



SAFA

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**South African
Falconry Association**

SAFA

The South African Falconry Association

S.A.F.A. is an association formed from affiliated Falconry Clubs or other organisations that practice or support Falconry and activities allied to or with the sport and all that it stands for.

The aims and objectives of S.A.F.A. with regards to Falconry are clear and they are:

1. To support the aims of affiliated clubs and other organisations that practice and or support Falconry as a sport.
2. To promote and protect the recognition of falconry as a legal field sport.
3. To actively promote the conservation of birds of prey.
4. To initiate and co-ordinate communications and discussions with Nature Conservation Bodies and Decision Makers on a national level, for the purposes of obtaining uniform laws and policies regarding Falconry. At the same time fostering sound working relationships and understandings based on integrity and mutual trust.
5. To actively promote the scientific study of raptorial species, their care, welfare, training and captive breeding as well as information on wild species.
6. To establish traditions which will aid, perpetuate and further the aims of Falconry, its welfare and the raptors it employs.
7. To provide communication and to disseminate relevant information to interested members.
8. To improve, aid and encourage competency in the art and practice of falconry amongst interested persons.
9. To facilitate communications and co-operation with international Falconry Clubs, centres and organisations of matters of mutual interest and which benefit the sport of Falconry.
10. To actively assist with the co-ordination, implementation and management of the breeding in captivity of various raptors employed in Falconry.



Inaugural SAFA meet held at Kokstad in 1990. l-r; Bennie van der Merwe, Ian Hoffman, Tim Wagner, Dieter Nischk, Alan Harvey & Alan Stephenson

EDITORIAL

Editing this second issue of the SAFA Journal set me back to thinking of days gone by, and where I started in falconry. I reread Howard Wallers first editorial about the negative perception most members of the public had when the word falconry was mentioned. Fortunately falconry has come of age and now that publicity and exposure for the sport is fairly widespread, more and more people understand what it is all about. When people do not understand something they usually fear it, because fear of the unknown has always been part of mans makeup. I suppose this is natures way of ensuring caution when approaching the unknown. I remember in days past trying to explain and correct negative perceptions about falconry as the world was then in the preservation mode and very little tolerance was given to anybody who wanted to keep a wild animal simply for the enjoyment of it.

Trends and cycles change and if one examines these trends it becomes apparent that these are caused by a lack of understanding. In the early years of my conservation career, predators were hunted with a vengeance including birds of prey. Fortunately knowledge has shown that they are just as important as the prey species if not more so. Then the trend did a complete about turn to the other extreme where no predators were allowed to be hunted or kept in captivity. This preservation code did not allow for the average persons feelings and these are the people who will ultimately ensure the species survival. With raptors that move over large distances and cannot be kept in reserves, education is the best way of ensuring their continued survival. Conservation is far more preferable to preservation and this entails the wise utilisation of our natural resources. I am often requested to give talks on raptors and the most impressive presentation is with a live falcon. I was visiting a farmer recently who informed me that he had years previously attended a talk I had presented at a local school. The memory of seeing a live falcon up close has stayed with him forever. He told me he has odd problems with eagles eating his lambs and that his father used to trap or shoot them, but he now has a different outlook and policy on the farm with the understanding they do more good than

harm and all play a part in natures cycle. I left the farm feeling good about life in that there are some rewards for your efforts after all.

Over the years falconry has progressed in South Africa to where the standard is very high at present and we need not be ashamed of hosting any foreign visitors. Our standards are as good as any other country. With frequent contact and visits to other countries we can now evaluate the standards set in this country and be proud of them. This has taken hard work and always by the few that make a difference. As falconers are few and far between, every falconer is an ambassador of the sport and should contribute as much as they can. As most falconers are very independent and individualists this can often lead to conflict and I appeal to you as falconers to be tolerant of one another and others that share the same interests as we are the ones that have to ensure that falconry remains a legitimate pursuit for our children to be able to practice in the years ahead.

A STEPHENSON



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It is late afternoon as I sit and watch through my binoculars, scanning the sky for that falcon I have a feeling has to be out there somewhere. I have parked my vehicle next to a sunflower land that has ripened and allowed to dry before harvesting. As usual every dove and pigeon for miles around has moved in for the feast and thousands of rock pigeons and red eyed doves swirl around, trying to eat as much as they can before it gets too dark. I have a pigeon staked out behind a net in an open land next to the sunflower land as well as two other pigeons tethered on long line on opposite corners of the land. I sit and wait, lighting up another cigarette, as the tension builds because the time has

pigeons. I sit back and light another cigarette thinking that perhaps this is going to be another blank afternoon trapping as the light is starting to fade quickly as it does in winter. As I turn to scan the net I see the bait pigeon flapping frantically and I think to myself that this is a good pigeon, a blue bar with white wing tips that is very visible. At that moment a falcon stoops past the pigeon and throws up, turns again and starts strafing the pigeon on the ground. I grab my binoculars, trying to hold them steady without shaking as the excitement surges back and then disappointment as I realise the net has fallen. When I set up the net, there was a good breeze so the pigeon was placed upwind of the net but

this area before, and, I seldom have the opportunity to trap a peregrine as they are fairly scarce in this area. I wait patiently until the peregrine binds to the pigeon and sits proudly in the land with its kill. The pigeon is a strong cock bird slightly larger than the falcon and it is with difficulty that the peregrine eventually subdues the pigeon. I feel a bit sad as this was one of my own homed pigeons and a good one as well, that is why I had placed it behind the net hoping it would not be killed. The other two pigeons are culls from pigeon racers. I carefully take out my noose carpet and check to see that all the nooses are open and standing up properly. The noose carpet consists of two square 350 mm flat pieces of thin wire welded mesh, with squares 12 mm by 25 mm. The idea of the small mesh size is so that the falcon can only take tiny bits of meat at a time and getting frustrated moves around trying to find a better opening to feed through. Both pieces of mesh are hinged at one side so that the pigeon can be sandwiched between the two pieces which is clipped closed with wire hooks at each side. If only one piece of mesh is used the falcon will flip it over, exposing the pigeon. Nooses are made from 10 kg test fishing line and tied into a running noose about 50 mm in diameter. Fifty to a hundred nooses are placed evenly all over the upper side of the carpet. Send \$10 for complete instructions and plans!!

I wait patiently thinking about the three rules of trapping with a noose carpet. Patience, patience and patience. I watch carefully through my binoculars as he plucks feathers in an aggressive and exaggerated manner. Suddenly he takes off screaming, three black crows have arrived on the scene having noticed the drifting feathers. The tiercel flies into the

TRAPPING

by Alan Stephenson

arrived when experience from years of trapping makes me sense that something is going to put in a sudden appearance before long. I make a mental note that I am trying to give up smoking, but at times like this it is hard. All of a sudden there is a clatter of wings and thousands of pigeons are swirling around the land. I stand up, looking for what caused the disruption, knowing that somewhere, something has caused the pandemonium. I find it, just a reed cormorant coming in to land on a little dam next to the land. The pigeons are skittish and this is a good sign that raptors are preying on them. The pigeons settle quickly once they identify the cormorant, intent on filling their crops. I wait another few minutes before there is another swirl of pigeons only to discover a tractor moving down a side road that has upset the pigeons again. I wait a further twenty minutes before action strikes again, this time it is for real as a black sparrowhawk accelerates past some trees and locks on to a red eyed dove and chases it all over the sky eventually snagging it and drifting off down the valley ignoring my bait

the wind has now dropped and the falcon has come from the side and pulled the net off without getting caught. I identify the falcon as an adult peregrine tiercel as it stoops again for the tenth time trying to flush the pigeon. I curse the net, the pigeon and the falcon as I have not trapped a tiercel peregrine in



Adult female Lanner trapped by A. Stephenson - Salem Area, May 1998

closest one and binds to it falling to the ground, only releasing it just before they hit the ground. @%#@! I think to myself, this little guy has got guts and these \$#@%^\$# crows are stuffing up the whole show. The crows leave in a hurry with the falcon in screaming pursuit. He turns after a short distance and lands next to the pigeon again. I breathe a sigh of relief as he carries on plucking the pigeon, making a mental note I should get a big crow hawk to thin out these troublesome crows. After an eternity he starts breaking into the pigeon. This is now when the make or break is about to happen. I drive slowly closer until I am opposite the falcon, stop the vehicle and get out. Walking nonchalantly without looking at the

hundred meters and stop the vehicle. There is the tiercel venting his frustration on a hapless marsh harrier which eventually drops into the grass just to get out of the way. The tiercel flies back and lands about twenty meters from the pigeon, stands upright, runs forward a bit and then stops and looks again. My heart is pounding in my ears and I cannot stop the binoculars from shaking. The tiercel moves forward again and looks around, clearly suspicious. Suddenly he flies off again and I curse for there walking up the road is a farm worker. I start the vehicle and drive towards the person quickly and stopping next to him ask him if he wants a lift. No he says, he is just going up to the corner. Get in I tell him. He smiles and says it is not necessary, he can walk

peregrine about one hundred meters away from the carpet. Suddenly the falcon takes off and lands right next to the pigeon, and after a quick pause to look around walks onto the carpet and does a few circles trying to get hold of the pigeon. He tugs away at the mesh and turns again. I see him tugging his leg and flapping a wing. He must be noosed but I cannot see clearly in the fading light. I start the vehicle and look again through the binoculars. He turns slowly and falls over, wings outstretched. I am now certain as I race off towards the falcon, jam on brakes, pull up the handbrake and leap out realising I forgot to leave it in neutral as the vehicle dies a shuddering death. I sprint the fifty meters towards the falcon as he tries



