

MEWS VIEWS

Magazine of the South African Falconry Association
Volume 1, 2003



MEWS VIEWS

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The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily the views of the SAFA executive committee.

Front Cover: Red Breasted Sparrowhawk on the nest. Painted by Ray Black and original owned by Roger Nielson. (See also Page 40)

EDITORIAL

One of my most successful accomplishments is an ability to open my mouth wide enough to swallow both feet. If I had a third foot I could probably have fitted that in when I offered to produce a magazine for S.A.F.A., in a fit of exuberance, last year. That it was done cold sober, in the broad daylight and with numerous witnesses left me no excuse. I tried to rationalize; why do we need a magazine? Even that gave me cold comfort as there is good reason. We practice our sport (or art) in isolation or in small groups, sparsely scattered over a huge country. We need to communicate with one-another in order to make friends, enhance our abilities and defend ourselves against threat. Indeed, one of the real successes of S.A.F.A. has been to develop communication between the far-flung falconers of this land and, even, international falconers. A magazine would be a worthwhile adjunct to this.

I have attempted to produce something simpler than the S.A.F.A. Journal, which could be resuscitated later if desired, and have christened it "Mews Views" in an effort to emphasize its role as an organ of communication. This is your mouthpiece to share your views, your stories, your quandaries and, above all, your passion with your peers.

If we communicate, we can learn from one another and formulate views and opinions on issues that may be critical to the development or even, survival of our sport. I would like to stimulate thought for the next issue. How do we stand on the commercialization of falconry, is this a threat or an asset to the sport? What are the ethics of the Sky-trial spectacle? How do we stand on exotic and hybrid hawks and can we answer those who would wish to prevent their use in falconry? Your articles for next year please.

I have attempted to provide a mix of articles, with something for every taste. The publication has definite regional flavor but includes some articles relating to foreign falconry to broaden the scope. Two falconers who have died recently and who have each, in his own way, made significant contributions to regional falconry are remembered in articles in this issue.

Finally, my thanks to all those who have contributed articles and photos for the magazine. The success of this issue is yours.

Good Hawking.

Adrian Lombard.

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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Tim Wagner

While wondering what to include in this report, it dawned on me that we may be living in the golden years of falconry, certainly here in South Africa.

Never before has it been easier to practice legal falconry with the greatest array of suitable raptors in SA. Falconry is now recognized as a legal activity in all nine provinces as well as a pastime of sane, normal people. Most of the nine Provinces have good access to wild raptors for falconry, far in excess of their requirements, based on a negotiated quota. The remaining provinces have a limited take in that they need to negotiate each raptor they require and approval is on merit. These provinces have very few falconers and while the situation works for them now, we will have to bring them in line with the other provinces enjoying a more favourable policy, should their numbers grow.

We are privileged to have access to wild peregrines in some of the provinces, something very few countries worldwide enjoy. This is a privilege we must protect at all cost and have extended to other provinces.

Captive breeding has come a long way in the last twelve years and with some species, such as the peregrine, production is in excess of requirements. Success was even achieved in 2002 with Black Sparrowhawks. Two birds were fledged out of a total of five hatched in Gauteng. As far as I can ascertain this is the first authenticated breeding of Black Sparrowhawks in Southern Africa.

Legal access to quarry has never been better. Provinces such as Gauteng are allowed to hunt all bird species, all year, for simply submitting a quarry list once a year. Other provinces practice a 'let lay' policy, in that if your hawk kills a protected or 'out of season' bird, you may feed your bird up in the field but must leave the remains of the carcass in the veld. This allows some falconers to fly nine or more months of the year at wild quarry.

These conditions that now exist are due to the hard work of a handful of dedicated falconers in each province. We owe them our gratitude and appreciation.

Unfortunately not everything is for the better. Modern life styles and work commitments put serious pressure on free time to practice falconry. Urban sprawl is also starting to affect

I am extremely envious of local and foreign falconers who have found a way to make a living while practicing falconry as their first passion. Hopefully I (and like minded others) will find the courage to make a similar move soon.

We may not have the Red Grouse of Scotland, the Sharptail of Canada, the Sage Grouse and Prairie Chickens of the USA but SA is still a good place to get out on a crisp winters afternoon with your hawk and dog.

PROVINCIAL REPORT – EASTERN CAPE

Alan Harvey

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Falconry in the Eastern Cape has been quiet during the past 2002 season with only a few members actively flying birds. Alan Harvey flew a hacked female African Peregrine "Kayla" from his 2001 breeding. This bird was hacked for 4 weeks and was destined to be flown until April and then released; however she turned into something special and completed the season on 92 kills with over 50 being Yellowbills. The rest were Shovelers, Red billed Teal, Greywing and Orange River Francolin. The intermewed female African Peregrine "Jasmine" was released in May after 6 Yellowbill kills, at the end of the 2001 season.

