had always imagined goshawking would be like.. and it was epic!

We went on to catch many more walked up crows and each time the flights were just as



explosive and challenging. Although many got away, the results were the same: action packed, fast and furious, twisting dog fights. Aerial combats of perfectly matched predator and prey - most only lasting a few seconds but always leaving me buzzing with excitement!

Although he was always instant when chasing crows he also took some flights at pigeons and the odd darting blackbird. He wasn't as instant on rabbits. At 1 lb 8 oz it took a lot of work to get him confidently chasing rabbits. We managed to bag one bolted by the ferret in a nice fast 30-40 m slip with a huge feed up to boost his confidence. With Blitz, I caught my first ever cock pheasant after a memorable 400 m flight.

All in all, it was a very good first season hunting, with 29 head caught, including mallard duck, wood pigeon, and the odd small bird. He hit many more but was unlucky with his footing. There were also a few tussles with wild birds of prey that were released unharmed - never a dull day goshawking!

Training and hunting with my first parent reared goshawk was hard work. I only missed out on a handful of days flying. I put serious time and effort in and I think my main obstacle was having few pheasants to hunt and without a spaniel or pointer I had to rely on mostly rook hawking, which I love. Luckily, he would take on slips from 100 m plus in great style. But as anyone that hunts corvids with a hawk will know, as the season progresses, the cunning crows become increasingly aware of your presence. I tried to sneak up country lanes as slow and steady as I could, trying not to upset the

gos or alert the crows to our approach. I mixed up locations and hunted at different times of the day. It was the only way to get within the 100 m range - challenging, but we had some success right up to the last day of the season.

With our first season over and plenty of game in the fridge, I'm happy to say that I finished with a feather perfect and silent gos. Potential noise was my biggest worry from the start, and the main reason I didn't want an imprint.

So for anyone looking for a breakdown on my opinion of a parent reared Harris hawk vs a parent reared goshawk... the Harris hawk is like a modern Golf GTI; Sporty, fun, reliable, will handle anything you can throw at it - strange locations, strange people/field meets, will work with you, understands cooperation, and makes for an easy to live with hunting partner that improves the longer you have it. The goshawk is fast and furious from the start like an old school Lamborghini Diablo with sketchy brakes and bald tyres! It takes a lot of work to keep it somewhat reliable, not so keen on new faces or locations. But when it goes it's 'EXPLOSIVE', sometimes scary, fast and dodgy; hard to predict where you will end up (across rivers, over fences, maybe a few fields) but super addictive when it's going well. Always keeping you on your toes waiting for the next blast of eye popping action!



# RODENTS FOR HAWK FOOD

Keith Barker

Co. Waterford

**I have recently noticed a surge in pricing for hawk food; availability, delivery costs, and fuel driving up the price for almost everything these days. It made me realise that the rodent breeding set up I have in place might, and has, helped me along the way when food supplies have been getting short.**

I buy a certain amount of boxes of day old chicks. I can remember when I used to buy them in for nine euros a box, but the last time I collected some they were nearly twenty euro. Chicks are the maintenance feed I buy, combined with freshly killed rats, and steel shot woodpigeons. These three food items make up the basic diet for my small breeding project, producing a few hawks and falcons each year.

I have bred quail in the past but electricity prices have also gone through the roof, and quail require total attention throughout their life cycle from incubation, brooding and rearing. They have this uncontrollable desire to commit suicide at any given opportunity, so is it any wonder the price of a single box of quail now is the same as three boxes of day old chicks?

Rodents do not need any incubation or brooding, the mothers and aunties as I call them do all the work for you. They can be kept inside relatively cheap and simple to build breeding systems that would complement a falconer with just a few hawks throughout the moult and hunting season if things were not going too well.

The quality of rodents you produce is a testament to the feed and nutrition you put into them. I find any complete dry food of 17% protein or above with a constant supply of fresh water and some fresh vegetables once in a while go a long way to producing a quality rat.

Some might run at the sight of a rat, never mind being willing to handle one. I wouldn't try to handle a wild one that's for sure as he would have his teeth sunk into your fingers a few times before you could drop him. My breeding stock are derived from laboratory strains and on the whole are quite tame. They don't mind being handled briefly when changing the litter tubs on a weekly basis, just a quick lift by the tail when you transfer each individual into the next clean tub.

The rat racks I use to house my breeding stock are relatively simple to construct if you have any basic joinery skills. Just four upright 3x2 supports and roofing battens running parallel to each other to slide the tubs in and out for cleaning and maintenance.

The top of the tub has a 10mm square wire mesh fixed to a framework made from 2 x 1 roofing batten exactly the same size perimeter as the plastic tub you are using. This prevents the rodents gnawing their way out of the tub top and escaping. The tubs sourced must be completely smooth on the inside with no shaped plastic edge to get their teeth into; this is the most crucial part of the build or they will escape! I have





found recently that Dunnes Stores sell the type I use for a reasonable price. 25 litre underbed storage tubs are plenty big enough for two adult breeders and two litters of pups.

When the wire frame has been constructed the plastic tub is slid onto the two opposing batons then the frame fitted on top of the tub, wire facing down and fixed to the uprights so the tub can be slid in and out without obstruction. Each tub must have sufficient headroom to insert a plastic one litre water drinker overhead. My main feed is sow pellets or pig finisher. Some rat breeders feed their rats with large pig nuts that are placed on top of the wire, so the rodents gnaw at the nuts from below and there is no feed wastage. However, my breeding shed is not secure and I found that feeding this way attracted wild rodents and birds into the shed for easy pickings. This made me opt for bowl feeding instead.

When it comes down to production the numbers produced in such a short space of time can be incredible. I put one large male rat in with two females for a week or so, and 28 days after the male has been removed the pups are born, each female producing up to a dozen or more pups in one litter. Straw is added prior to the females giving birth for them to make a warm nest for the youngsters. Now here is the real head scratcher, when the pups are four weeks old, some of the females will give birth to another litter of pups without being serviced by the male rat a second time! So at four weeks of age the oldest pups are finding their way around the tub and the females have a new litter of pups in the nest to look after.

At twelve weeks of age the oldest rats are ready

to breed. Pregnant female rats that have not given birth yet will wet nurse babies that do not belong to them. They really are simple to keep breeding machines, and when you start breeding your own you realise how easy it is for them to reach out of control populations in farms and grain stores where there is a high volume of food at hand for them to take advantage of.

I clean my rats out once a week, replacing the old bedding and shavings with clean, the waste goes onto the garden compost heap to rot down and nourish the flower beds that Mrs Barker tends to during the summer months.

I have literally hundreds of rats being produced in the summer months when my demand is at its peak, a great feed to take into an imprint female peregrine or goshawk when fresh killed to show her that I can provide for her a quality offering, (a) for her and (b) for the chicks she will be having in the future.

Out of the three feed items I feed, the only one I wouldn't eat myself is a day old chick. Pigeon no problem at all, rat I would.. but I would prefer pigeon. Chick, no way would I eat one!

If any paid up club member would like to get started with their own small breeding project I can provide you with breeding stock to get you going, free of charge. Any help or advice not given in my article I can provide by email at gosnest@gmail.com or over the telephone on 0851230165.







# THE HON. JOHN 'JOHNNY' MORRIS

## 1951-2022



**The Hon. Johnny Morris - Hilary White**  
Healthy though it might seem these days, falconry in Ireland had to be rebuilt in the 20th century. The advent of the shotgun had seen falconry dwindle in many nations during the 18th and 19th centuries, but Ireland had the added burdens of colonialism, famine and poverty which stripped cultural heritage to its bare bones and led to a largely disconnected, utilitarian view of the landscape. Independence was hard won in the 1920s, and for a nation still classified as Third World, there was little time, resources or determination for a hunting art that required ample amounts of all three. The traditions that Ireland enjoys today, from language to mythology, were kept alive through these times by small groups of impassioned and erudite devotees, and falconry was no different. Johnny Morris, who passed away in January aged 70 after a long and difficult illness, was fundamental to the gradual revival of the art in modern Ireland.

The son of Lord Killanin and part of the Morris hereditary line of western chieftains that is one the fabled Fourteen Tribes of Galway, Johnny was obsessed with falcons and falconry growing up in the windswept and dramatic region of Connemara. By the time he was a lad, his father suggested it was time to visit a local falconer up the road in Oughterard who might help sculpt this enthusiasm into something more robust. It so happened that that falconer was Ronald Stevens, a latter-day guru whose writings to this

day encapsulate better than any other the craft and spirit of hunting with falcons. Johnny would stay with his maternal grandfather, the Rector of Oughterard, and cycle the 15-mile round trip to Stevens' house to learn all he could.