Adult male peregrine trapped by A. Stephenson. Salem area, May 1998

falcon directly I stroll across as if there are other things on my mind and I could not care two figs about this little bird sitting in the middle of the land. The peregrine starts screaming defiance at me as I approach closer and eventually flies off still screaming his frustration. I bend down and quickly place the pigeon inside the noose carpet, careful to arrange feathers to stick up through the mesh. I then turn back to the vehicle, moving at a brisk walk, telling myself not to run but act casual. I talk a lot to myself while out trapping. When people have accompanied me on these trapping excursions they usually have this amused look as I babble to them and myself without saying anything they can understand or makes sense. I leap back into the vehicle, jam it into reverse and move back not too hurriedly while trying to find the falcon again. As I narrowly miss a pine tree I then look in the rear view mirror making sure I am back onto the dirt track again. I reverse about five

the rest of the way. With teeth clenched trying to smile I tell him that if he does not get in quickly because I am trying to trap a bird and he is spoiling the whole effort I will be extremely angry with him. I am already extremely angry but I smile politely. Eventually he gets in and I start reversing even before he has time to close the door. I then explain to him what I am trying to do and point out the pigeon lying in the middle of the field. Without binoculars he cannot see it and from the look on his face he clearly believes that I am mad. Maybe I am. After driving up the road for a kilometre or so I tell my passenger he can get out with strict instructions not to venture anywhere near the trapping area. He is just too relieved that nothing serious has happened to him and climbs out hastily thanking me for the lift. I cruise down slowly looking for the peregrine but cannot see him. I stop about three hundred meters from the noose carpet and scan the area carefully. There sits the

unsuccessfully to get away. I grab hold of him quickly and smiling broadly release the two nooses pulled tight around his toes. By this time it is nearly dark so I decide to take him with me to ring, photograph and release early the next morning. All the while my captive bred three year old peregrine falcon is sitting hooded quietly on the seat. I race over to a little dam nearby, fit on her transmitter, untie the jesses and without checking to see if there are any ducks on the dam strike the hood and she is away. It is a perfectly clear calm evening with the sun down and a red sunset behind the falcon as she mounts with that urgency they only seem to

have when flown this late in the evening. When she has reached about four hundred feet, old heights die hard, I storm up the dam wall and flush. A cloud of weavers rise into the air but no ducks. Well I think I cannot have it all my own way. I look up and take out the lure to call the falcon down. After a few swings of the lure I realise this falcon wants something to fly and as fast as I swing the lure the faster she powers even higher and higher. I am having difficulty keeping sight of her as the light is fading fast. I then remember a small pond a little way further down which sometimes has a duck on it. I run as fast as I can to the pond and briefly glance up as I get to it but cannot see the falcon. Two redbilled teal get off the pond and fly unhurriedly out over the land. I stop and watch trying to catch my breath. As the teal fly away I can suddenly hear the rushing air from a stooping falcon but still cannot see the falcon. The teal obviously can as they turn sharply and put on the turbo's to get

back to the pond. Too late as she stoops past them and throws up from underneath, binding to the front teal as she passes through him. The rear teal just flies straight down and bounces into the grass. I walk over and look for it and see it trying to hide under a small grass tuft. I catch it carefully but it is going nowhere and definitely not up into the sky again. Its nerves are shot as I put it into the pond and it quietly slips into the reeds. I pick up my falcon from the kill and feed her up. What a day. Early the next morning I drive out to the spot with the hooded tiercel on my glove where he was trapped the day before. After ringing, measurements and several photos have been taken I cast him off into the calm morning. He does a small circuit and lands in a tree nearby where I can hear him calling and a return mate call as well. What's going on here? I grab my binoculars and scan the tree. Sitting just below the tiercel is a haggard female peregrine. I dive into the back of the vehicle grabbing pigeons and nets and quickly set up. Driving a bit further down the track I look back to see nothing much is happening. In my haste I have put out an unfit, lazy pigeon which has seen this all before. It sits there trying to pretend it is a clod in the ploughed land. I curse and think what should I do. Plan B. Sit awhile and see what happens and get a pigeon ready with a weight to throw out if the falcons start flying and ignore the net pigeon. Nothing happens for a moment and then the tiercel takes off into hunt mode, ignoring the net after yesterday's experience. The female follows shortly after and this is my cue and I toss the pigeon as far as possible away from the vehicle into the land. It flies across the land trying hard but losing height rapidly. Both the tiercel and the female turn and chase the pigeon as it lands. The tiercel then leaves the chase as the pigeon gets up and flies towards me again. I hurriedly start the vehicle and race away down the road looking back to see the female strike the pigeon. I drive down the road until far enough and turn around again. I cannot see any falcons or the pigeon as it is in a slight hollow. Slowly I drive until I can see where there is a dark shape sitting where the pigeon is supposed to be. I scan with the binoculars to see a falcon plucking the pigeon. My heart starts the old familiar pounding and involuntary reach for a cigarette. Feathers are flying as the falcon plucks the pigeon. This has to be the female as it is not long before the falcon is feeding and no more feathers are drifting downwind. I slowly edge closer in preparation with the noose carpet until I draw up level with the falcon. I get out and with the casual walk amble over

to the pigeon. As the falcon flies away I think to myself this peregrine looks remarkably like a lanner falcon. The falcon flies overhead and I look up to see the white chest of an adult lanner. Well I think that is why most people confuse lanners and peregrines because I would swear blind this was a lanner if I had not seen it sitting in a tree with a tiercel I had just released. Carefully putting on the noose carpet I move away back to the vehicle and drive down the road again. I turn around further down the road and drive back till I am about three hundred meters from the noose carpet. The falcon is already sitting next to the carpet as I stop. As I glance through the binoculars the falcon steps on to the carpet and is noosed straight away. I drive over thinking this was too easy and run to catch the falcon. As I grab the bird I then realise this is a lanner falcon indeed. What's more it already has a ring on. I walk back to the vehicle trying to puzzle out what has happened. I glance up and see two falcons soaring overhead. With one hand I look through the binoculars to see both falcons are peregrines. What must have happened is that the lanner was perched nearby and took the pigeon and the peregrines then moved on. The interesting part was that I had trapped this female at the breeding site four and a half years ago and about three kilometers away.

Although there are many different ways of trapping raptors the net and noose carpet back up are definitely the most productive for me. I have tried most of the methods known to man and then a few not heard of and probably will never hear about again. Dig-ins on the beach bring back memories of approaching rumbings down the beach and jumping out just in time before being driven over by a fisherman in his 4 X 4. I have tried the jacketed pigeon with limited success, as the pigeons usually will not fly and when they do they get snagged on a bush or up in a tree. Several times I had to fetch my climbing gear and retrieve a noosed lanner and pigeon from a tall tree. I even tried fishing off a cliff with a jacketed pigeon, works well until it gets snagged and then out comes the ropes to abseil down and release the pigeon and often with a falcon dangling together. Climbing gear is definitely part of a jacketed pigeon setup. Even on the beach I have had to swim far out where those huge critters with big teeth and eyes lurk, when a pigeon has decided to head out to sea. A transmitter attached to the pigeon is a definite must to find it again as a lost pigeon could mean a dead hawk. I have also tried radio controlled bownets and it works well until the batteries go flat and nothing happens.

The more elaborate the plans the more to go wrong. Working on my lanner research project often means I have to trap an individual bird so elaborate plans are sometimes necessary to trap a trap shy bird. Its hard to keep a straight face when a little old granny came into the office one day to tell me there are boys trapping pigeons and shooting them across town on a wire. This was when I was trying to trap an elusive peregrine in town and rigged up a long fishing line from the two tallest buildings and sending a jacketed pigeon across to entice the falcon. This was after I caught some other little old ladies dog in the net early in the morning and the local beggars were always trying to steal my bait pigeon. A free tossed jacketed pigeon landed on some woman's plate in the local Spur after being chased by the peregrine and took refuge in the first open doorway.