The 4 times intermewed female African Peregrine "Sky" was hacked back from her original hack site she was hacked from as an eyas. She stayed around for two weeks and then left for good. Two months later a call from Adrian Lombard in the Cape to enquire about a falcon recovered at Robertson nearly a thousand kilos away. It turned out to be Sky.

She had killed herself flying into overhead wires while chasing doves. This was an interesting albeit sad insight into the movements and the mortality of wild peregrines. Go well Sky.

Alan also flew the once intermewed female Red Naped Shahin "Shakira" from July until September. She was extremely aggressive and showed off some serious strikes on duck. She is now finally in Southern hemisphere moult pattern and should show her full potential. Talks on falconry and birds of prey were given to the Queens College Outdoors Club + a group of students from Volksskool.

Other interesting visits were from falconers Mark Williams from Alberta in Canada and Dave Dixon from Utah in The States. Arnold Slabbert flew his 5 times intermewed Female Black Spar in the latter half of the season with good success at Red Wing Francolin and Guinea fowl taking 70 odd. Arnold continued rehab work via his involvement with the raptor centre he co-manages. Alan Stephenson took a break for the season as he contemplates a career change and a possible move. George Beton successfully flew an AF Gos and Gareth Coombs rehabbed a female Little Spar.

The rest of the members were inactive for a variety of reasons. In December we took leave of Ray Black who had been a member of the club since its inception. Ray passed on after suffering a stroke.

Ray was a respected member of the falconry community with his excellent raptor art, knowledge and his likeable personality. Our sincere condolences to his wife Pat and the family.

PROVINCIAL REPORT - FREE STATE

Steven Squires

As usual our small club maintained a high standard of falconry during the 2002 season.

Angelo Grobler started the season flying a Black Sparrowhawk, which was donated by the Eastern Cape falconry club. He later achieved his A-grade status and flew a hacked intermewed African peregrine female, Storm, bred by Alan Harvey.

Storm gave some breathtaking stoops during the first part of the season and was later successfully introduced to ducks. She also took second place at the annual sky trials.

Angelo is currently working for Dave Dixon in Salt Lake City where he is learning more about the art of breeding.

Anton Muller flew an intermewed African peregrine, donated by the Eastern Cape falconry club. This bird showed a lot of aggression taking the occasional cattle egret. Sadly she was lost towards the end of the hunting season chasing ducks.

Liege Strapp did not fly during the 2002 season but maintained his Lanner breeding project.

Philip Bodenstein was not able to fly during 2002 due to work commitments.

Francois Breedt had his best season ever. He flew a 3-year old Gyr-Prairie hybrid, Zin Zan and a 7-year old African peregrine female, Penny.

Fortunately duck numbers were high due to a good summer rainfall and both birds took duck regularly in fine style. Zin Zan lived up to his Prairie reputation and struck all quarry with disabling blows.

Steven Squires flew an intermewed tiercel peregrine at doves with some success and a hacked peregrine falcon at anything that moved, eventually specializing in Knorhaans. Some success was achieved in this regard.

Two new members, Tim Mcpherson and Carel de Jager, joined the club in 2003 and we look forward to adding their names to our hunting report for 2003.

PROVINCIAL REPORT – GAUTENG

Tim Wagner

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Breeding:

The last two years (2001 and 2002) has seen a reasonable amount of peregrines produced in Gauteng. Tim Wagner produced 28 birds during this period while Mark Labuschagne acquired a pair of peregrines from F.Breedt (originally from A. Harvey) which produced 3 chicks in 2002.

Mike Thompson and Ray Thompson also produced a number of African Goshawks that went to falconers countrywide. Mike also bred a couple of Lanner falcons and Gabars.

The most exciting news was the fledging of some Black Sparrowhawks. Two spars fledged from a total of five hatched in Gauteng. It has taken many years to reach this point and hopefully now that the ice has been broken more success will follow.

Falconry:

The TFC has a couple of new members currently flying their first birds, Greater Kestrels. By the time you read this most would have moved on to their next bird, either an African Goshawk or Lanner falcon.

Greg Jean Jacques and son, Rory will be frightening the Swainson on the Peach Tree Farm with their Black Spars now that the weather is cooling down. Unfortunately, their old Red Spar will not be in attendance this year as she killed herself at the SAFA meet last year by flying into a wire.

Grant Neale, Ray Thompson and I are flying peregrines at the moment but finding we have to travel long distances to find quarry. All three birds are strong on the wing and taking quarry on a regular basis. Mark is flying a young peregrine he bred and his intermewed Gyr/prairie. From all accounts his hybrid is deadly on ducks and the peregrine is taking good pitch. Dirk Verwoerd is flying his intermewed Gyr/peregrine and a young peregrine. He appears to be struggling with time at the moment like the rest of us. Ronnie Watt has taken up his Lanner from the moult and is impressed with her. Gary Warren is again flying his intermewed Peregrine tiercel on francolin.