What began was one of the most famous falconry partnerships in the world, and precisely the kind of inter-generational transmission of knowledge that has made falconry a jewel in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage crown. By learning from Stevens, Johnny joined a lineage of mentors that went back more than a century through Gilbert Blaine, Major Charles Hawkins Fisher, and John Pells, falconer to the Duke of St Albans.

Morris and Stevens were among the founder members of the reconstituted Irish Hawking Club in 1967, partly out of a desire to have a mothership for Irish falconers to meet and engage, but also out of a need to "obtain some control" of Irish eyries, especially from "profit making and overseas falconers".

At 18, Johnny was able to acquire an Iranian Saker falcon through the US falconer and archivist Kent Carnie, who was then posted in the Middle East. Farah was her name, and fed up with more than a decade of trying and failing to breed Irish peregrines, Stevens suggested they pair her with his tiercel. To the amazement of the two men and the falconry world who subsequently got wind of it, the odd couple hatched the first hybrid falcons ever bred in captivity, one of which would go on to adorn today's bank note for the United Arab Emirates.

Among his many professions, Morris's father had been a celebrated Fleet Street journalist in his day, and perhaps this played a role in encouraging Johnny to use this medium to search for falconers in Ireland. A 1976 classified ad in the Irish Times simply stated that the Irish Hawking Club was being reformed and that interested persons should contact the Hon. John Morris by post. Morris and the then tiny huddle of falconers he flew with were aware that, having recently joined the EEC, Ireland would soon be subject to a revision of wildlife law to bring it in line with European standards. A formalised representative body was urgently needed to plead the case for falconry.

To this day, a facility exists within Irish legislation for a small annual harvest of raptors that has proved massively enriching for licensed falconers here, myself included. The journey of wild take is a privilege we share in Ireland with many counterparts around the world, but things might have been different were it not for the awareness and mobilisation of Johnny and his peers.

On a personal level, meanwhile, an excursion hawking with Johnny at the age of eight was my very first falconry touchstone, one that would prove indelible. It was therefore a personal honour in 2015 to present Johnny on behalf of then-IAF President Adrian Lombard with the IAF Presidential Award for "*exceptional services to Irish Falconry*". By that time, Johnny was already an Honorary Life Member of both the Irish Hawking Club and British Falconers' Club, but IAF still saw the value in international terms of recognising a figure who had espoused the ethos of sustainable use with a mind to future generations.

A voracious reader and amateur historian, with a teacherly generosity that sought to share that

knowledge without ever lecturing, Johnny was softly spoken, curious of mind, and held falconry second only to his wife Thelma Mansfield (a painter and former TV presenter in the fledgling years of Irish state broadcasting) and their two sons, Roderic and Michael (a musician and painter, respectively).

At a funeral in South Dublin, Johnny was laid to rest by a large group of family and friends who heard about the devoted husband and father, nature lover, and photographer who bent life into the shape that he wanted, one where time spent with family or under high-flying hawks was all that really mattered. A longwing guard of honour had stood by the doors to the chapel before the service. Two Irish tiercels from this contingent slipped inside to find a pew, only to duck out before the end of the ceremony to go flying in the nearby hills before light faded. You can be sure they had his blessing.

### Don Ryan

As I came late to falconry, I never got to know Johnny in his prime as a practising falconer before Parkinson's cruelly struck. But I do know that not even a debilitating disease such as Parkinson's could quench the passion for falconry that Johnny held. It was palpable. His eyes lit up at the mention of it - like the sun breaking through dark clouds. He loved its history, its traditions and all things falconry.

I consider myself very fortunate to have known Johnny for the brief period I did and for the few occasions we met. He left me with great memories of the snipe meet he organised near his home in Spiddal, Co. Galway. We flew in tough conditions on that wild bog but later enjoyed great company, food and song at Oranmore Castle with Alec



Phinn, Richard Ward and their many friends.

I was also privileged to raise a glass with Johnny and Thelma on the evening of the 50th anniversary of the IHC on 12 July 2017. It's not easy to set up a Club and it's certainly not easy to make it last 50 years - we should have finished the bottle!

For the falconry community in Ireland, the reforming of the Irish Hawking Club to protect the interests of falconers in Ireland has to be one of Johnny's greatest legacies particularly as it was established during a period in Irish history where new regulations could have seen the practice outlawed.

It's worth considering that in 1967, Johnny was only 16 when he had the foresight and maturity to reform the Irish Hawking Club. Most young lads of that age have far less meaningful things on their mind than forming an association to protect the interests of falconry in Ireland, and make no mistake, that's exactly why Johnny did it, as I have seen the correspondence from Johnny during that period. The IHC has always been more than just a Club - it's an association, a representative body and clubs like ours can ill afford to lose people of the stature and wisdom of Johnny.

But that's just me being selfish about Johnny, our mutual sport and club. First and foremost Johnny's family must take priority and I know I speak for us all when I say the falconry community share in their loss of such a great man. RIP Johnny.

### **Robert Hutchinson**

Outside the sun was shining but inside, the room was dark curtains were drawn. I was unsure what to say, what to do. I had been taken by surprise and shocked by his condition ravaged by Parkinson's disease and a chronic heart condition. I had to break the silence ....

*"How do you want me to treat you? As a man who is very sick? Or as one of the boys?"*

*"One of the boys."*

*"Well then, to be one of the boys you need to get yourself a falcon. Will you?"*

*"Yes, I will."*

The answers are all by Johnny Morris, responses to my questions at our first meeting in his family home in County Dublin. They are short responses from a man whose sad fate was to be buckled by poor health from middle age and whose destiny was to be passionate about Falconry. He was simply the bravest man I have ever met.

Johnny Morris was born 4th April 1951 and died 12 January 2022, the son of a businessman and President of the International Olympic Committee Lord Killanin. Preferring the Lure and

the Camera to paid employment he devoted much of his life to spending time on the wild bogs and mountains of Galway and Wicklow. At an early age his father arranged for him to spend time with Ronald Stevens at Fermoye Lodge their lifelong friendship only ending with Ronald's death. He could count as friends Bill Rutledge, Roger Upton, Tony Huston, Maurice Nicolson, Alec Phinn, and others he was also in regular correspondence with many of the leading lights in falconry both in Europe and US.

In terms of his achievements, you can list re-establishing the Irish Hawking Club in 1967, breeding the first hybrid falcon in partnership with Ronald and securing wild take for Irish falconers. As a young falconer he focused on crow and magpie hawking in the wilds of Connemara flying a cast of wild taken peregrines and sometimes taking to a pony. His best season, his falcons "Albert & Victoria" accounted for 68 magpies and 2 grey crows. He also flew merlins but his passion was peregrines. Later he tried game-hawking. Walking hundreds of miles across the barren mountains in Wicklow and Mayo looking for a grouse point often accompanied by one of John Nash's setters. He admitted defeat telling me years later *"it was a lot of effort for very little return"*.

After our initial meeting he 'dug deep' and took up driving again, secured a captive bred tiercel peregrine 'Lieu' from Irish breeder and falconer Ken Smith. He trained it effortlessly to wait on. I watched in awe as he conditioned Lieu by casting him off to terrorise flocks of waders on the estuary at Spiddal before calling him in after 30 mins by simply dropping his lure on the ground. Despite his poor chronic health condition, Johnny was always keen to 'do his bit' and organised and flew at many snipe meets and I'm sure those privileged few who attended the post meet feast at Leap Castle the home of his friend Sean Ryan and whose family of talented musicians entertained us into the early hours will agree he knew how to throw a party. It was said that during his grouse hawking trip the boys *"kept the whole of Scotland awake for 3 days"*! He bewailed some of the modern 'developments' in falconry with the comment *"very sad"*.

I recently visited one of his lifelong friends the artist Richard Ward who captured beautifully Johnny's passion for falconry. *"You know when I think about it, I think Johnny would have been happy spending his whole life just flying falcons"*. Johnny is survived by his wife Thelma and two boys Rod and Michael.