Nets for trapping should be as fine as possible, braided silk dyed black is the best if you can obtain it. Mesh size should be one hundred millimeters from knot to knot for falcons and larger accipiters, seventy five millimeter mesh for smaller accipiters. Never put nets up too high as they are easily seen. A standard net size is one meter high and two meters wide set with the bait decoy upwind of the net. With accipiters two nets set in a L shape is more effective as they are not particular about the wind when they fly in. For the noose carpets a noose about fifty to seventy five millimeters is right and make sure that the knot does not move or jam tight. This is to ensure that if a noose does break the bird will be able to pull it off easily otherwise it may lose a toe. A triple circle fishing knot tied on a small nail makes the best noose. Trapping is a serious art and care should always be taken to ensure the welfare of the raptors. Although pigeons are often killed by the raptors, ensure that they do not have to suffer by your tardiness. Provide food and water when out for a days trapping and never leave them in direct sunlight on a hot day for any length of time. Also make sure you have valid trapping permits.

That is what trapping is all about and while some people play golf or have braai's with the family others like myself will be out there trapping.



To Hack or not to Hack

by Alan Harvey

The controversy of whether to hack or not hack eyas falcons has come down with us through the ages. The practice of hacking was prevalent in British falconry for the past 500 years. Hacked eyases were worth three times more than those that had the benefit of a few weeks liberty. Any falcon destined for waiting on flights was not even considered unless it was well hacked. A larger number of eyases than needed for the coming season was collected from different wild eyries, and put out to hack. The best falcons were then taken up for training.

In recent years the advent of the captive bred eyas, usually paid for in hard earned cash has seen few falconers willing to risk eyases at hack. In most countries the lack of wide open spaces free from human interference and the modern falconers lack of understanding of the benefits to be had derived from a good hack system, has resulted in few eyases being hacked.

I have hacked two broods of captive bred eyas peregrines for falconry and release purposes. Prior to this I have successfully hacked lanner falcons and kestrels back to the wild state. I am fortunate in that I breed my own peregrines and live in an area where hacking conditions are favourable.

Briefly the advantages of a good hack are that you start with a bird that is in superb physical condition and has the mental outlook of a young passage falcon and most importantly is homed to the hack site, to which it will return from as far as one hundred kilometers away. The other benefit is the pleasure to be able to watch a brood of young falcons flying around the hack box and discovering their environment and learning the techniques that will be fundamental to their successful entry into the cycle of life.

Young falcons at hack exhibit all the personality traits and flight tendencies that they will retain to a large degree throughout their lives. I have found this invaluable in selecting an eyas out of a group of youngsters. In contrast an eyas chosen at random out of a breeding facility is a matter of luck. In a brood of falcons out at hack, very often one finds a bird that seems to have the disposition to fly. This bird will fly high and wide almost continuously. It seems to enjoy riding a wild Spring gale and harassing any large bird that enters the hack territory. Another common activity is to pull a spray of leaves off a tree and carry this high up into the sky where it is released only to be caught and released again in a series of spectacular aerial manoeuvres. Other behaviour often seen is the ubiquitous pole sitter. These birds will sit for long periods of time doing nothing except to fly to the hack box to eat and then spending the rest of the day lengthening the shadow of a pole or rock.

The traits exhibited at hack have in my experience been a fair indication of how a falcon will turn out later as a falconry bird. While new falconry techniques such as kite training can to some degree alter this behaviour, a young falcon carefully selected at hack on its performance goes a long way to cutting the odds of picking a good falcon. Another advantage of a hack programme is that any birds not required for falconry can be released back to the wild successfully. At present where peregrine breeding projects in this country are producing more birds than is required for falconry, this is an important consideration. This can augment the wild populations and also place requests in a favourable light when permits for new genetic bloodlines are required.

The hack system I use is basically the same as that used by the Peregrine Fund Release Team of Cornell University in the United States. It is based on a traditional hack using a hack box on a platform mounted on four meter long creosoted poles. The siting of the hack box is very important as for the first few weeks the site has to be monitored continuously until the young falcons have homed to the structure and surrounding area. There should be as few mammalian and avian predators in the area as possible as well as unprotected powerlines and transformers. These can and have caused casualties.

The following is a day to day account of the hack of two captive bred female african peregrines until day seventy five. The pair that bred were both three years old and prior to being placed in a breeding pen had been flown under falconry conditions for two years. The three chicks with natural incubation were hatched in October and parent raised. The tiercel was left in with the parents until hard panned at 54 days and then removed for falconry purposes. The two females were removed at 34 days old and placed in the hack box.

Hack Box

The hack box is the same design as used previously to hack lanner falcons and kestrels. It consists of a wooden box 1.5 meters deep by 1 meter wide and 0.75 meters high mounted on two four meter long creosoted poles. In front of the box a ledge 1 meter wide and 1.5 meters in length is mounted. The front half of the box is closed and the interior floor is covered with washed river

gravel. The two base poles have flat sheet zinc nailed around them for two meters to prevent mammalian predators from scaling the poles.

Situation

The hack site is in rolling grassland with few trees except for a line of big eucalyptus trees about two hundred meters from the box. Adjacent to the box are two pit silos and a concrete silo two meters above ground in height and about four meters deep.

Methods

The two eyases were placed in the box in the late evening after removal from the breeding pen. A mesh surround was put over the ledge so the birds could not accidentally fall out of the box. This served the purpose of letting the eyases get used to their surroundings before fledging. The mesh was kept in place for ten days, when it was removed, also in the late evening. The birds were fed once a day with whole eviscerated quail at predawn. Feathers were not removed from the quail. Every effort was made so that the falcons could not see the food being delivered. The quail were placed on the ledge by means of a long aluminum pole. Average feed was 100 grams of quail per falcon per day. After the eyases had fledged food was tied onto a wooden board and placed on the ledge. The two portions of food were tied on opposite ends of the board to minimise feeding aggression. The board was only used after the eyases had stopped coming back to the box to roost. From day 38 till day 58 the birds were monitored from sunrise till sunset and behaviour noted and avian predators such as yellow billed kites were prevented from stealing the food. As genets were a problem in the area, a cage trap was set every evening under the roost tree for the duration of the hack. This was made easier as the birds used the same branch of the same tree every evening for the duration of the hack. The birds had a few favourite perches and seldom perched anywhere else.



Diary Notes

Day 43

One eyas bales off prematurely and is only capable of level flight. It is retrieved and replaced noting that one centimeter of blood is still in the base of the feathers.

Day 45

Both eyases fly early in the morning. They crash land in the top of the trees and fall down through to the ground. They spend the morning running around on the ground from tree to tree. By evening they have flown and landed higher up, the dark bird on an electricity pole and the pale bird in a tree.

Day 46

At first light one bird flies to the box and feeds while the other flies around the box and lands on the ground. Eventually joins the other bird and feeds at 1 pm. Both birds spend the rest of the day sleeping on the hack box.

Day 47

Dark bird flies to pole and back again in early morning and then falls into the silo. The pale bird flushes when a ladder is brought to retrieve the bird in the silo. She flies high and wide landing in the trees. Dark bird flies up to hack box where both spend the night.

Day 48

Fly to perches and back to the box. Roost on ledge huddled together.

Day 49

Both fly to edge of pit silo early. Fly off together one stooping at the other. Spend the rest of the day on the hack box.

Day 50

Immature lanner falcon flies around the box. Eyases crouch down, no vocalisation. Dark bird tries to catch a wagtail without any serious intent.

Day 51

Start to scream. Still do not move more than three hundred meters from the box. Become more active in the mornings doing everything together. Lanner arrives back at noon. The dark eyas flies with it, mild aggression from the lanner.

Day 52

Birds scream a lot. One chases a black crow after being displaced from an electricity pole.

Day 53

Lots of screaming. Heron lands on top of hack box and eyases dive bomb it calling. One bird rings up after a lark doing three rings. Birds sit in rain

Day 54

Both birds chase a lark and the pale bird tries seriously to intercept a glossy starling crossing an open area. First night away from box, roost in trees near house.

Day 55

Flying all over planation 500 meters from the box chasing each other with plenty of screaming. Pale bird stoops at crows feeding in lands. Flying almost all the time in late afternoon.

Day 56

Pair of local lanners attack eyas which easily outflies them in a straight line.

Day 57

Lots of playing and chasing. The female lanner stoops at the eyases sitting on the box. The eyas outflies it then turns and stoops at it, driving it away. The pale bird does two rings after the racing pigeons at the house.

Day 58

The dark bird is seen eating a small prey item pirated from a black shouldered kite. Pale bird rings up after another black shouldered kite. Serious dogfights with immature lanner and peregrines hold their own.

Day 59

Lanner sits on hack box. Proceeds to eat food. Peregrines seem tolerant and sit and watch.