Eelco Meyjes and Graham Berry are flying African Goshawks and soon the dicky birds and mynahs in the neighbourhood will be nervous. Colin Williams has taken up his intermewed Gos as well and by now will be ringing up a good score.

A number of other falconers in the Pretoria area are also flying Af Gosses but we have not heard from them lately. We assume they are too busy flying to be in contact.

PROVINCIAL REPORT – NATAL

Angus Burns

The Natal Falconry Club went through a lengthy period of inactivity whilst resolving internal issues. In 2002, the club was resurrected from its ashes and experienced a renaissance of sorts with many old members returning and new members joining. A number of problems within the NFC needed further resolution and happily this has been achieved through the election of an enthusiastic committee (chaired by Blake Osborne) and the support of all the NFC members.

The committee for 2003 consists of the following NFC members: Blake Osborne (Chairman), Angus Burns (Secretary), John Bamber (Grading coordinator), Ben Hoffman (Breeding and Rehabilitation), Kevin Hutton, John Korsten and Bruce Padbury. The committee is representative of the club both from a generational perspective through to experience levels (A, B and C grade falconers serve on the committee).

The club presently has a membership of 65 with 21 of these members actually hunting with hawks. The membership numbers are continuing to swell with many young falconers joining and becoming actively involved at many levels.

The NFC "Hawk Talk" magazine was once again published after an extended period of absence and this was welcomed by all the members of the club. The next Hawk Talk will be published towards the end of August 2003.

Shortwings are being flown by most of the active members with only a handful flying longwings. This is because of the many new inexperienced falconers having joined the NFC and also due to a lack of suitable quarry. Herewith information on what a selection of falconers are flying and achieving:

Greg Mcbey's lanner and peregrine continue to impress, as does his imprint Black Spar. Great things are expected from John Bamber's hybrid and North American peregrine. John's imprint musket Black Spar is an awesome hunter with many NFC members bearing witness to its capabilities. Angus Burns is flying a socially imprinted musket Gabar Goshawk and this little bird has proven its worth with over 230 grassland bird kills in its first season. Tom Davidson is flying a peregrine falcon and hoping to take duck very soon. Bruce Padbury has been enjoying great sport with his African Goshawk and taken many hundreds of Indian Mynahs in and around Durban. Ben Hoffman has been achieving success in the field hunting with captive bred African Goshawks at grassland birds. Darryl Twiddy plans to take a shortwing for the next season (possibly a Black Spar or Gabar Goshawk). Kyle Solms returned from the UAE and brought his hybrid falcon with him – the club is expecting some good flying from this bird. Blake Osborne will be taking up a musket Black Spar later this year. The Durban-based falconers are flying mainly African Goshawks with some incredible kill rates resulting from this. It has been most encouraging to see the number of new falconers getting "up and running" very quickly and making a success of their efforts.

The NFC committee has decided to socially imprint more Black Sparrowhawks in 2003 and ensure these birds are hunted until sexually mature. Thereafter, breeding projects will be implemented to attempt captive breeding of Black Spars. The same will be done with Red Breasted Sparrowhawks. The club enjoys a healthy relationship with KZN Wildlife as well as different rehabilitation centres from which a number of hawks have been acquired, successfully hunted and then hacked back. This approach forms part of the NFC's commitment to assisting with conservation in KZN. NFC members also contribute to the sensitive site atlas with information on nesting sites.

Overall, it can be said that the NFC is functioning again as a club and ensuring good falconry throughout the province of KZN.

PROVINCIAL REPORT – WESTERN CAPE

E E Oetlé

It is with mixed feelings that I write this last Chairman's Report, since I will be resigning at the coming AGM. A few reflections might be appropriate at this stage, as there were only a few of you present from the start of the club.

Fifteen years ago, in 1998 when I arrived in the Cape, I initiated the process of getting falconry legalized. This took over 2 years of negotiation, and after numerous setbacks, the club was born out of a handful of outlaws at the Hawekwas Forestry station in the early 90's. The going was pretty rocky in the beginning, since the falconers were scared of coming out into the open. Gradually, the good intentions of all parties became evident, and happily for everyone, things slowly normalized. With the splitting of the Western Cape from the Eastern and Northern Cape, the club went through a difficult time, but that too passed with time. Falconry throughout the country was going through a renaissance, with the birth of SAFA, and the initiation of national field meets. Gradually, with the good will and effort of the members and committee of the club, and the officers of Nature Conservation, we have today the structure that we can all be proud of. I would specifically like to mention a few people:

Adrian Lombard, our faithful secretary, for his level-headed approach and unflagging dedication to the cause. Without him, the club would have not been what it is today. Bennie van der Merwe, for his wisdom and ability to think on his feet in tight spots and his dedication to improving the bird dogs. Without good dogs, falconry is far poorer. Thys Walters for his artistic flair, and his enthusiasm and passion for the sport. Kas Hamman, Director of Nature Conservation, for being willing to enter negotiations with falconers at a time when the mere mention of the word sent shivers up the spines of conservationists. Guy Palmer and Kevin Shaw, for being always available to discuss problems, and being willing to spend huge amounts of time in sorting out all the teething problems of the club. These are but a few of the people we owe our club to today. No longer is it necessary for any one to practice illegal falconry, as birds are plentiful, and quarry likewise. Information is easily obtainable, help is readily at hand, and even the limitations set by the club and Nature Conservation are reasonable and for the good of all. However, just as this was not obtained without effort, neither will it continue without effort. There is no place for complacency.