# ONLY IRON SHARPENS IRON

Nick Curry

England

**I'm probably not alone in thinking snipe are the hardest quarry out there for a peregrine to catch. The best? Well, that's purely subjective but in terms of being difficult to catch then I think only the golden plover can rival *Gallinago gallinago* in the shape shifting realm.**

For years I flew peregrines at ducks, partridge and grouse; all quarries that a beginner can take a peregrine, especially a peregrine with some natural talent, and realistically expect to catch things relatively quickly in the eyass's first season. They are quarries that give the young falcon confidence that they can be caught, they knock them down, touch them in the stoop, take a fistful of feathers, put them in. They believe they can do it and crucially, will come across younger quarry in the season that are on the eyass's level, they then develop with the quarry and become proficient.

With snipe, the starting season is as cold and unforgiving as the October weather they turn up on. I dream about, but am yet to see the easy starter snipe, the moulting snipe, even the yellow belly snipe that flies to the nearest cover under no pressure. More's the pity. They all turn up on migration like rockets ready to play with your callow eyass like the roadrunner with Wile-E-Coyote! One jink and they set the road on fire burning into the distance!

Getting your foot in the door and making a kill or at least keeping your eyass still stooping them by the seasons end is the first hurdle to overcome. I don't consider myself an expert by any stretch. I have however made several clearly identifiable mistakes over ten years that others could learn from. There simply isn't enough time in life to make all the mistakes yourself. I wish I had someone like myself in that first decade of bog slumping failure. What I did have was access to one of the pioneers of the sport and a true expert, Eric Witkowski. Not that I was intent on listening closely at first. I was, in my mind, an established long winger and relatively successful in the UK flying the larger quarries. I knew how to prepare a peregrine for snipe, or so I thought! I tried several game hawks at snipe and then dedicated several eyasses at just snipe. All resulted in failure. Looking back now I can see the common trend in all these non-events - I made things too easy. Too easy for my game hawks as they had already caught game and ducks and when the first few snipe burnt them out of the sky they quickly saw the contrast compared with their cosy former life and wanted no more of this humiliation. This was understandable and the more palatable of my

failures, as it was to a certain extent expected and at least these hawks could be returned to the comfort zone of their usual quarry relatively easily.

Where things got perplexing was with eyasses. You need to develop them on something for those first few weeks when they are learning to fly. You need to develop them as predators along the normal trajectory of how young raptors progress but you are still weeks away from snipe even arriving on your ground. What do you do? I would get my tiercels flying strongly, waiting on well, killing and then when the snipe came in they would initially stoop and fly them hard but without success. At this point I think my approach and Eric's were broadly similar. Get the eyass killing, waiting on well and then show them snipe. It is probably at this point that our approaches and results diverged. Eric would keep his tiercels on snipe and only snipe whereas I would worry about the weeks and weeks of continual failure and take them back to other quarries for what I thought was a morale boost. This was a critical error and Eric did warn me. What always worked for other quarries did not work for snipe, at least not for me. Not quite killing them with kindness - but spoiling them. Probably some kind of Stockholm syndrome was keeping me bound to this version of bogland pugilism. Every night, exhausted and dejected I would drive off the hill talking to my tormentor - *"Never again! I've had it! A complete waste of my time!"* I never wanted to see a bog again before signing off with the parting shot *"see you tomorrow!"*. It is such a drug because we now know it can be done thanks to Eric, Martin, Don, Kevin *et al*.

I think the key decision and approach to be made with snipe hawking no matter what the initial training, is to keep the falcon on snipe and only snipe. Most (but not all) will keep trying hard and raise their game to the standard of the quarry. This principle of lowest common denominator will work against you if you drop the level and show the peregrine other quarry, particularly before it is well made on snipe. It stands to reason as the path of least resistance to a kill and warm meal. I was already well aware of this concept through making duck hawks where for similar reasons it's wise to keep them on ducks until they are wedded.

With snipe though it has been hard to stick with as the falcon simply isn't getting success for weeks on end and it's natural to apply human thoughts to the eyass' failures such as 'depressing' or 'spirit

crushing', rather than just viewing it as a natural process. I always have underestimated the eyass peregrine's ability to accept failure and keep trying - so long as it has a reason to keep trying and no obvious reasons to stop trying. Show them an easier quarry once you have started on the snipe and you are asking for falcon to simply assess the ying and yang and give up on snipe. It's simply a calculation of effort for calories. On the flip side, if all you've ever known is a hard standard you don't actually realise how hard it is as there is no context, no relativity. It's always been like that. Blissful ignorance probably works for you with snipe hawking, if your hawk is ignorant!

It took a few years of the ying and yang of Eric's serial success and my strikeouts for the penny to finally drop. I needed to fly snipe and snipe only.

In 2020 I bred a small peregrine tiercel of good breeding and got him as ready as I could for October. He waited on well as tiercels normally do, only this time I kept him going on snipe. Just kept flushing. He was joined by a wild passage tiercel for most of the season and although he often took a back seat and was intimidated into not stooping by the larger faster falcon, I realised it was only because of this and not because he didn't like the quarry or was too fat. Which brings me on to the second item for discussion - weight. This topic is as old as the hills and provides eternal pub discussion. There is no right and wrong answer to

any hawk on any quarry and indeed much of the 'correct' weight is individual to a hawk's character. However, I have seen the emergence of a trend with snipe hawking - higher weights tend to get better results. That is the working hypothesis to be tested by future field results, but my experience and others have backed it up. Again, Eric sowed the seed through his experiences as did correspondence with a couple of other snipe hawkers in the UK. Traditional wisdom on hunting the usual larger quarries suggests that refusing or half-hearted hawks get a few cranks on the hunger handle, or to be more accurate, the weight handle, to get a more positive response. This commonly works with those quarries. With snipe it tends to have the opposite effect from my experience. You are making the falcon weaker and this seems to bleed over into their psyche - to again transpose human logic, they seem to know they are not 'physically up' to chasing snipe hard. It seems counterintuitive to go the other way and add weight but it worked with three different tiercels that I've flown. It didn't make them all catch snipe but it did transform their response to snipe flushed under them.

I've flown my current tiercel fairly high in weight through his first two seasons. He killed a common snipe in his first season on the very last day. In his second season he made the normal jump in aggression and attitude just by virtue of sitting





in the moulting pen with that little plastic noggin hardening up into adult seriousness. He killed a few more common snipe in his second season and was more confident and assured to actually stoop and hunt with the wild tiercel who had also returned after his summer vacation (that's another story altogether).

My tiercel waits on very nicely, remounts for fun and waits on for 30 plus minutes, but his footing is poor. Like most things, some are naturally great, some are poor and everything in between. Unhacked eyasses start way behind the start line in my book, more on that later. He was very much in the poor category but is slowly improving. The annoying thing is that if they could just improve their footing, they would make a few more kills, and if they make a few more kills they would stoop even harder and catch even more. I don't particularly want to kill more snipe, but I want it for the hawk. They are not flying for our entertainment but to fill their bellies so it has to make sense for them. That is why I would often take them back to other quarries to give them a 'reward' for their efforts.

The tweak I added for the last month of the season was to bump my tiercel's weight up even more but fly him every other day. Big weight, big feed up and then big appetite when he did fly. His flying and stamina went up another notch, not just by my perception but on the actual metrics. I had the fastest stoops of the season on the GPS readings and a cluster of kills. Once he is fit and up

and running I will certainly employ that approach again for the coming season. It also takes a bit of pressure off the falconer in feeling they need to tramp the bogs every day. You can enjoy the days off a bit more and it brings a bit of balance to home life and other commitments. My bogs are all in hilly areas and I do get very tired and worn out over a long season (the longest season on the calendar) so flying 2/3 times a week is about perfect. Of course, you need the weather to cooperate to make your little plan fit and often it goes out of the window entirely.

Snipe hawking is so hard that I often have to stop and thank god that it is hard. It is that very fact that has me thinking about it far more than I should admit to, even during the day during the height of summer. How to make the perfect snipe hawk, routinely make snipe hawks. Quite a teaser and likely enough of a challenge to me before something goes irreversibly snap out on the bog! Well, it seems like the honourable way for a snipe hawker to be retired!

I think wild hack is the answer, to get the flying and footing powers to a level that make it a fairer fight when the snipe turn up, but to also bridge those long weeks in late summer and early autumn when you are tapping your heels. It also helps you keep away from other easier quarries that may compromise your efforts later on. The weak links... Snipe are well within the peregrine's capabilities. It is just that we make them hard to catch. Let's look at it bluntly. We

keep our peregrines in 10' x 10' aviaries for their first eight weeks, then don't allow them hack that allows them to develop physically and mentally as they naturally would. Then we give them a few minutes flying once per day and then expect them to catch an avian sky rocket. But give them the tools through a hack or just a very high standard of unhacked training, like Eric, and they have a chance.