Day 60

Both birds scream violently when at perch or flying. Mantling at hack box extreme, possibly due to lanner pirating their food the previous day. Pale bird chases a pigeon tossed from the hand. Flies around at high speed in the late dusk, eventually roosting in its tree in the pitch dark.

Day 61

Pale bird chases another tossed pigeon, and nearly catches it in the trees. Dark bird more perch specific and not as active.

Day 62

Both birds fly with fluttering gliding flight when around the hack box. In the late afternoon they soar higher than three hundred meters over the mountain about a kilometre away. Pale bird chases a passing stanleys bustard for almost a kilometre. First vertical stoops while playing. Pale bird rings up a black shouldered kite over three hundred meters above.

Day 63

Both birds come off the mountain when shown a pigeon and chase hard.

Day 64

Excellent flying by both birds over the mountain. High altitude duelling sessions with immature lanner and yellow billed kites. Released sealed pigeon, caught by immature lanner.

Day 65

Self hunting by both birds on the racing pigeons. Good cooperation and speed. Dark bird nervous on the box when feeding, keeps trying to carry food away.

Day 66

Both birds absent in morning. Trapped immature lanner and ringed. Birds return mid-morning. Chase a pied crow in late afternoon.

Day 67

Pale bird catches a pigeon after trying to strike it. Feed together after initial squabbling. Pale bird chases two rock pigeons from the house to the mountain in late afternoon.

Day 68

Major fight over plastic packet between birds. Found both birds sitting on fence poles next to maize land about two kilometers from hack box.

Day 69

Cold, wet and drizzly. Eyases sit on house roof and watch trained peregrine sitting on the block on the lawn. Not very active. Afternoon, the pale bird rings the flock of racing pigeons up to one hundred and fifty meters the first time. Second time cuts one out and catches it over the house and carries it to the plantation where the dark bird joins in. Peregrines nearly killed by trespassers with throwing sticks while feeding.

Day 70 (Trespassers still running. Ed!)

Dark bird still screaming loudly. Pale bird much less vocal and demonstrative. Pale bird takes pigeon from a perch of two hundred meters with awesome speed. Both feed on pigeon under trees and dark bird changes roost to adjoining tree.

Day 71

Dark bird absent in early morning, arrives at eight am. Pale bird works the flock of pigeons over the house masterfully, not unlike a black sparrowhawk. In the afternoon has a brilliant chase after a good racing pigeon, pulling some feathers out of the pigeon.

Day 72

Pale bird starts hunt on pigeons very high over plantation. Very good speed and overhauls pigeons easily, taking one.

Day 73

Both birds sit on house roof in early morning and scream at adult peregrines in the breeding pen. Flutter flight still common especially when hungry.

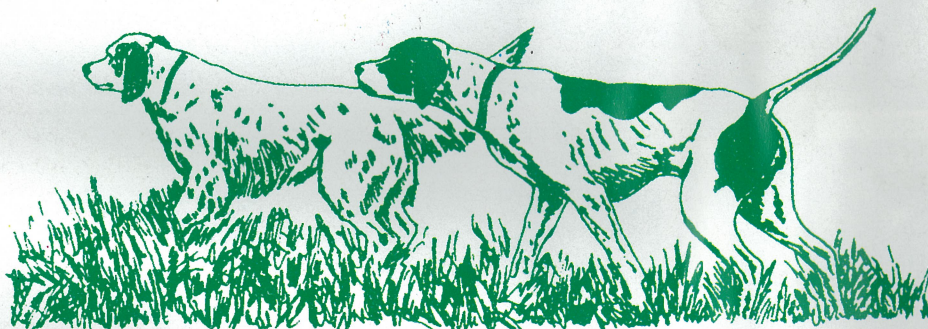
Day 74

Both eyases start a good ringing flight on pigeons over the house. Pigeons put into trees. Dark bird rings pigeon. Not bad flying. Pale bird trapped with nets in afternoon. 730 grams, fat.

Day 75

Dark bird catches wild quail and feeds below trees. Trapped in afternoon, ringed and released.

This bird came back after an absence of three days, fed on the hack box and was gone for ten days before returning and seen soaring over the hack area. The last positive sighting was twenty five days later when she was seen hunting rock pigeons over the maize lands.



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DUBAI FALCONS

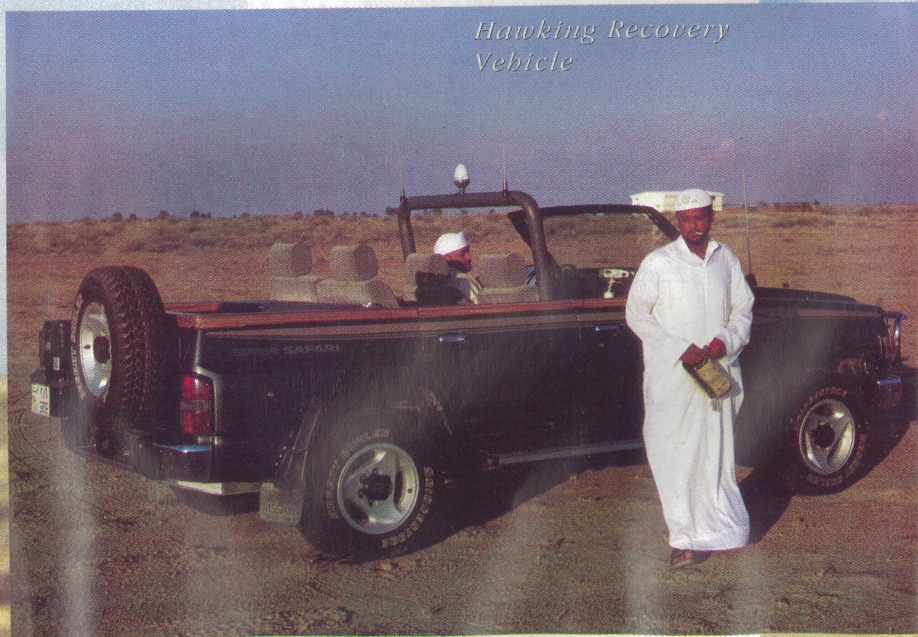
Breakfast in the desert; l-r, Shaikh Rashid, Howard Waller, Martin Lee



Gyr / Peregrine



Hawking Recovery Vehicle



Barbary Falcon



*Left;
Gyr / Peregrine*

*Below;
Red naped Shabin*



*Gyr / New
Zealand Falcon*

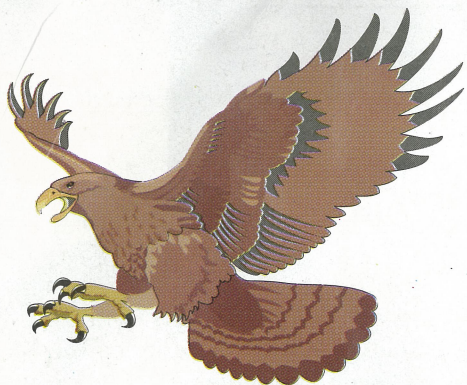


*Above;
Gyr / Saker.*

*Right;
Turkish Peregrine*



Lure Hacking



By Clinton Gilliers

Over the past few years one can't help but notice people talking from time to time of having just liberated or hacked their hawks.

On asking them how this was achieved the reply is unfortunately often the same: They took the hawk to a nice field and after giving it a full crop released it to "live happily ever after".

I have had two opportunities to hack hawks, an eyas Lanner and a first-year Jackal Buzzard. The Lanner was hunting and killing under falconry conditions¹ and the Buzzard was successfully hunting for itself before it damaged itself in a birder's aviary. According to this information one could be led to believe that there would be no trouble with liberating these birds into the wild and having them fend for themselves.

The Lanner, after taking its eighth dove was ready! The bird was hunted in the area where it was to be hacked with the hope to give it a sense of familiarity once free. The hawk was given a decent crop (NO GORGE) and left outside. The next day the bird was back and eager for the lure. A week passed with the bird arriving each day at the mere sight of the vehicle and each day the ration on the lure was reduced. On the sixth day the bird was weighed and had dropped to 20 grams under its flying weight so I had to raise its weight again.

On day twelve the bird arrived after quite a bit of lure swinging with a visible crop and dove feathers on its talons. I gave it a mouthful

from the lure and the next day it was back for more after another unsuccessful day.

From day eighteen the bird would start disappearing for a day or two at a time and was killing on almost a daily basis, but there were still days when it had to depend on me..

Only after 35 days had a whole 6-day period passed without any assistance from me and the hawk also wouldn't come down to the lure. I saw the hawk for the last time 52 days after the release and since it had fended for itself for roughly 3 weeks I feel confident that I had done everything in my power to help liberate this lanner back to the wild.

The exact same method was followed with the Jackal Buzzard. It seemed very unwilling to fend for itself initially, but after 2 weeks it was fending for itself completely unassisted.