A continual input is required to keep up relationships with rehabilitators, amateur bird watchers, ornithologists, and conservationists. As Samuel Johnson said "A man, Sir, should keep his friendship in constant repair", this is as true to the club in 2003 as it was for Johnson in 1755.

My message to the new committee is fairly straightforward: Build on what you have, and don't forget the bigger picture. Falconry is a wonderful activity, but practice it in a vacuum at your peril. Encourage interaction with interested/concerned bodies, actively inform wherever possible, and strive to practice the sport at the highest standard of ethics possible. Above all, keep the lines of communication open.

The time is ripe for a change in management of the club, to prevent stagnation and to bring in a fresh breath of new ideas. It is with great pride that I am able to hand over the reins to the new committee. I feel that the new management will take the ball and run with it, to enable the club to grow and develop better than would otherwise be possible. As all the legal structures are now in place, the challenges ahead are to improve the standard of falconry, and to establish a tradition of quality and ethical falconry equal to the best of the world. I wish them every success.

SKY TRIAL RESULTS 1995-2002

1995 - 17 Entrants

1st - T. Wagner 1st Y Captive Bred AF Peregrine Falcon (WITCH)
 2nd - A. Harvey 1st Y Captive Bred AF Peregrine falcon (SCRATCH)
 3rd - H. Waller 1st Y Captive Bred Scottish Peregrine Tiercel (FIRE)
FALCONERS CHOICE: T. WAGNER + (WITCH)

SCORES			AVERAGE SCORES
98	98	97	97.6
88	90	90	89.3
87	87	87	87.0

1996 - 16 Entrants

1st - F. Breedt 1st Y Captive Bred AF Peregrine Falcon (PENNY)
 2nd - A. Stevenson 1st Y Captive Bred AF Peregrine Falcon (KATE)
 3rd - K. Pinnock Once Intermewed Lanner Tiercel (RASTA)
FALCONERS CHOICE: K. PINNOCK INTERMEWED PASSAGE LANNER TIERCEL (RASTA)

SCORES			AVERAGE SCORES
100	99	98	99.0
97	96	96	96.3
97	96	87	93.3

1997 - 17 Entrants

1st - F. Breedt 2nd Y Captive Bred AF Peregrine Falcon (PENNY)
 2nd - A. Muller Internewed Passage Lanner Falcon (SAVANNA)
 3rd - T. Wagner Twice Intermewed Captive Bred AF Peregrine Falcon (WITCH)
FALCONERS CHOICE: F. BREEDT + (PENNY)

SCORES			AVERAGE SCORES
95	93.5	98.5	95.6
90	87	96	91.0
91	93	83	93.3

1998 - 16 Entrants

1st - K. Pinnock Internewed Passage Lanner Tiercel (RASTA)
 2nd - K. Bezuidenhout Intermewed Captive Bred Lanner Falcon (PAM)
 3rd - F. Breedt Intermewed Captive Bred Peregrine Falcon (PENNY)
FALCONERS CHOICE: K. PINNOCK + (RASTA)

SCORES			AVERAGE SCORES
98	96	95	96,3
93	92	93	92,6
90	92,5	94	92,3

1999 - 16 Entrants

1st - J. Bamber Gyr / Peregrine Hybrid Tiercel (MAGNUM)
 2nd - F. Breedt 1st Y Captive Bred AF Peregrine Falcon (GRUMPY)
 3rd - A. Harvey 1st Y Captive Bred AF Peregrine Falcon (TOURER)
FALCONERS CHOICE: G. NEALE - PASSAGE LANNER TIERCEL (INDY)

SCORES			AVERAGE SCORES
89	89	89	89,0
87	86	86	86,3
80	80	83	81,0

2000 - 15 Entrants

1st - G. McBey 3rd Y Captive Bred Imprinted & Hacked African Peregrine Tiercel (JD)
 2nd - A. Stephenson 2nd Y Captive Bred Gyr / Red Naped Shahin Hybrid Tiercel (GYRSHIN)
 3rd - G. McBey - Passage African Peregrine Falcon (SKY QUAKE)
FALCONERS CHOICE: POSTHUMOUSLY MR BLACK SHOULDERS KITE