They are not even the hardest thing out there that wild peregrines catch. Watch wild webcams and the old notions of peregrines simply feeding on pigeons have been dispelled. Tiercels commonly bring in small birds of every flavour and size. Some you wonder how on earth do they pluck those out the sky? But they do. One pair in Madrid brings in adult swifts as a staple. You would not believe it unless you watch the webcams. They have limitless potential particularly in the footing department, which I feel we are merely scratching the surface of (with blunt talons to labour the pun).

The one time I have been fortunate enough to wild hack peregrines I was amazed to watch them chase swifts over a windy wood. I don't think the swifts were in terrible danger but they were

getting pushed round the sky by eyasses that had only fledged 9 days previously. I'm sure this is the future of my snipe hawking development.

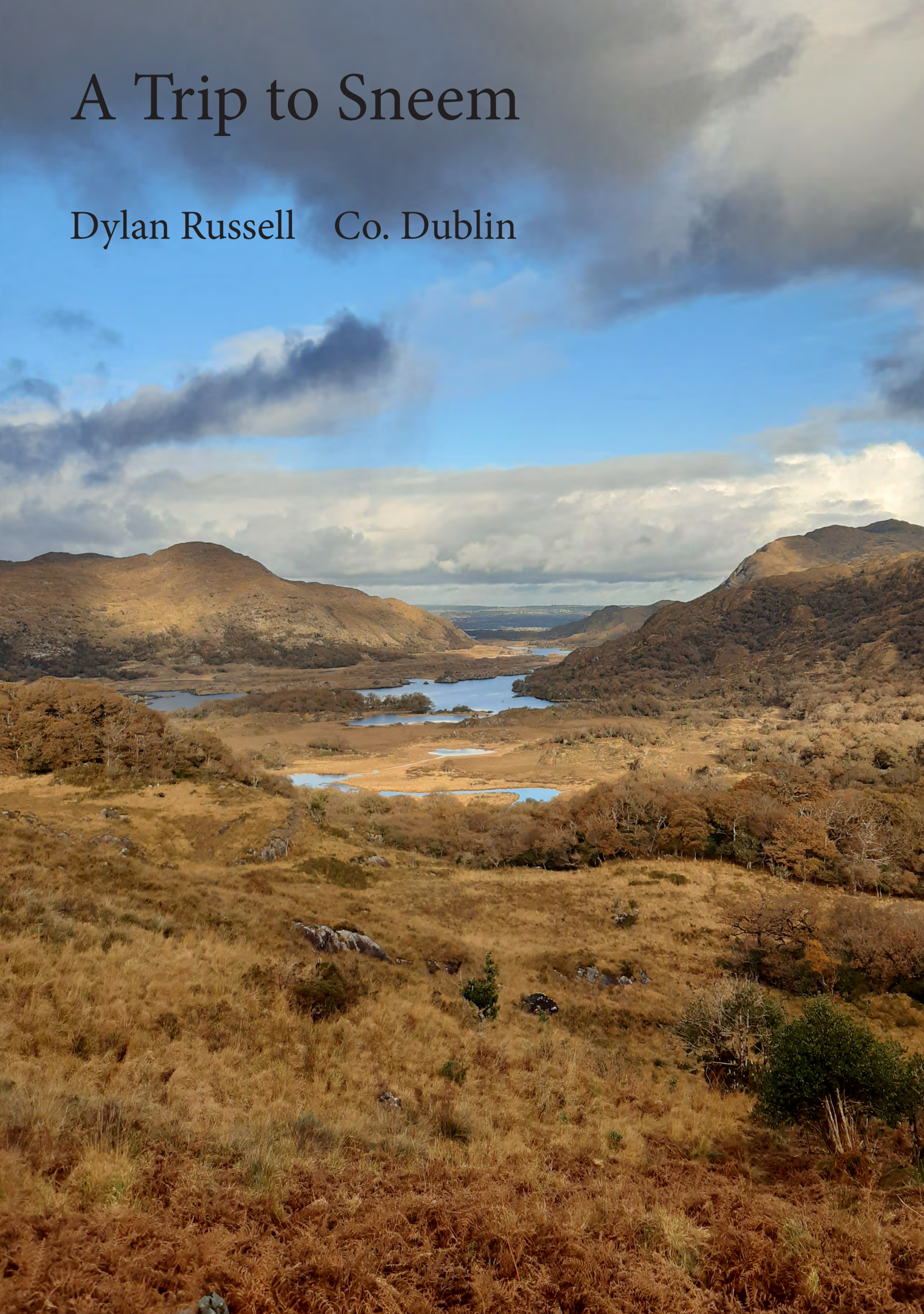
Not a how to by any means as I'm on the beginning of the snipe journey like most, but more a collection of rambling thoughts. If I could suggest anything from my traumas and occasional success I would say at this point - keep them on snipe when you start hunting snipe, keep their weight up and keep flushing snipe only, even if they go periods of refusing. Keep that edge angled against the iron only.





# A Trip to Sneem

Dylan Russell Co. Dublin



**I joined the Irish Hawking Club late September 2022. I had recently visited the National Bird of Prey Centre in Russborough House. One of the guides there, after an informative tour, shared with me his love of falconry and peaked my interest. I was informed that the best way to get involved was to join the Hawking club and so I did within a couple of weeks.**

I was warmly welcomed to the group which was reassuring and it showed evidence of a very spirited community. While scrolling through the Facebook page I had saw I just missed the opportunity to attend a field meet at Tory Island, however, there was another upcoming field meet in Sneem, Co. Kerry. So without hesitation I booked into the hotel. I had never been to a field meet or any type of hunting trip up until this point so I was excited to see how it would play out.

I travelled five hours from Dublin. For the majority of the journey I was excited but as I met the dark mountain range and a couple of wild goats as I got closer to Sneem, I started to think *"Have I lost the plot!?"* After an exhaustive drive, a quick bite and a pint I decided to head to bed. I was awoken by the sound of tinkling bells. I drew back the curtains and saw a multitude of falcons and hawks perched outside the window. After breakfast, I made my way out to the meeting point. After a few meet and greets, I realised I was the only spectator and felt I might be a third wheel.

Once we arrived to the grounds there was a few minutes of chatter and I just took in the beautiful scenery. Once everyone was ready we made our way to the first hill. There was a beautiful variety of birds there including a gyrfalcon, a goshawk, some very fit Harris hawks and one particularly chirpy juvenile golden eagle.

The falconers got into the thick of the action quickly, sending the determined ferrets down the burrows to flush out the tenants. The first few flights saw some great slips and near misses. Then the first rabbit was caught by a Harris hawk on her first day out of the season.

Shortly after another Harris caught a rabbit that bolted down the slope of the hill. The falconer, Clifford, ran to assist his hawk only for the rabbit to escape the hawk's talons and make a break for it. The Harris hawk showing experience and pure fitness took flight again and caught up with the rabbit, this time with her feet firmly bound to it! The weather at times was unfavourable with sharp coastal winds that would cut you in half and spells of heavy rain but the good spirits and laughter did not dampen. As everybody stood silent braving the elements while one of the falconers awaited a slip, it was amazing to see a group of people with the common goal of flying their birds to the best of their potential, while not knowing if they would have a successful hunt. The main goal is clearly the welfare and training of their birds.

**"I was intrigued  
by the  
sense of tribalism  
associated with  
falconry"**

At the meet I got talking to a falconer, who gave me advice on all the licensing requirements and how to obtain them. He also shared with me the importance of giving your bird time and dedication in order for them to perform at their full potential.

He also offered to let me slip his hawk, to which I jumped at the opportunity! He set the bird up on my glove and away I went to the top of a hill. Standing there for a few seconds I was amazed at the focus of the hawk and her good temperament while being handled by a stranger. As the seconds past it got increasingly quieter and I could hear my heart racing. Suddenly, a rabbit bolted and the hawk took off, closing the distance quickly. Unfortunately the rabbit went to ground but the experience of this alone was fantastic and confirmed my interests in the sport.





“He also offered to let me slip his hawk, to which I jumped at the opportunity!”

After a long, eventful day we made our way back to the hotel for some dinner and drinks. The conversations and comedic humour were in full flow. At one stage my jaw ached from the laughter.

Looking back on the trip, I was intrigued by the sense of tribalism associated with falconry - groups of people braving harsh weather and terrain with a common goal. I was thrilled with the experience, the people I met and the knowledge I gained. I look forward to the upcoming field meets in 2023 and to keep on learning and eventually partake in the art of falconry.