From my limited experience I honestly do think that it is extremely difficult for a hawk to initially fend for itself once released and it is essential to assist the hawk until it can definitely cope on its own. As a point of interest, I found that using the "kite technique" as described by Harvey on p6 of the 1996 SAFA Journal a good way to get the larger and lazier hawks fit.

In conclusion I would like to appeal to members to enjoy each and every hawk you fly while progressing through the ranks and not merely see it as a stepping stone to bigger and better things. Take what you can from each hawk and if you no longer have a use for the hawk have enough compassion to ensure that once it is no longer in your care that it can at least fend for itself.

¹The bird had originally been bred in the Johannesburg Zoo, trained by a falconer, lost while flying in Sandton and picked up starving. It was handed to ARC who asked Clinton to rehabilitate it. (Ed.)

A successful Hormone-assisted moult with a Musket African Goshawk

Roger Neilson

"Goblin" was given to me in early February 1997 as he was beginning his fourth season. He weighed 205 grams and had seen only 1 moult! I flew him until early July, by which time his faded sepia-brown, two-and-a-half year-old plumage had lost the battle with a short, sharp hunting season that had notched up 76 kills (mostly Indian Mynas and Laughing Doves hawked from the driver's seat of a car along quiet suburban roads) and he had only four of his own feathers left in his train. Two had been yanked out when his tail-bell snagged on an iron fence post while he was in pursuit of an Indian Myna, and the rest - brittle and weakened from a severely delayed moult, had been broken in tussles on the ground.

As winter approached, I became desperate - "Goblin" was beyond "tatty" and pretty soon he would not even be able to fly if he did not replace his feathers. In talking about how we could get "Goblin" to moult, I remembered an experience I had with a juvenile African Hawk Eagle which seemed to have been induced to moult prematurely as a consequence of its diet. I was living and working at Tuli Breeding Station at the time. In October that year, Tuli Breeding Station became infested by quelea Finches. Back in those halcyon times I had a number of hawks to feed so I greeted the arrival of the pre-breeding swarms of queleas with joy and put out a couple of "walk-in" traps and caught up to 40 finches in each trap every day. I fed fresh queleas to my hawks and deep-froze the balance for future use. The male queleas were in an interesting condition - they were just beginning to moult from winter to summer plumage, some pink feathers around the head and neck peeping through the drab, pale biscuit brown, but more important was that the gonads of the male birds were swollen to the size of small acorns. I decided to feed males to the male African Hawk Eagle and the females to the two female lanners in my care. The female lanners enjoyed the quelea females immensely, but didn't drop any feathers (possibly because the male queleas have to attain breeding plumage, build nests and display on these before the females are attracted and are ready to mate and lay eggs). The African Hawk Eagle male, on the other hand, began to drop feathers from his breast, back and neck at an age of $4\frac{1}{2}$ months.

I discussed the pro's and con's of a hormone-assisted moult with Robbie Robinson and he more or less agreed with me that if "Goblin" did not moult in the summer of 1997/98 he would be rendered flightless and that although the male animal has both male and female hormones in its make-up, testosterone would be the one that triggers breeding condition and moult. Around about this time (June 1997) a body-builder colleague was talking about a course of anabolic steroids and a male hormone called testin. I explained "Goblin's" problem and acquired a phial of testin from him. I decided on a dosage formula of 0.01 millilitre for every ounce (28.35 g) of body weight (i.e. a 0.07 millilitre sub-cutaneous injection, since "Goblin" was about 7 ounces at flying weight) every 21 days. I administered the first of four injections on 12th June. I did not have long to wait for the first and very interesting side effect to show. "Goblin" (whom I

continued to hunt with until the rapid fall of flight feathers made this inadvisable) put on mass and developed a huge appetite. I was able to fly him at his previous year's moulting weight of 205 g. At this weight he was deadly! For example, previously I was able to rescue Mynas from his clutches and give them to friends who wanted them for lanner trapping or any other trapping activity. Now with his increased muscle, by the time I could get out of my car and make in the 25 or 30 metres that these chases usually covered, the Mynas were stone dead of spewing blood from punctured lungs. He was also faster - as several new Crowned Plover kills attested to - and could hold his accelerative burst longer, as a 42 metre chase and kill on a winter widowbird proved. (Incidentally, I had tried for years to take a winter male widow bird with lanner tiercels and failed). I figured that even if he did not drop feathers I had found a way of increasing a male short-winged hawk's slipping range, speed and tackling capability. The implications could be enormous! (Male Black Sparrowhawks pulling down fully grown guineafowl on a regular basis, for example).

The first primary feather dropped 14 or 16 days after the first injection, two secondaries followed a week later. Strangely, although flight feathers moulted and grew in rapidly, very few breast, back or neck feathers dropped until I stopped the treatment, when they dropped rapidly.

"Goblin" began "yipping" to attract a female in early September - by which time he had dropped six primaries on each wing and six train feathers. I stopped treatment to allow these major feathers to grow out and not be subject to too much stress. These major feathers grew in broad, with darkly contrasted blackish and white bars. The moult changed once I stopped treatment, and small feathers began to drop. In November I learned that Jates Oettle had lost one of the males from his breeding facility. We decided that "Goblin" should be given a chance to become a father, because a) we need captive-bred stock, and b) if he did breed successfully it would further prove the viability of the artificially assisted moult experiment (i.e. if it enhanced performance, caused feather drop and did not impair his sexual prowess, it would be a worthwhile addition to the falconer's medical syllabus).

A this point in time (late February 1998) "Goblin" is fully through the moult (and has been for about a month) but has failed to breed. We suspect that the last week of November was too late to introduce him to the breeding enclosure and expect results. He does interact with his new mate, some sticks were added to the nest, and things look good for next season. I shall definitely be trying hormone-assisted moult (using testin) on other male accipiters in the future. I may even try anabolic steroids (that don't promote moulting and breeding condition) purely to enhance performance. I have subsequently made a cursory study of the lengths to which pigeon breeders go to enhance performance in races. What they do is interesting and definitely could have falconry applications.

And so it transpired that four rough and ready South Africans set out for the Great Divide. We left Howard Waller and a grinning Alan Stephenson to make their own way to the Middle East (it just so happened that they were on their way to Dubai on the same day we left for the States).

We flew to Boise (Idaho) via Amsterdam and Minneapolis. I really enjoyed Amsterdam because that \$10 that had been burning a hole in my pocket could be well spent on a hot shower after nearly 10 hours on the plane. I think 50 bucks for a shower is a bargain. And they even gave John a complementary towel. At least that's what he says. Francois was disappointed because he was hoping for a golden shower. Apart from that, Amsterdam is the only place where you can spend R60 on a packet of McDonald's chips and a coke. Otherwise Amsterdam is a very quiet little place with only the

who did look away quickly muttering something about chemotherapy. Once in the States we adapted quickly as only seasoned travellers do. That we were too scared to get off the Interstate in case we couldn't get back on has nothing to do with it. The fact remains that had it not been for Tim's lightening fast reflexes within the first 10 minutes of getting into the car, things could have turned ugly.

And so unfolded a great trip to the U.S. of A. Minneapolis, Boise (Idaho), North Powder (Oregon), Boise, Ketchum and Sun Valley (Idaho), Mud Flats (Idaho), through Wyoming and Nebraska and finally, Doge City, Kansas for the meet then to Minneapolis and back home. About 3 000 miles, 90% of which I don't think we could have endured had we stuck with the first compact car we hired in Boise. To say that we were crammed in that car doesn't even

loft again. Francois and I wanted to catch and train her as a quail hawk in time for the NAFA meet. Later on during our stay we saw plenty of Prairies and various baits and the odd Golden Eagle.

During those first few days in the States we tried in vain to catch a glimpse of the famous Sage Grouse, but we did see the occasional duck. In fact it seemed that everywhere we went there were always ducks in the air someplace. The Blue-winged Teal (one of the many duck species in the USA) is about the size of our smallest francolins, and would make our little African Peregrines' eyes water.

We spent those first days driving around the North Powder - Baker area hunting ducks from small dams, rivers and drainage ditches with a Prairie and a couple of different hybrids. On one day we went in search of Sage Grouse and

AFRICANS IN THE U.S.A. OR HOW WE SAW THE NAFA MEET

Kenny Pinnock

occasional buxom blonde walking around in a long flowery dresses and clogs. John still swears that he heard whip cracks and screams, but I think he was just over-tired.

The flight from Holland to the United States was worth noting only because we experienced four sunsets and 3 sunrises en route. Which would have been far more pleasant had it not been for John's uproarious bowels. Our arrival in the States caused no undue sensation as I had feared. In fact if we hadn't told anyone we were falconers from South Africa no-one would ever have known. Very few people looked twice at Francois' Free State hairstyle, and those

come close to the truth. But then, how else does one describe the effect of having your knees pinned to your ears in a confined space?