SCORES			AVERAGE SCORES
86	86	87	86,3
82	89	87	86,0
82	84	86	84,0

2001 - 18 Entrants

1st - G. Neale 1st Y Captive Bred AF Peregrine Falcon (ONE WAY)
 2nd - J. Bamber 3rd Y Gyr / Peregrine Hybrid (MAGMUM)
 3rd - G. McBey 4th Y Captive Bred Peregrine Tiercel (JD)
FALCONERS CHOICE: OMITTED

SCORES			AVERAGE SCORES
94	97	95	95,3
95	94	96	95,0
92	92	89	91,0

2002 - 9 Entrants

1st - G. McBey - Passage African Peregrine Falcon (SKY QUAKE)
 2nd - A. Grobler 1st Y African Peregrine Falcon (STORM)
 3rd - A. Harvey African Peregrine Falcon (KAYLA)
 Minus 5 points for late retrieval
FALCONERS CHOICE: A. HARVEY (KAYLA)

SCORES			AVERAGE SCORES
83.0	83.5	87	84,5
90.4	77.0	85	84,1
92.0	81.0	93	88.6
87.0	76.0	87.0	83.3

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SKY TRIALS



The eighth consecutive Sky Trial was held on Friday 12 July 2003 in the District of Aliwal North in the Eastern Cape. Aliwal North was the new venue for the SAFA meet and the surrounding farm areas certainly produced an abundance of Quarry in the form of Orange River, Greywing and Yellow Billed Duck.

The usual die hard band of falconers were there to enjoy some good falconry, renew old friendships as well as having a crack at the Sky Trial.

The flying conditions on the day of the Sky Trial were not ideal and the site chosen to stage the Sky Trial proved difficult for the falcons in that there seemed to be a cold downdraft of air funnelling down over the Sky Trial flying area moving in from the North West. The net result of this saw most falcons flying out far from the Judges and spectators in an Easterly direction, with most falcons working for pitch in a North Easterly or South Easterly direction.

The conditions were not ideal and falcons tended to be rather wayward while attaining pitch, and one could sense the frustrations of the Falconers at the time. Some falcons were seen to be working for pitch over the tarred National road about one kilometre away in what was interrupted as getting some form of lift from warm air coming off that stretch of tar. Nine falcons were fielded for the event, significantly down on the previous years eighteen.

Judges on the day were Bob Dalton, invited guest judge visiting us from the UK, with his no nonsense approach and very dry sense of humour. Howard Waller, invited guest, who was out in SA on holiday from Dubai and had taken the time and trouble to attend the field meet and yours truly. It's always a pleasure to be part of this Falconry occasion.

The averaged out scores for the day were not as high as we have seen in the past and this was attributed to the conditions on the day and not a reflection on the falcons flying ability.

I have been privileged to be a part of this excellent Falconry spectacle since its inception in 1994, there is never a dull moment at a Sky Trial particularly some of the quick witted remarks coming from the Falconers and the gallery. It must be remembered that it takes effort, time and a special sort of commitment to turn out and be able to present the sort of falcons we have been privileged to see not only on the Sky Trials days, but during the meets under hunting conditions.

This small group of dedicated Falconers are a credit to Falconry in S.A. and the relatively young sport of Sky Trials.

We are now starting to see numerous Hybrid Falcons being flown from the various Falcon Sub-Species and I have no doubt that we will be seeing even more in the future. Some of these Hybrids are really spectacular when flying under Sky Trial conditions, however having said that, one simply has to look at the score sheets to notice that our very own African Peregrine has come out tops in six of the eight events so far, with impeccable scores – some in the high nineties.

Testimony to the ability and flying prowess of our very own Peregrine Falcon which must never be underrated.

The Hybrids with all their unusual attributes and promise of spectacular falconry must not be overrated by the really experienced Falconers.

In other words, your new generations of Falconers should be aspiring to fly the pure bred falcons as opposed to the Hybrids whose reputation has been hyped up by your really successful longwing boys who can do them justice.

I firmly believe and advocate that as responsible Falconers, we should all be mindful of this for the future and Falconers must continue with the breeding of Pure Bred Falcons.

To conclude, if I can make one observation from the Sky Trial, there seems to be very few new longwing Falconers coming through the ranks and participating in the Sky Trial.

Angelo Grobler being the only new young falconer. It remains the old guard of Falconers in S.A. who persevere with perfecting longwing flying. The longwing falconers should be asking: what are we doing to develop our young Falconers? After all, they are the future of Falconry in S.A. They are the next generation who should be taking the sport to the next level if that be possible. For pure interest sake, I have posted the various results of the last eight Sky Trial events.

Good luck with the 2003 flying season. We look forward to seeing more new faces and entries at the 2003 Sky Trial Event.

GREG JEAN-JACQUES

FALCONRY WISDOM.