# The Measure of Success

Darry Reed

Co. Dublin

It's a long time since I began my journey as a falconer. Little 12 year old me was fascinated by the natural world, and in particular, predators. I found solace in these things, and at age 13, I set up with the basics on a shoestring budget and trained my first hawk under guidance from the great Rowland Eustace. A kestrel for a knave, and I loved every minute. Fancy equipment, expensive hawks and transport were all out of my reach. As I grew through my teens and joined the workforce, I had a bit more cash flow and dabbled with spars - though they weren't my cup of tea - then flew a female harris and some longwings pursuit style which I loved. In my early twenties, life took me away from falconry for many years, but in 2017, the fire was rekindled, and I rejoined the IHC.

Of course one thing led to another and before I knew it I was back in the game, with the means to create a falconry set up of a higher standard than all those years ago. I built a nice mews, exactly how I wanted it, with new materials. I could afford telemetry, and custom travel boxes. Most importantly, I could afford the time required to devote to falconry, as I have a flexible job.

We all want to be the best falconers, or austringers, possible. We think about what branch of falconry we want to do, we dream, we set goals. The road to success with a hawk can be long or short, depending on our definition of success, circumstances and the individual hawk. To catch game, to catch a lot of game, or to catch game in a certain style are different parameters of success. Some branches of falconry are far more difficult to achieve success in.



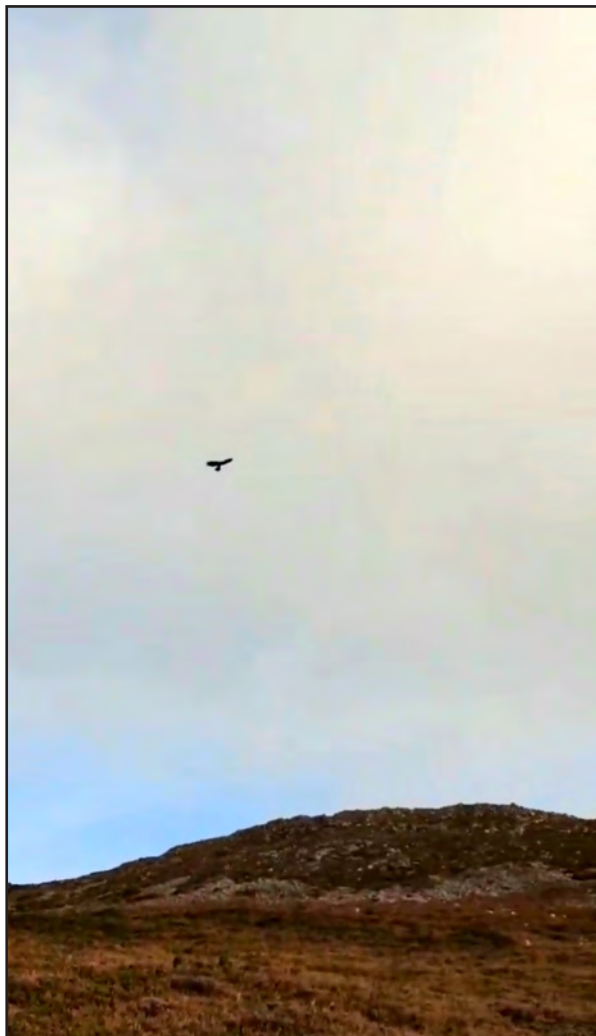
For me personally, it helps to set goals. As someone who hunts alone most of the time, it helps with motivation to move things along and keep the interest alive rather than do the same thing day after day. I like low stress hawks, but love a challenge, or a project.

I jumped back into falconry with a parent reared goshawk taken up in December 2019. I had some degree of success, but as I hadn't enjoyed spars in my youth, and didn't enjoy the day to day life with a gos, I concluded that though I love watching others fly them, accipiters are just not for me. I have to accept my limitations, and my failures, depending how I frame a situation. But each hawk gives us experience non the less.

I knew the versatility of a Harris would fit well around family and work life and was keen for some low stress falconry. The male, Lir arrived in late 2020 as a juvenile, and I've flown him mainly at corvids. I took on a four year old female, Willow, in 2021 for rabbits and with a notion I might fly them as a cast eventually. Though she had not been shown rabbits before, she took to them enthusiastically, taking her first daytime rabbit with ease but taking more perseverance to be successful on the lamp. For a long while she'd pull off as the rabbits approached cover, though she had no problem smashing into cover in daylight. She'd slip, chase, pull off, recall instantly and repeat, becoming very grippy after a titbit. I suspected she was just going through the motions with the half hearted slips and working for the recall titbits. I started recalling her



“It’s very easy to fly a mediocre Harris, but when you see what can be achieved with Harris hawks flown to their full potential, it’s hard to settle for mediocre”



to a bare glove and she took her first rabbit on the lamp shortly after. It solved the grippy issue and she still recalls quickly. I feed her very little on the glove, if she doesn't catch she gets her main rations in the travel box at the end of the flying session, or recently, on a block beside the dog.

To date I haven't flown them as a cast. In Spring she initiates nesting behaviour in the male's presence but at hunting weight looks at him as potential dinner! I late-stage hood trained both of them because I find it has such a multitude of uses, for changing equipment, travelling, hiding things from them in the field. I have a few hoods from Keith Barker who started making them a few years ago and they really are excellent. In the case of the female, who had only had only been flown following on and bated incessantly while being walked on the fist, being able to hood her was game changer to get from A to B. This has improved over time though, and she now understands the difference between places where she can follow on or situations where she's flown from the fist such as ferreting or lamping.

Social media gives a window into other falconers' day to day exploits, in every branch of falconry from countries all around the world. The

bar is really high, but as Stephen Power pointed out to me, we mainly see the Hollywood glitz! It's the polished highlights, not so much of the hard parts that build up to success, or the days where it all goes wrong. But it's good to see what can be done, for inspiration and motivation. There are so many different styles of falconry, one lifetime isn't enough to try and perfect them all. What is enjoyable and rewarding is different for each of us.

I'm really enjoying my Harris, I've built steady progress with them and there's a lot more I'd like to do. It's very easy to fly a mediocre Harris, but when you see what can be achieved with Harris hawks flown to their full potential, it's hard to settle for mediocre. No point putting a cap on your dreams, they say. So, a Harris taking hare or pheasant from the soar? Waiting on over a dog Lauren Mc Gough eagle flying style? As a cast waiting on? Pipe dreams perhaps, but not impossible, and one might as well aim high and fall short, than not try new things. If I get halfway to that dream I might get them following on over a dog which will be fun.

I do exercise my female slope soaring, and have considered that the addition of a dog would add a whole new dimension to my falconry. So I have a lovely pointer bitch on loan from Keith Barker. I've had sighthounds most of my life, and have only ever worked hawks and dogs separately. So working a pointer is a new skill to develop, and persuading the hawk to see the benefit of the dog and handling them together will be a new experience. I've had many dogs over the years, most I've liked well enough, and only a couple I really loved. The pointer bitch rates high - she and I are on the same page. I was never drawn to pointers but just working her minus a hawk is already great fun, I love her high energy drive in the field, obedience and that she has an off switch



at home! The credit for her training is all Keith's but it's good experience for me in handling a pointer. I have herself and an old lurcher here at the moment, but whenever there's space, my next dog will be a pointer pup.

I continually re-evaluate where I am with my falconry, building on my successes, and considering what are achievable goals. The best person to compare myself to is not the top world class falconers, but myself. Is there progress? Have the hawks and I enjoyed ourselves? If the hawks have progressed over the season, have been flown regularly and caught game and are mentally and physically in good condition, and I've had fun - that is success to me. Rome wasn't built in a day. Who knows where the small incremental successes will lead... I might one day find myself on a hillside watching my hawk stoop on a hare!