Once we got to Dan and Karen Thee's home in North Powder, things got a whole lot more exciting. That first day dawned crisp and clear with a light dusting of snow. But then of course, we get this back at home all the time.

Our first sighting of a wild hawk happened to be a marauding Cooper's Hawk, helping herself to Dan's pigeons in his loft. I felt he was being unsporting when he prevented her from getting in the

found a covey of Huns (Hungarian or Grey Partridge) which are about the size of our Coqui Francolin instead. I got the feeling that the Hun is a bit faster than the Coqui. This was also the first time any of us had seen Prairie Falcons flown and we were all impressed with their power of flight and aggression when flown at ducks.

After spending four days with Dan and Karen, we went back to Boise where we spent a very pleasant few hours at the Peregrine Fund, although we were disappointed not to see any Aplomados, Peregrines or Taitas as they had been moved to another facility.

Visiting the archives was also a worthwhile experience. We then spent a wet afternoon with Bruce Haak and saw his female Anatum Peregrine flying. That night we rocked Boise like never before. Francois (or France, as the Americans preferred to call him) kept the crowds entertained with stories about newspaper boys being chased up the traffic lights by lions and such commonplace African events. Although at times I don't really think that the audience understood all that he was saying. As one Mexican put it: "I can hear ze words but I don't understand what you're sayin".

We left Boise feeling in rather high spirits. The reason being that the "Men in Black" had arrived. We had left the much-too-small, "knees-around-the-ears" compact back in Boise and exchanged it for a lean, mean GMC Jimmy falconry machine. With "Jimmy" we toured in style. The temperature had plummeted to -10 °C and coming from sunny South A. this was a whole new experience. But we didn't care, we had "Jimmy".

When we reached Sun Valley we met up with Carl Green and flew his Gyrkin to the kite in a screaming gale and just about in the dark. We then knew why Gyrs are such effective hawks under those conditions after it got above the kite and put in a huge stoop into the wind at a bagged pheasant.

The following day produced great flying weather and we were lucky enough to get to see a merlin flown at starlings and at last had our first sighting of Sage Grouse. They weren't quite as large as I'd imagined them to be, but they are quite big enough! Unfortunately no kills were made so we didn't get to see one in the hand, but we got to see their famous "dump 'n jump" escape technique, which kind of reminded me of Francois back in Boise, although in his case it should read the "jump 'n dump" technique.

Our departure from Sun Valley was marked by our usual breakfast of Canadian Bacon, hash browns,

eggs sunnyside up on white (although I think Tim had Streaky Bacon on Rye - he never could make up his mind). The land of infinite choice was really too much for him. From here we headed for the Saw Toothed Range of the Rockies and passed weird landscapes called the "Craters of the Moon" en route. Following Dan we were led straight to Jack Orr's house in a valley between two rocky mountain ranges. That afternoon we flew a Gyr X Saker at Sage Grouse, but they bumped just as Jack had cast his hawk off. Later a Gyr X Peregrine was flown at Hungarian partridge. No kills were made, but we did get to see Jack Orr's private collection of falconry literature and natural history later on that evening.

Leaving the Saw Toothed Mountains, "Jimmy" was pointed towards Mud Flats where our host was Hubert Quade. It was here that we first spotted the smaller grouse species of the States. On a very snowy, rainy and cold morning, Hubert flew his passage Gyr at Sharptailed Grouse. Even though the grouse flushed when the hawk was out of position we were able to see the speed of the grouse and thought to ourselves yet again how great it would be to live in the States. After tracking for the next two hours Dan recovered his Prairie falcon and then Hubert flew his Gyr at a couple of duck in a drainage ditch. He also flew a passage Prairie Falcon which I thought was the most impressive hawk I had seen flown so far.

It was now time to head down to the NAFA meet which involved a Hell of a lot of driving. Unfortunately we drove over most of the Rocky Mountains in the dark, but we still had Cabella's to look forward to the next day to make the trip more interesting. When we reached Cabella's (the largest hunting/outdoor store in the USA), John was like a pointer in the middle of a covey of about 80 Orange River Francolin. When we finally managed to drag him out, his credit card was all warped and blackened around the edges and he had that stupid look on his

face that one sees only on people who are high or live in Vereeniging.

And so we drove (a lot more loaded now) and stopped only for a pizza, surprising the waitress by not knowing how the Juke Box worked. We finally reached the NAFA meet later that evening and promptly spent all of our remaining money on transmitters, receivers, books, perches and even, in John's case, a lure (which he lost in Dullstroom this year anyway).

Tim gave a talk on South African falconry, and due to the lack of flying fruit, I think it must have gone down pretty well. We saw some great duck hawking at the meet, and Shane Phitides (a South African living in the US) outdid himself by catching a Blue-winged Teal and a Bobwhite Quail on the same day with his Anatum tiercel. The Bobwhite flight brought home the amount of quarry to be had in the States. The flight was originally supposed to be a duck flight, so the hawk was put up and we all ran in to flush ... a rock. (This should ring a few bells!). But Shane said he'd seen a quail next to a clump of trees nearby before, so we stomped around the tree's for a little while and sure enough, up got a covey of about 15 Bobwhites, and one bled.

The NAFA meet was also an opportunity for us to see Prairie Chickens in action, and what an impressive quarry they are. Just perfect for our African Peri females. We also met several of the well-known American falconers, including Pete Widener, Rick Sharpe, Steve Martin, Dave Cherry and several others. And then it was back home to the normal summer heat. I would like to thank all the U. S. falconers who assisted us in our trip and thanks must also go to NAFA for putting us up (or putting up with us) at the meet. Obviously, thanks to John Bamber, Francois Breedt and Tim Wagner.

Oh!. And thanks to Arnie Swartzneggar for letting us use his house in Sun Valley for photographic purposes.

FALCONRY IN ARABIA

ALAN STEPHENSON

Having worked on the *Calidus peregrines* on the coastal dune fields in South Africa, and making contact with The Avian Research Center in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates I was full of enthusiasm when Howard Waller from the Free State Falconry Club and I set off. Destination Dubai. We met up with four other falconers at Johannesburg International airport who by chance were leaving to attend the Nafa meet in Kansas, US of A. They were leaving on the same day and at about the same time. After having a drink together and swapping falconry stories Howard and I boarded the plane for Dubai. We arrived at five fifteen am the following morning at Dubai Airport. Upon arrival Howard walked through customs with a British passport and I, having a South African passport was asked for my visa. Upon explaining to the official that I did not have one and I was assured something had been arranged he indicated I would have to catch the next flight back home. I then explained we were guests of Sheikh Rashid Bin Khalifa Saeed Al Maktoum. A light went on somewhere and the man told me to wait. A short while later a very important looking man arrived, smiling broadly and apologised for the delay. Judging from the amount of braid and stars on his uniform he was in charge. My passport was stamped and I was wished a pleasant stay. Service with a smile. We met Martin and Pat Lee and had a high speed tour of the town in style. Later on we met up with Ali Soori, a very pleasant man who works for the main man who is Sheikh Rashids cousin. It was all very confusing trying to remember who was who. Ali took us out into the desert and showed us how they train their falcons. Their relaxed attitude was very refreshing, in fact the whole calm atmosphere in Dubai was pleasant after tense SA. We even watched part of an air show while waiting to go out with Ali.

Martin and Pat were very pleasant hosts and went out of their way to show us around Dubai. What a shoppers dream and all at bargain prices and you could still haggle an even lower price. After blowing our bucks on cameras and other electronic toys and filling shopping lists for others back home we still went back to look and look some more. Martin showed us the bird souq which is like a long row of pet shops where one can buy almost any bird you want. There were plenty of falcons and Howard and I just sat and wondered with our mouths open. We saw barbary's, red naped shahins, lanners, luggers, sakers, peregrines and even captive bred hybrids. I was surprised to see most of the birds were in good condition and well looked after as I had heard that these places were really bad news. All the shops were airconditioned and kept very clean. Martin then took us to some hawk merchants at various houses in Dubai. They mostly had sakers with the odd peregrine and some captive bred birds. At one house we saw a beautiful altai saker. Mostly passage birds with the odd haggard. We went shopping at night as that is when the town comes alive. By paying one

durum equal to one rand thirty we could take the ferry across the creek. There we went to the gold souq which was impressive to say the least. Saw plenty of Russians and other European tourists. The style of dress for Europeans was as we see it anywhere else in the world but Moslem woman were dressed in traditional dress. Listening to the call from the Mosques every evening was a new experience as well. Odd evenings we went around to Sheikh Rashids palace and sat around the Majlis, which is a large mens lounge and dining room next to the palace. The women have their own so we never saw them. Servants waited on us bringing tea and coffee. The coffee was black and bitter but very refreshing. Eating in the traditional manner took some getting used to as there are no knives and forks and you are only allowed to use your right hand. By sitting on the left hand or putting it in your pocket one could keep it out of the way. Spending a penny was interesting because there is no toilet paper, only a bidet. Large paper tissues were fortunately provided for drying hands on. The first few days were like Disneyland trying to remember the customs and also trying to remember all the people we met. They were very friendly and interested to hear about our falconry and what quarry we have. A visit to Sheikh Butti was also very interesting as he has a zoo in the front garden with antelope walking around and cages with all sorts of different birds and animals to be seen.