I recall an incident that occurred many years ago when I was an apprentice and had gone on a hunting trip with older falconers, one of whom was known as Alex. He was flying a passage Lanner that was not performing well on the particular afternoon. She had taken stand in a camel thorn, unapproachable due to the surrounding thicket, and had one foot up with her eyes fixed on the distant horizon. Alex was standing in the hot afternoon sun, flapping his lure around ineffectually while the flies tried to crawl into his nose and his eyes. Eventually he turned to his audience, whose attitudes ranged from boredom to irritation, and said, "We do this for fun you know!" How often have I remembered his words when I have been up to my waist in freezing water or crawling through a reed bed after some elusive hawk that is keeping just ahead of me?

HACKED FALCONS FOREVER

Alan Harvey

I have bred African Peregrines every year since 1994 and have run a hack programme as a means to enhance the quality of the eyases to be used in falconry and to release the excess back to the wild. Forty Eyases later, of which fourteen have been released, I am hooked on flying well hacked eyases. The primary reason being that, the eyases raised this way, have all the positive attributes of a passage falcon.

As they have only flown for a few weeks they are still fairly tame but have already learned the basics of flying in a wind, the advantage of height and show less inclination to explore the countryside once trained. All these well hacked bird comes ready equipped with and a much more mature attitude to boot. I think a young falcon benefits a lot from developing its flying skills and muscle development at this crucial stage of its life. Hacking a young falcon fits in with what it would experience in the nature as a wild fledgling. Another plus for hacking is if you want to release a bird after a few seasons or you lose it before then its chances of recovery are pretty good if close to home and if not the chances of successfully fending for itself are increased.

The hack box I use is made of plywood and measures 1.5m x 1.5m by 1m high. The fourth side has a removable weld mesh door. This opens onto a flat platform the same size as the box. A feeder hole is situated in the rear and is accessed via a ladder. This whole setup is mounted on top of two 12 foot poles fitted with predator proofing. The young falcons should be 35 days when first placed in the box, at 33 days they have difficulty in feeding themselves and at 39 days they can damage themselves by trying to get out all the time.

When the birds are 42 days old the mesh door is removed without disturbing them. At this time things can get tense. Some birds bale straight out and fly over the nearest mountain, only to return days later. The longest I have had a bird take to return and feed is 4 days. During this time they fly backward and forward obviously trying to find the hack box. The more civilised ones will come out, enjoy the view, and spend a day or two exercising their wings before venturing into the air. When a bird has returned to the box and eaten once it seems to have memorized "home" and is safe as far as finding the hack box is concerned. For the next week the young falcons have to be watched all day as they perch on the ground and on low rocks where they are extremely vulnerable to ground predators such as cats and mongooses and aerial ones such as Black Spars and Jackal Buzzards. At night the civilised ones sleep on the hack box, while the other sort disappear into the genet and owl infested dusk hopefully to be seen again next morning.

The first two weeks not too much action takes place as the young eyases spend a lot of time sleeping on favourite perches around the hack site. The latter half of the hack is by far the best and makes keeping Breeders the whole year round worthwhile. The action is normally in the mornings until 10 and again in the afternoons from 4 until dusk. Most of the activity takes place within 1 km of the hack site. When one bird flies the whole gang takes off with lots of tail chasing and stooping at each other. Another favourite pastime is to fly full speed at saplings blowing in the wind and binding to the tops and almost stalling out. If a spray of leaves is pulled off a frantic game of catch me if you can starts as all the young falcons try to get hold of this prize. Interactions with other predators take the form of territorial defence with the youngsters learning to stay above the trespassing eagle or black spar while putting in hard stoops with big throwups and much alarm calling. Three or four young falcons can see off any interloper including Black Eagles. An interesting incident happened one year when I had three tiercels and one female out at hack. The tiercels were slightly more advanced than the female and were sitting on the ridge across the valley from the hack box when she made her maiden flight. This ended in her landing unceremoniously on the ground.

As she hopped around a female Black Spar came out of the poplar plantation like a heat seeking missile straight for her. The spar was almost on the young falcon when the first tiercel arrived with a whoosh and audible strike that slowed the attack. the second and third tiercel, both dusted the now frantically retreating spar, chasing it right out of the valley.

All the hacks have not been plain sailing. I have lost one bird to electrocution, two have flown into walls and wiped themselves out and one has been killed by a genet. The electricity line has been hawk proofed but all the other hazards that are out there one cannot do too much about. Granted that hacking is a lot of hard work and the risks are there, to me it makes the whole falconry experience complete. The old adage of high risks, high rewards are very apt in this case.

FALCONRY'S LIKE THAT.

A group of falconers, that included a friend of mine named Chris, went on a hunting trip together. They had a brilliant time flying their birds in the day and sitting round the fire in the evening telling tall stories and emptying brown bottles, then crawling off to their sleeping bags. After one particularly fine evening, Chris awoke with a terrible pain in the center of his chest. This was a dreadful pain and he realized that it must be a heart attack, the very thought brought him out in a cold sweat. Never the less, he was unwilling to disturb the sleep of his friends; what could they do anyway? He racked his brains and remembered that he had been told that, in the event of a heart attack, one should move as little as possible so as not to aggravate the situation. So Chris lay dead still and waited the night out. Eventually, the eastern sky started to turn orange and he felt he could now, justifiably, wake his friends. So he rolled over and found that he had been lying on his dog whistle all night!