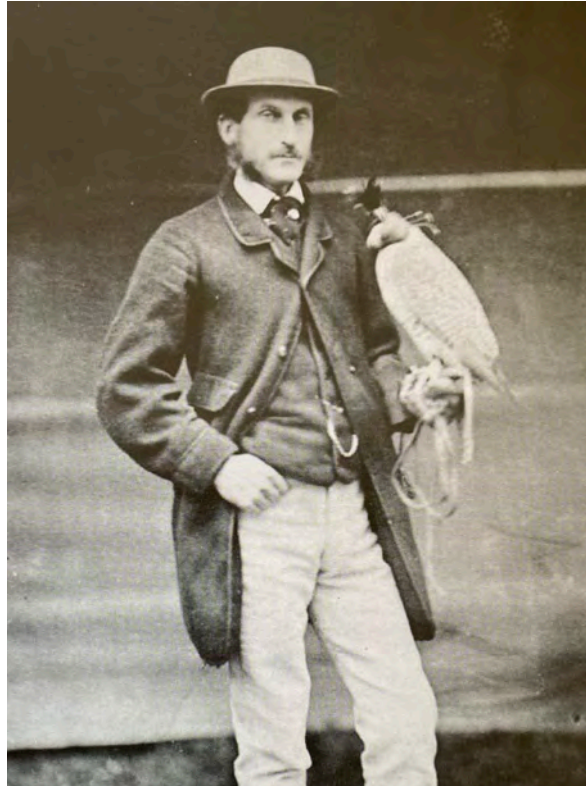
# A HAWKING TOUR IN IRELAND

Don Ryan

Co. Dublin

On Tuesday 2 April 1861, Francis Henry Salvin (1817-1904), co-author of *'Falconry in the British Isles'*, landed at Kingstown (Dun Laoghaire), Co. Dublin, to begin a month-long hawking tour of Ireland. Born on 4 April 1817 in Durham, England, Salvin served in the British army, retiring at the rank of Captain in 1864. This was not Salvin's first hawking tour of Ireland nor was it to be his last. His regiment was stationed in Ireland in 1855 where he arrived with Scottish falconer John Barr. Over the course of a number of seasons, they focused on rook and magpie hawking where they perfected the art of hawking with falcons in enclosed country. In 1857, they accounted for 184 magpies between August to November with their 2 tiercels, Dhuleep Singh and The Ó Donoghue within the counties of Cork, Kildare and Tipperary.

Salvin was not alone on this Hawking Tour; he was accompanied by fellow falconer and British army officer, Captain Arthur Brooksbank (1831-1903) from the south Yorkshire market town of Tickhill. A veteran of the Crimean war and author of *Letters from the Crimea*, it is unknown whether this was Brooksbank's first hawking tour in Ireland but like Salvin, it was not to be his last.

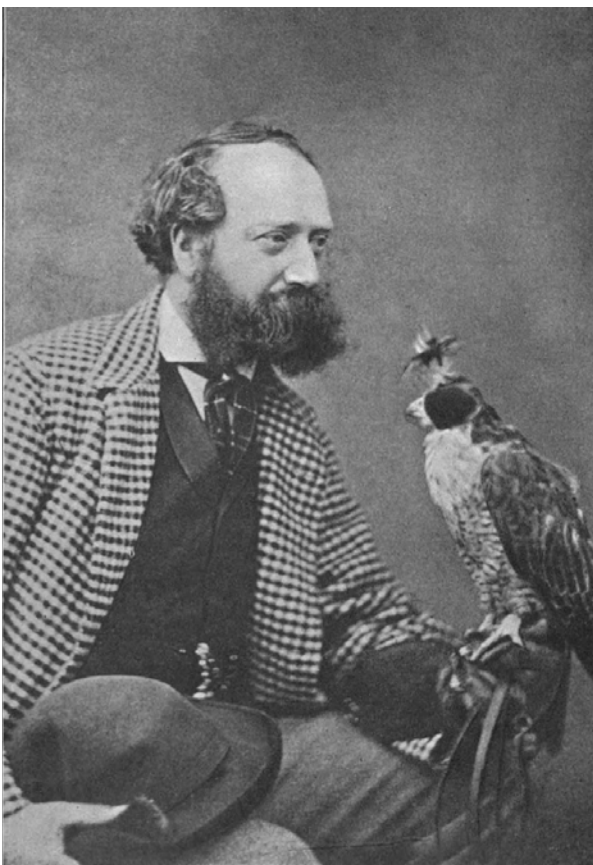


They arrived with five falcons that were in the charge of professional Scottish falconer Robert Barr throughout their stay. On the second day of their visit, they met with Irish Hawking Club members, Robert Montgomery and Dr. Leech at Dublin Zoo in the Phoenix Park and also shared a day's hawking with them at the Curragh on 8 April. A photograph was taken during their visit to the Phoenix Park which remains in the Dublin Zoological collection.

The meets were widely advertised in many newspapers of the day; in part to help recruit volunteers as beaters and spotters of wayward hawks and also to alert the locals that they were flying in the area so as to not cause the hawks any harm if they came across them.

The meets were held at the Curragh in Co. Kildare and in various townlands around Fermoy in Co. Cork and Clonmel in Co Tipperary where the attendance of locals 'surpassed' their expectations. In total they caught 52 magpies and two rooks.

Both Salvin and Brooksbank were contributors to the popular sporting magazine *'The Field'*, and wrote under the pseudonyms of Rocket (Brooksbank) and Goshawk (Salvin). On 11 May, 1861, their account of their Irish tour was published in *'The Field'*.





Top Left: Arthur Brooksbank

Top Right: Robert Barr

Bottom Left: Francis Salvin

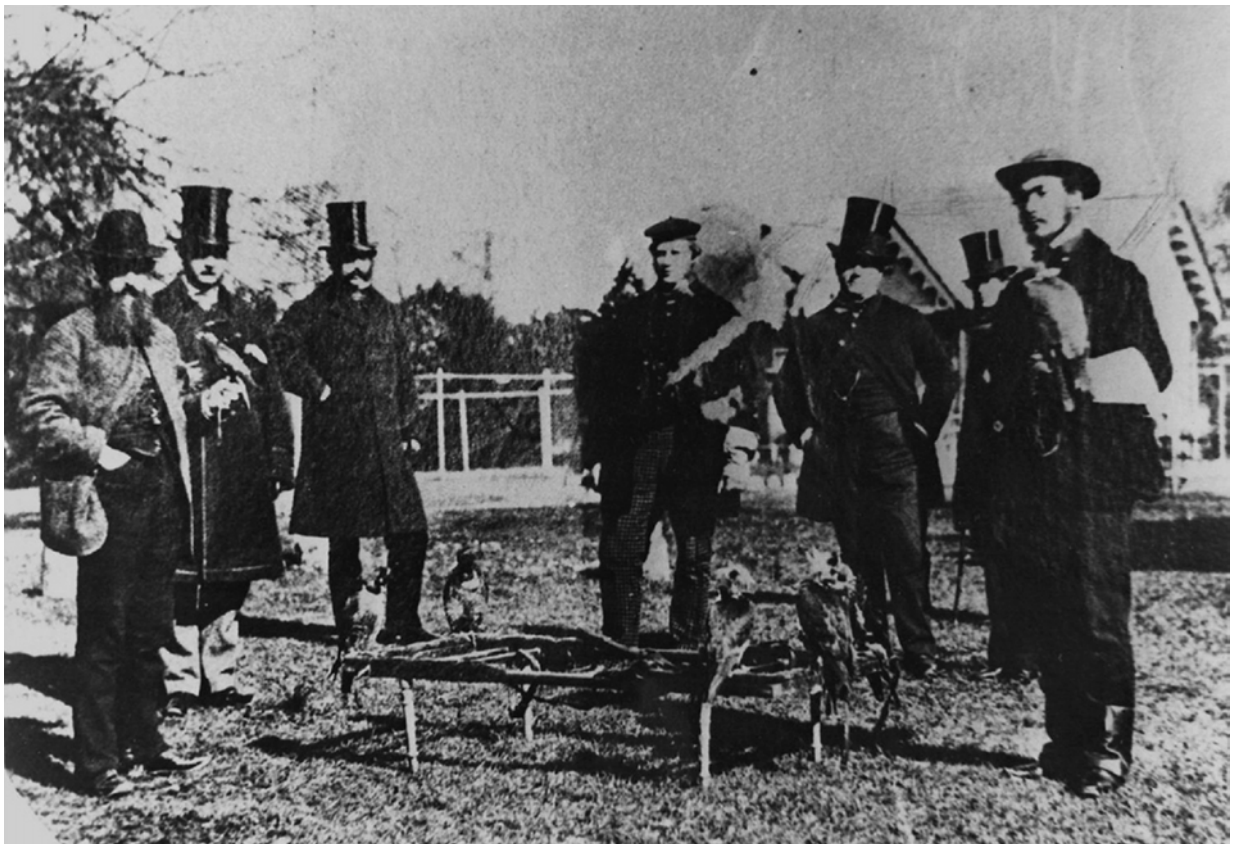
Bottom Right: Phoenix Park, Salvin left, Brookbanks right

Along with the reports of the meets from various newspapers of the day and Salvin and Brookbank's account from 'The Field', the following pages contain the fascinating daily entries from the hawking diary of Francis Henry Salvin during that Hawking Tour of Ireland in April, 1861.