Martin took us to a mountain in the desert called Jebel Hafit where we saw plenty of egyptian vultures and where barbary falcons breed. Sitting on top of the mountain which has serious cliffs all around was interesting especially when a local family joined us. They offered us tea and we shared a cigarette with them. A small child kept on running towards the thousand foot cliffs and my nerves were rapidly deteriorating. I enquired why they were not worried about the child falling over the edge and was told if it is Allahs wish then it is so. I suppose this outlook on life makes it a lot less stressful. Getting to the top of the mountain was easy as there is a three lane highway to a palace built at the top. After that we visited a guy called Dan who lived in Oman and kept a few raptors. There we saw imperial, golden and snake eagles, a long legged buzzard as well as a black kite and several other falcons.

We also visited the beach house/palace where the sea is crystal clear but no chance of surfing there. There were falcons in retirement and several others sitting around including four hundred mallard ducks which were bought to train the young falcons on but as they are terrible fliers they were not used and left to laze around getting fat. The hacking tower nearby was inspected. Very impressive but hacked birds had been electrocuted on powerlines nearby so these have to be corrected before it can be used again.

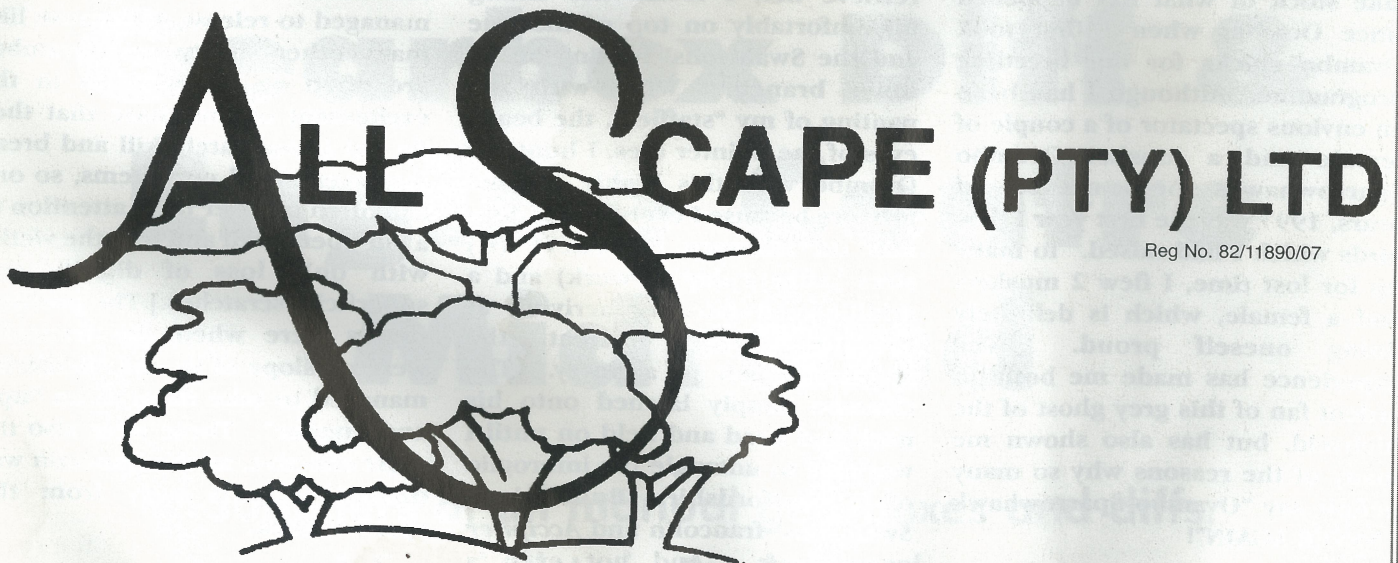
Sheikh Rashids breeding pens were also visited and this is where I saw my first black shahin. Most

impressive and made my mouth water. There are a number of breeding barns, all airconditioned and well built with many breeding pairs of peregrines and gyrfalcons as well as various other birds. Food is supplied from the government quail farm and there was no shortage of quail around the place.

A visit to the falcon hospital was interesting as the falcons line up with their cards and are inspected by the resident veterinarians. We met Dr David Remple who ran the hospital. The place was well fitted out with modern equipment for treating raptors. We also saw a few stone curlew or "kairowan" which is the same as our dikkop, maybe slightly smaller, at the hospital.

Later in the week we went out into the desert and camped there while hunting the falcons. I say camped but camping back home was never like this. Tents were airconditioned just in case it got hot and the servants were always in attendance bringing food and drinks whenever you turned around. The food was good although different and getting used to only using the right hand was by now getting easier. Living under these camping conditions was something I could get used to very quickly. Falcons were taken out and trained on pigeons if no houbara were to be found. The air of joviality was infectious and it was really relaxing being out with these friendly people. They were always making jokes and asking questions as to how we did things in SA. In the early mornings we drove around looking for houbara or trying to spot their tracks. Not easy to the untrained eye. We saw several arabian gazelle which were fairly tame and a common lark called the hoepoe lark which has a flash pattern not unlike the hoepoe. A small insignificant cobra was seen and Sheikh Rashid informed us it was deadly

poisonous. Large fat black lizards called dhabs were commonly seen. The desert was not unlike parts of the karoo with small bushes in abundance and short trees occasionally seen. The style of falconry was different to our falconry in that it was flights out of the hood at quarry that was flushed. An excellent ringing flight was observed at a seagull by a calidus peregrine which went up very high and far away and had to be followed with binoculars. The gull often tried to attack the falcon until eventually the falcon got above the gull and caught it in a short stoop high above the ground. Eventually our stay had come to an end even though we had extended our stay by a few days. The evening before we were to depart we were over at the Majlis roughing it as usual, talking about trips to other places and different falcons when Sheikh Rashid presented both Howard and myself with gifts of image stabilised binoculars. I was extremely touched by this generosity as these people had gone out of their way already to make our visit a most pleasant and unforgettable experience. With sad hearts and our little brains overloaded with all the new things we had seen and learnt, I had seen more falcons and different species in this short time as I had seen in my whole life, we left to return to South Africa. Hopefully we can reciprocate this hospitality and Martin and Pat have already come over to stay and I hope they enjoyed their visit as much as we enjoyed ours. Although we did not get to see a belly dancer or ride a camel due to many other things to do maybe if we go again we will put those items on our itinerary. I apologise if I have misspelt names or places but my mind is still in overload whenever I think about the trip.



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Hunting with Ovambo Sparrowhawks in the Highveld

E R Robinson

Almost overhead a deafening detonation of thunder and the rain begins to pelt down. I race back to the car, sheltering "Beldarin" (my female Ovambo Sparrowhawk) as she clenches her talons into the third kill of the afternoon. Into the car and wipe the rain from my spectacles so as to see how my "impossibly nervous" sparrowhawk feels about things. After a quick shake of the wings she settles down to fill my wife's new car with plover feathers. I remove the Indian Myna and the White-winged Widowbird from my pocket and note her tally at 106 - nowhere near the 225 birds taken by Kenny's "Tavi" in her first season, but fine by me. It is mid-September, the first storms have arrived and my hawk dropped her second tail feather today. The end of the season for her and time to take stock of what has happened since October when I first took Ovambo chicks for our breeding programme. Although I had been an envious spectator of a couple of female and a musket Ovambo Sparrowhawks for a number of years, 1997 was the first year I flew birds which I had raised. To make up for lost time, I flew 2 muskets and a female, which is definitely doing oneself proud. The experience has made me both an ardent fan of this grey ghost of the highveld, but has also shown me many of the reasons why so many people say "Ovambo Sparrowhawk - NEVER AGAIN!"