DIARY OF A GYR-PRAIRIE HYBRID, ZIN ZAN

Francois Breedt

Being a passionate duck hawk, I couldn't help wondering whether the striking capability of the Prairie and the sheer power of the Gyr falcon could prove to be a formidable combination. When Tim Wagner returned from the Canadian Falconry Meet in 1999, he informed me that several Gyr-Prairies were being flown there with great success. This further fuelled my desire to obtain such a hybrid. I contacted several breeders in the US and obtained 2 male Gyr-Prairies from Dave Dixon in Salt Lake City. In order to gauge the true capabilities of this cross, one of the males was given to Mark Labuschagne, being an avid duck hawk he would be able to put this cross to the test.

Training Zin Zan progressed faster than expected. He was trained to the kite for 2 weeks. In this time he already showed potential to be a high mounting bird.

Entering Zin Zan on duck proved to be difficult. I did not follow the advice given to me by the breeder. Dave had told me that all Gyr hybrids should be entered on ducks before showing them upland game. Flying him too heavy only added to the problem. In my experience, this particular cross does not tolerate as large a weight variation as the peregrine. Although short, the season ended well with a total of 5 duck and 14 partridge on the scoreboard.

Once having established the ideal flying weight for Zin Zan in his second season, ducks were being caught regularly in fine style.

In my opinion, the following traits were found to be dominant in this cross:

1. Mounts very quickly
2. Ability to achieve great pitch (Don't consider flying such a cross without a good pair of binoculars)
3. Rapid stoops
4. Preference for striking, seldom binds
5. Not afraid of pursuing quarry into cover
6. Despite their reputation, Zin Zan proved to have a good temperament

I feel the key to success is keeping an open mind when training and hunting with a Gyr-Prairie. This cross does not tolerate mistakes on your behalf as lightly as a peregrine.

In conclusion, I think the Gyr-Prairie hybrid is a great cross for duck hawking.

HUNTING RHODESIAN LANNERS IN SCOTLAND.

By John Condy.

This article was first published in The Austranger in 1999. John was the first chairman of the Rhodesian-now Zimbabwean- Falconry Club. As such he has left a legacy to southern African falconry that is still reflected in our attitudes and practices today. He died while on holiday in the Okavango last year and is sadly missed by his friends and family. This article epitomizes his enthusiasm and immense enjoyment of life and his contempt for petty bureaucracy. It is also of historical interest, showing the possibilities of an era less fettered with regulations and red-tape.-Editor

The Mecca of Longwing hunting of game birds must surely be hunting grouse in the Highlands of Scotland.

In 1972 I had the opportunity to do this. The first problem to overcome was that there were sanctions being imposed against Rhodesia by the rest of the world. I knew that should I apply for a permit from the British Home Office to import some falcons to Britain the answer, should they be bothered to reply, would have been NO.

Being a member of the 'ways and means club', and all Rhodesians were by this time highly innovative in finding ways of doing all sorts of things to get around 'sanctions', I decided to get my friend Steven Frank to get the permits for me, giving a Malawian address, and to meet me at Heathrow.

In due course I arrived at Heathrow with three haggard lanners (one had been caught 48 hours previously) and a haggard peregrine tiercel, with no permit to import them.

I walked up the red route with the two cardboard cartons containing the birds and was prepared to explain to Customs that the permit was in the hands of a friend who was to meet me. I put on my best innocent and honest face and the customs officer said: "What have you got there?" "Three Falcons." "And what are you going to do with them?" "I hope to kill all the grouse in Scotland." "Well push off and get killing."

It was as easy as that. I walked out to find Steve, who immediately said: "How on earth did you get through? Here is the permit."

Those were the days before terrorists and hijackings.

The first ten days were spent in Somerset with Eustace Poles, where I spent all the time manning and training the birds to the lure. The peregrine became sick and died. It was sent to the veterinary laboratory in Cambridge. The post mortem report was negative. In retrospect I am sure it died of insecticide poisoning brought on by dropping its weight.

So on the 'Glorious twelfth' we were all in place at Steve's croft near Dornoch.

Steve had a pair of Peals peregrines and a Scottish falcon. My Lanners consisted of one very lazy bird, one average and one very good one. I had already assessed their characters, and so did most of the hunting with the good one, 'Sasha'.

Her first kill was a spectacular vertical stoop on a grouse. It was not from a great height. Most of the time Lanners do not go very high. Their home hunting is often in woodland, where a very high pitch can be a disadvantage. It was seen to be vertical because on the way down one could see first its back then the belly.

Over the next two weeks one of the points that showed up was how much more tenacious in the hunt the Lanner was compared to peregrines. As soon as the grouse dropped into the heather, peregrines would

lose interest, whereas the Lanner would go into the heather and get its quarry. In fact, once Sasha went down a wide four-foot deep hole, to get her grouse.