*Mon 1st. Left Killingbeck for a Hawking Tour of Ireland. Met Capt. Brooksbank with his Hawks at Liverpool. Crossed at night in the "Iron Duke". Met Ed. Middelton onboard.*

*Tues 2nd. Arrived at Kingstown about 7 am after a smooth passage. Went per rail to Dublin & put up at Morrison's Hotel. Went to Zoological Gardens in Phoenix Park where we met Robert Barr. Being a regular wet day our 'Meet' near Dublin with the hawks did not come off. Made acquaintance with R Montgomery, the Secretary to the Gardens & Dr. Leech; both Falconers. We put the hawks which R Barr has been keeping at the Gardens upon the wing in the Park for exercise. Applied Burnt alum etc to a White Headed Eagle in the Gardens which has the frounce.*

*Wed 3rd. Left Dublin by an early train for Kildare - Went out with the hawks. Brooksbank's tiercel & mine flew magpies well - mine (Wallace) killed. In the evening we took the falcons to the Curragh but they would not look at rooks. They want more flying.*



## FALCONRY IN CLONMEL.

We are happy to be able to announce the arrival in Clonmel of Captain Salvin, 1st West York Rifles, whose love of hawking, and whose knowledge of that gentle science contributed so largely to the pleasure of the inhabitants of this and other localities in Ireland. The gallant gentleman has come accompanied by Captain Brooksbank, and in charge of the hawks he brings Robert Barr, brother of John Barr, the well-known falconer, who is at present at Calcutta with his Royal Highness the Maharajah Duleep Singh.

Captain Salvin arrived from Fermoy, where, for the last ten days he enjoyed admirable sport, the meets having been attended by the entire of the gentry of the surrounding country. He has arranged to have his first meet in this neighbourhood, at Nicholastown Castle, on Monday next, at half-past one o'clock, where it is hoped his five noble Peregrine falcons will find many a quarry, and give to a crowded field the pleasurable excitement of many a gallant flight through the atmosphere of the present brilliant weather.

Captain Salvin purposes remaining in Clonmel, till the end of the month, as the Hawking season will then be over, but he will within that limited time have as many meets as he possibly can.

Captain Salvin's regiment was quartered, during the winter in Scotland, where he showed the officers and men, some excellent sport, in flying his celebrated tiercels at game. We anticipate here some rare amusement, and hope the gallant captain will be greeted and recognised at his meets by many of the old familiar friends, who enjoyed so fully the pleasures of falconry, and whose assembling in numbers so much contributed to the pleasant character of the sport.

Thurs 4th. My tiercel killed two magpies. I should have said caught two for we took one from him alive & flew Brooksbank's at it - he caught it which will encourage him. Hydra killed a rook off the Curragh near the Grandstand. We had a great magpie hunt there with two falcons but Maggy beat us. The Col. of the 20th & another Officer joined us on Horseback.

Fri 5th. We had very good sport this morning with our tiercels at the magpies until the sun was too hot when we returned to the Inn. Wallace caught two making five in all. After some lunch with Soda Water & Sherry we started again with the falcons for the Curragh - Met some Mags upon the open which we could not resist tho' after rooks - had a long flight with one Mag & tho' we flew three falcons at him at last he beat us amongst the furze.

Sat 6th. Met at The Grandstand. Only one Officer of the 20th Regt from the camp joined us but we had assistance from some police & farmers who came up & tho' it came on to rain we had three flights & three kills making eight in all. One was a capital flight. An umbrella kept the hawks dry. I think one might be carried in wet weather in "a Frog" like bayonet having a case to protect it from thorns etc.

Mon 8th. Mr Montgomery, Dr. Leech etc arrived from Dublin for some hawking. We had good sport - Killed five in all - in all 13. These Gentlemen returned by a late train.

Tues 9th. Brooksbank went with me to

Punchestown Steeplechases near Naas. They were well worth seeing.

Wed 10th. Left for Fermoy.

Thurs 11th. Met at Grange Cross, had a good field of Officers from the Depot Battalion. We had good sport. Killed four - in all 17.

Fri 12th. Met at Corrin Bog. Killed five making total 22. Dined at Barracks.

Sat 13th. Met at Fermoy Turnpike. Had some excellent flights but only one making 23. B's falcon killed a rook.

Sun 14th. After Mass & a good Sermon there was a great procession. Walked to Castle Hyde with B. It's very beautiful. You have hill, rock, wood, water & the ruin of the Castle. It's rented by Major Chichester but is on the market.

Mon 15th. Met at Belle Vue. Killed four making in all 27. Dined with Major Daniel the Barrack Master.

Tues 16th. Met at Hag's Bed. Had some very good sport killed three making 30 in all. One Mag was a most obstinate one & at last he fairly tired out the hawks which had struck him three times. We actually had to leave him in a bush to the delight of a keen farmer of the name of Dwyer who boasted his Mags were the best in all Ireland. Dined at Mr & Mrs Bell's & had a dance after.

Image: Castle Hyde



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## CAPTAIN SALVIN'S FALCONS

On Monday last, Captain Salvin and Brooksbank, with their falconer, Robert Barr, and a pair of tiercels, met at Nicholastown, and although the season for falconry is well-nigh past for this year, and in most open districts there is at this period a considerable difficulty in finding magpies where a sporting flight can be obtained, yet so anxious were those accomplished falconers to procure some amusement for the large field which assembled at the meet that after some time passed in endeavouring to force the magpie from the neighbouring coverts, some splendid flights were had in the afternoon which resulted in the deaths of four of those cunning birds, whose craftiness in seeking the protection of every hedge, tree and shrub, within their flight, was overcome by the bold riding of the horsemen and the rapid stoops of the noble peregrines.

As the story of Captain Salvin is, by the close of the season, now limited, we are informed, to this week, we will not enter into detailed particulars of the day's sport, especially as we understand that it is his intention to return here during the ensuing winter, when we shall be happy to again chronicle some more of those brilliant meets at which there assembled, as well as all the sporting celebrities as the bounty, rank, and fashion, of this and adjoining counties. At the close of the day, and in one of the best flights, we observed three falcons together in the air, and, on enquiry, we learned, with much pleasure, that the third falcon was the property of a Mr. Langley of this county, who, we were informed, had been "with hooded falcon on wrist," anxiously and intently watching the canny movements of the falconers, and seemingly determined to profit by the opportunity of thus getting a lesson in the arts by which those wild, though daring birds, are managed in the field. Mr. Langley, we are aware, is yet but a novice in the art, and it must have been to him a golden chance to receive instruction from such practiced masters, with one of whose treatises, "Falconry in the British Isles, by Captain Salvin," we are satisfied Mr. Langley must be quite familiar. We regret that, in our anxiety to keep pace with the rapid movements of the falconers, and again join in some of this enticing sport, we had not earlier observed Mr. Langley's falcon, but we find that the sedentary pursuits of editorial labour are not the best preparations for "the pace that kills" over such a stiff country as Nicholastown where our only consolation was an occasional check, and the deep breathings at our side, that we were not alone in our distress.

On to-morrow the hawks will meet, for the last time this season, at the Kilsheelan Railway Station at one o' clock, where, from our former recollection of that country, we anticipate some first-rate sport.