At flying weight which varied from 250 g when entered to 275 g at the end of the season (or 90 - 99% of the weight when taken up), "Beldarin" was pretty average for a female Ovambo, and she dwarfed her male "cousins" which flew at 150 - 165 g. The largest quarry she caught was a young cock Swainsons' Francolin which

weighed 642 g. This was an exceptionally large item for her to catch, as she usually only tail-chased Orange River and Swainsons' Francolins. What entered her head on this afternoon, I cannot begin to guess. During the preceding week she had managed to catch a young female Swainsons', so maybe this made her bold. Or perhaps it was just that the cock seemed intimidated. Anyway, we (that is, the dogs, hawk and I) were working a patch of weeds in fallow lands when the pointer took on a classic pose. As I approached, a Swainsons' that looked as big as an Isuzu double-cab flushed about 10 metres from me. In the excitement, I threw the Ovambo at it and she chased him into a wattle tree along the stream. When I arrived to apologise and retrieve her, I found her sitting uncomfortably on top of the tree and the Swainsons' lurking on an inner branch. What with the panting of my "staffies", the beady eyes of the pointer (yes, I hunt the Ovambo with this highly original mixture because I exercise my dogs and do falconry to relieve (?) stress after a day at work) and a middle-aged falconer arriving at the foot of its retreat, the Swainsons' left in a hurry. The Ovambo simply latched onto his neck and head and held on until I was able to untangle the imbroglio of 2 Staffordshire Bullterriers, Swainsons' francolin and *Accipiter ovampensis*. And not even a broken feather, thank goodness. Her other "mega-quarry" was a fully-grown Cape Dikkop. When first she attacked him, he just could not believe that this was real, and did not even take off, just slapped her off him with a wing-whip. After the third attack, he decided that this was just too much and flew off with the Ovambo still vainly trying

to pull him down.

If Swainsons' were usually too big and Orange River too fast, Coqui Francolin and Common Quail were another matter altogether. Throughout the season she chased and caught these lovely little game birds as though they were made for her. As long as the slip was less than about 30 metres she had a good chance, and even on longer slips she would pursue until the francolin had clearly got away and was not going to land. I was very lucky in having a portly pointer which worked Coqui well, and an excellent area of grassland with scattered clumps of thorn trees and LOTS of "swempie". "Beldarin" managed to end her first season with 8 Coqui kills out of 12 slips to her credit. [Although I have recorded them as "kills", I managed to release 4, because like many other shortwings, Ovambos are often so wrapped up in the excitement of the chase that they do not immediately kill and break into even small prey items, so one can often transfer their attention to a cut-open quail and free the victim with only loss of dignity and superficial scratches.] The prettiest flights were when the francolin were up slope of us and "Beldarin" managed to take them in an "up - and - under". These were also the most effective, as the francolin was unable to pull away from the sparrowhawk.

Although pride - of - place in the score-book goes to the francolin kills, flights at these species or Common Quail were seldom the most spectacular. By far the best flights for female and musket Ovambo Sparrowhawks are at small seed-eaters like Quail Finches. One of our hunting spots is a farm with meadows of teff. In

these one finds literally clouds of Quail Finches which often flush close to one's feet and always try to gain altitude. The Ovambo Sparrowhawks chase avidly, and the flights can go to 10 or 15 metres high and involve numerous turns and strikes by the hawk. The muskets, having a lower wing-loading and much smaller turning radius, were very much more effective than the female at this quarry, even hampered as they were by leg-mounted telemetry. [I flew all the birds with transmitters since they were intended for a breeding programme, so loss was unacceptable.] The quality of flights at these and similar small birds is as high as one can get with any hawk at any quarry. Not only did we get plenty of flights (anything up to 20 in an afternoon and maybe 7 kills before the hawk was tired), but they are right in front of one, the hawk has to exert all its skill in flying and footing, and the very best flights almost always end with the quarry flitting away above and the hawk gliding to land panting on the ground or the fist. Interestingly, all 3 muskets and 3 females which I have flown or seen flown regularly, continued

to fly Quail Finches throughout the season (and in the case of "Tavi", for four more seasons) in spite of the many disappointments they experienced, as long as they were in high condition and in yarak.

In between these extremes of size of quarry were all the other prey which we took. My two muskets were only flown until they had each made 20 kills, as I was really worried about losing them. Almost all of these kills were birds of widowbird and sparrow size, although the last kill made by the second musket was a Cape Turtle Dove which he grabbed as it flushed from a pool where it was drinking. Doves proved extremely hard quarry for all the birds in the first season, and it was only towards the end of the year that "Beldarin" was able to notch up a respectable number of kills when we walked doves up where they were feeding in the lands. A similar situation was found with plovers. Initially she flew hard at them but had no success and after some two dozen near-misses, she stopped really trying. Since I was unwilling to admit that a Red breasted Sparrowhawk could better an

Ovambo, I eventually resorted to flying them from the car. After 3 kills in this way, she regained her confidence and ended the season taking Crowned and Blacksmiths Plovers in completely fair flight when they were walked up.

So much for hunting with the Ovambos. What are they like to handle, fly and live with? To put what follows in context, it is important to consider how these birds were raised. Being intended for a breeding programme, and taking into account the reports of their temperament, I raised them as dual imprints - 2 females and 2 males being taken as downy chicks and hand reared as a cohort in an artificial nest in our living-room. All the birds were therefore extremely tame to the time when they branched (at about 21 days of age, and when the flight feathers were still not nearly hard-penned). At this stage the birds were placed in a large free-mew. Once hard-penned they were taken up for training. The three birds I kept were almost unbelievably relaxed. Naturally they were tame, being partially imprinted on us anyway.

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SAFA 1997 Hunting Scores

by E. R. Robinson

The 1997 SAFA meeting, held in the ideal countryside east of Bloemfontein in perfect weather, once again provided falconry of high quality (well, most of the time!). Apart from the Sky Trials (reported on elsewhere in the Journal), members enjoyed excellent hawking at a range of wild quarry, both on the Army land as well as on surrounding farms.

As usual, there were occasional dawn patrols to retrieve lost hawks, but the record this year must go to Willem Breytenbach who managed to lose his dog for a couple of days! In terms of excitement after a hunt, Greg Jean-Jacques probably had the most adrenalin-induction when he was called on to barter with an irate local resident after his Black Sparrowhawk decided that it would show how easily a chicken could be caught and subdued. The nice thing about chicken hawking is that one's pointer doesn't have to work very well to still allow one to find the quarry!

Accidents aside, the game hawking was most pleasurable, with ducks, francolin and "small fry" being abundant and in decidedly hawkable spots. Duck hawking seemed to come into its own at this meet, with a total of 11 ducks (10 Yellowbilled and a Redbilled Teal) plus a Coot which Francois just could not let get away. Alan Harvey actually made a bit of a pig of himself, taking 5 Yellowbilled Ducks. Next highest score was from the "local boy" Francois, who managed to put 2 Yellowbilled and the aforementioned Coot in the bag. Others whose birds came to grips with duck were Greg McBey, and Mark Labuschagne. This was most definitely the best duck hawking that I have seen at a SAFA meet, and let's hope that the duck hawks keep on improving.

Francolin were often found and 17 flew and died (and it must be admitted, quite a few flew and showed the falcons that the Free State does not breed sissies, even amongst the francolin coveys). The damage was done by:

John Bamber (1 Orange River and 1 Swainsons' Francolins)

Cobus Bezuidenhout (an Orange River)

Francois Breedt (2 Orange River)

Mike Davis (an Orange River with a Black Spar)

Alan Harvey (3 Orange River)

Kenny Pinnock (1 Orange River and 1 Redwing)

Alan Stephenson (3 Orange River)

Tim Wagner (2 Orange River)

Colin Williams (a Redwing Francolin with his Redbreasted Sparrowhawk - go the small shortwings!).

It was definitely the "meet of the longwings" this year, with the shortwing fraternity either being in the wrong places, or more often, being too keen to see duck hawking. Apart from the success that Colin had with his Redbreasted Sparrowhawk on francolin, the small shortwings (two Redbreasted Sparrowhawks and an Ovambo doing the deeds) managed 8 kills on small birds. The Black Sparrowhawks and the European Goshawk had a rather disappointing time of it. Apart from Greg Jean-Jacques' heroic efforts in the barnyard, I believe that only the European Goshawk made a guineafowl kill and Mike Davis took the francolin mentioned above, although I must admit that I was not at the entire meet.

Finally, we must not forget the night hawking with Warren Putter's male Crowned Eagle and Daryl Twiddy and his seasoned African Hawk Eagle. Both these birds gave great sport to the, by then, pixilated followers. The young eyes Crowned Eagle made up for its daytime serenading (which penetrated closed doors with the ease of an Italian soprano shattering crystal goblets) by the way it handled 4 Cape Hares, some of which were taken in fine style. The Hawk Eagle managed to bring 2 hares to book very convincingly.

All - in - all, a successful meet, with plenty of flights and enough quarry to send birds, falconers and dogs home well satisfied.





Left;
Mark Labuschagnes
Duck Hawk - Juvenile
Gymnogene



Right;
Three juvenile captive
bred female
Peregrines.
Photo by A. Stephenson



Haggard Male *Calidus* Peregrine trapped Woody Cape - January 1997 by A. Stephenson