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Left: Clonmel Chronicle Wed,  
April 24th 1861

Right: Nicholastown Castle ruins



*Wed 17th. Met at Corrin Hill. Killed four Mags making 34 in all.*

*Thurs 18th. Met at Corrin Bog. Killed two making 36. Hawks evidently want a rest as well as ourselves. I broke down under the right knee. Dined at the 19th Depot Battalion.*

*Fri 19th. Made calls & left for Clonmel. Had an hour & a half to wait at Mallow. Fell in with Sir Js. Cotter Bt. who showed us the Town & a fine old ruined Castle close to the Town. Upon arriving at Clonmel we called upon Power & put the hawks out at his new place (Springfield) over the Bridge. Took up our quarters at the Inn.*

*Sat 20th. Being anxious to give the hawks a rest we had an easy day with them. We killed a Mag after a hard flight making 37. My old friend Nul joined us today.*

*Sun 21st. After Mass I called upon the Power's & was joined by Brooksbank & we spent the day & dined there.*

*Mon 22nd. Met at Nicholastown Castle. There was a large assemblage of Ladies & Gentlemen. Mr Langley joined us with an old tiercel which had clearly (from its high flying) flown more at Pigeons & Game than Mags. Its pitch was too high but tho' it did not do much execution it served us by 'stooping' the Mags until we got up with our Hawks. Killed 4 making 41.*

*Tues 23rd. Went with Brooksbank & Nul to Ardfinnan Castle (Mr Prendergast's) to fish. After seeing Mr Langley's hawks (he being on a visit here) & an early dinner we tried 'crop fishing' for Salmon but failed for want of a breeze. Saw a man take a Salmon (10 lbs) with three worms well weighted with lead to keep the bait at the bottom of the strong streams. Though not successful we spent a very pleasant day & returned in the car at night. The old Castle which has not been modernised is a nice specimen. There is a pretty window in it.*

*Wed 24th. Met at Kenilworth. Killed five making 46.*

*Thurs 25th. Met at Kilsheelan but magpies were scarce & we only killed two making 48. Saw the quarry in which - Nul my friends cousin rode many years ago. It is most wonderful how he escaped from the fall, must be 30 feet! The horse was killed on the spot but the rider recovered without breaking a bone. It appears this quarry was not railed off & N & a friend of his Mr Grubb being youths were racing their horses both being ignorant of the quarry when W. Grubb's horse just passed clear of the abyss & his friends went in. I know both the parties & was glad to have the opportunity of seeing the place which is so famed.*

*Fri 26th. Left for Kildare. Flew at Mags near the Town but only killed one. The hedges are now too*

## FALCONRY.

**FALCONRY IN CLONMEL.**—We are happy to be able to announce the arrival in Clonmel of Capt. Salvin, 1st West York Rifles, whose love of hawking and whose knowledge of that gentle science contributed so largely to the pleasure of the inhabitants of this and other localities in Ireland. The gallant gentleman has come accompanied by Capt. Brooksbank, and in charge of the hawks he brings Robert Barr, brother of John Barr, the well-known falconer, who is at present at Calcutta with his royal highness the Maharajah Duleep Singh. Capt. Salvin arrived from Fermoy, where for the last ten days he enjoyed admirable sport, the meets having been attended by the entire of the gentry of the surrounding country. He has arranged to have his first meet in this neighbourhood at Nicholastown Castle, on Monday next, at half-past one o'clock, where it is hoped his five noble peregrine falcons will find many a quarry, and give to a crowded field the pleasurable excitement of many a gallant flight through the atmosphere of the present brilliant weather.—*Clonmel Chronicle.*

much out & it is too late in season. This makes 49 Magpies.

Sat 27th. Excepting on the day of our arriving we have actually had no rain until this morning. The day turned out fine & we 'Met' at the Grandstand on the Curragh having been invited by Capt. R Carr of the 36th Regt. He & many of his brother officers were there & we had a very nice days hawking, killing three which makes 52 during the Tour which ends today most satisfactorily but I must here observe that for Magpie Hawking a regular Falconer is not required especially when two or three of the party understand hawks which in such a Tour would be a great saving of expense. If required a lad might be hired for a trifle to carry

the hawks. After the days sport we took leave & returned in a car which came for us from Kildare - dined there & reached Kingstown about 10 pm.

Sunday 28th. Started by the Holyhead boat at night.

Mon 29th. Got home about midday.



been going on for some months past.—Correspondent.

**FALCONRY IN CLONMEL.**—Captain Salvin, 1st West York Rifles, whose love of the ancient sport of falconry is so well known, and contributed so largely to the pleasure of the inhabitants of our district on former occasions, has arrived in this town on a visit to some friends. The gallant captain is at present sojourning at Springfield, the hospitable mansion of Edward Power, Esq. He is accompanied by Captain Brooksbank, and the hawks are in charge of Robert Bair, brother of the well-known falconer of that name, who is attached to the suite of his Royal Highness the Maharajah Duleep Singh, in India. Captain Salvin gave his first meet in this locality on Monday last, at Nicholastown Castle, in presence of a large number of spectators. The gallant captain has arranged to renew the sports on Thursday and Friday next, and he purposes staying here till the 1st May, when the hawking season will be over. There is some rare amusement expected from the meets, and his able mode of flying his noble tarsels at game.—*Clonmel Correspondent.*

Top Left: The Field  
27.4.1861

Bottom Left: Map of  
Clonmel

Top Right: Irish Times  
26.4.1861

Bottom Right: Irish  
Times 1.5.1861

**FALCONRY IN CLONMEL.**—On Friday last Captain Salvin gave his last meet with his celebrated Perigrine falcons for this season in the neighbourhood of Clonmel. The meet took place at Kilsheelan, in presence of a crowded field, comprising several of the elite of the locality.—*Correspondent.*



## FALCONRY.

A HAWKING TOUR IN IRELAND.—In the column you devote to falconry we were lately sorry to learn that a trained falcon had been trapped, and thus probably lost to the gentle art; but it is a consolation that the owner of the moor on which the poor hawk was caught has (like a true sportsman) made the only reparation in his power by advertising the circumstance in your valuable paper. As hawks will sometimes stray, we strongly advise the owner's address to be attached to one of the jesses, which is easily done by having it engraved upon a small piece of silver, which of course must be thin and light. Many valuable hawks have been recovered by this means. We now send you tidings of a very different nature from the loss of a hawk, viz., the capture of fifty-two magpies with two tiercels during a short tour in Ireland of somewhat less than a month. We commenced at Kildare April 3, 1861, with "Wallace," a tiercel of last year, and Rocket, a tiercel a year older. After a few days these hawks, though not hitherto flown together, proved that the good opinion their masters had formed of them was correct, for in six days they cut down thirteen crafty magpies without the aid of a single horseman. The last day at Kildare we had the able assistance of two practical falconers from Dublin, who brought with them a most beautifully trained haggard, of the rather peculiar name of "Breezoh." From Kildare we proceeded to Fermoy, and were received at the station with a cordial welcome by Major L—, an old friend and an expert hand in "serving the hawks" by driving Maggy out in the scientific manner. We were assured of a good field, and made arrangements for "the meet" to be at Grange Cross the next day at two p.m. The promise of a good field, surpassed our expectations, for upon the road we were glad to see many cars of ladies, some ladies and gentlemen on good steeds, and many active-looking runners in gaiters and knickerbockers, with a sprinkling of pork-pie hats; our sport was good, and ended in the deaths of four magpies at the farm of our old acquaintance and excellent sportsman, Mr Dwyer, who joined us with as much keenness as on former visits. During our pleasant stay at Fermoy we had six meets, and killed on an average four magpies a day. On the 19th of April we took leave of our kind friends with regret, and proceeded to Clonmel, where our arrival and "meets" were reported in the *Chronicle* in a very flattering manner. Our first day, though not a "bloody" one, was productive of a most exciting flight along the high bank of a stream which was thickly covered with bushes and brambles, to which the wary Mag long stuck. The "quarry," being "put out" as quickly as the rough ground would admit, endeavoured by crossing the stream to work its way through some furze to a safe retreat in a wood; but in this he was disappointed by a successful flank-movement, which Mr P. effected on his clever grey, which proves how useful a good horseman, who is "scientific" in magpie hawking, may make himself. By this movement Maggy was "headed," and in a desperate effort to gain its old retreat (the bank), it fell from sheer exhaustion into the stream and was captured. We had only time for three meets at Clonmel, but must say that in no part of Ireland was the sport more appreciated, to judge from the numbers out, the interesting well-written descriptions of our sport that appeared in the local papers, the kind hospitality shown us during our stay, and the pressing invitations to return. During our visit at Clonmel we had the pleasure of meeting Mr L., a brother falconer, who resides in the county of Tipperary, and who being in the neighbourhood upon a visit was invited to join us with a tiercel. Though Mr. L. is not an old hand we were delighted to find him extremely fond of, and well acquainted with "the art," and his tiercel proved himself to be a splendid flyer and very obedient. We wish more would follow Mr L.'s example and join our ranks—that is if they will remain staunch, and not be disheartened by the many disappointments that every beginner must expect. In conclusion, we ended this very successful and delightful tour at Kildare, where we began, and, with the assistance of some officers from the Curragh camp, made up our list to fifty-two magpies, with but one wet day that stopped our sport.—ROCKET AND GOSHAWK.

Image: Salvin and Brookbank's account of their Hawking Tour in Ireland, printed in *The Field* 11.5.1861



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