I knew parts of the Highlands from the days before I started at Edinburgh University. I had worked in Ross-Shire as a laborer with the Forestry Commission, so I looked up an old friend, Sandy Grant. We arranged to go after ptarmigan near Ben Nevis. It was a very beautiful and almost hot day, with only a slight breeze. Near the top of a ridge, we saw ptarmigan 100 yards away. Sasha was put up. She was mounting nicely when a cock grouse got up under her. Of course she went straight down and got it, and our ptarmigan just took off and croaked their way round the hill to safety. It was disappointing but, on the other hand, I got a thrill at just seeing those beautiful birds again, and we did not go home empty handed.

A week later I lost Sasha. She had been chasing some bird across a busy road when a car hit her. Seeing she had jesses, the driver of the car took the body to the Air Force Base at Lossiemouth. Here it was well known that the Air Force kept a squadron on peregrines for clearing the gulls away before the jet fighters took off.

The second lanner was lost, and the third (lazy) I gave to a young girl who had fallen in love with her. She was a beautiful bird, but not one I would have kept for hunting.

FALCONRY'S LIKE THAT.

Dave, an old hunting friend of mine, had a very characteristic falconry "get-up" which included velies, shorts, dark glasses and a deer-stalker hat. He flew a stunning Ovambo sparrowhawk that was deadly on shrikes and had car slipping down to a T. Early one Sunday morning, he decided to take a drive around the suburbs and find some action with his hawk. Sure enough, before long, there was a shrike on a gate post and the game was on. A short, sharp chase ensued which came to a satisfactory conclusion on the front stoep of the house. Nothing daunted, Dave jumped the fence and made in on his hawk. With the quarry dispatched and the hawk back on his glove he happened to look up through the window to see a couple, holding the sheet up to their chins and staring at him, wide-eyed. Being a quick thinker, he gave them a wide grin, raised his deer-stalker and fled the scene. One can only wonder at the conversation round that Sunday lunch-table that day.

PRACTICAL INCUBATION FOR FALCON BREEDERS

Edmund Oetlé, Cape Falconry Club

Captive breeding of raptors has come a long way since Renz Waller bred the first peregrines during World War 2. Our understanding of the birds' behaviour, nutritional and environmental requirements have made falcon breeding a routine procedure in many parts of the world. Much of the breeding is undertaken by falconers with a few pairs of birds, and the birds are left very much to their own devices. For the lucky, the birds will court, mate, lay, incubate, hatch and rear without the need of assistance. However, not all birds will do so, and some are unreliable especially towards the end of the month long incubation. Broken eggs, chilled eggs, deserted eggs, these are all part of the chamber of horrors awaiting the falcon breeder. Thus artificial incubation has come to be the norm in many facilities. Once the mystique has been removed, it really is a very simple technique with a few straightforward rules that should be part of any breeder's repertoire.

I will try to give the broad principles, and refer the reader to Weaver & Cade's "Falcon propagation", published by the Peregrine Fund for the finer details. This wonderful manual will teach you most of the basics you need to know. What follows is a summary of the most important bits; particularly the parts that I feel were understated, as well as some of my own innovations.

To incubate one needs a machine, which can be as simple or as complicated as one's finances allow. The first peregrine to be bred in captivity in South Africa was incubated in a cardboard box, insulated with foam rubber, heated by light bulbs, with an ether wafer thermostat. I turned the egg by hand, as there was no automatic turning, and also no humidity control. Since then, considerably more sophisticated technology has become available, which simplifies one's task enormously. However, the point is an incubator is only as good as the person operating it. Bad supervision of a good incubator will give worse results than good supervision of a simple incubator. And beginning with a simple incubator teaches one the critically important lesson that it is the eye of the master that fattens the beast. In essence, don't think that by having the most expensive incubator you can just put eggs in and get chicks out. Until you know your machine intimately, and supervise it constantly, your results are going to be at best mediocre.

So, what constitutes a good machine? Incubator principles essentially are temperature and humidity control and turning of the eggs. If this is so, why are there such vast differences in price between the different machines? Well, firstly the degree to which the thermostat is accurate varies greatly. The ether wafer thermostats are good to approximately one half a degree C. Electronic thermostats can get to 0.1 degree C, which is much better. However, these can and do fail, so a backup is advisable, either the Robbins type or the ether wafer. Ether wafers can break, and the gas is toxic, although mine have given good service over the years. Don't believe what you read! Just because there is a digital readout saying the temperature is such and such, doesn't mean that the temperature is so. Instruments, particularly digital ones, MUST be calibrated before they can be trusted. Beg, borrow or buy a master thermometer. This is a highly accurate mechanical (not digital) instrument, which has been calibrated exactly. Place this thermometer along with the thermometer you wish to verify together in a lump of plasticine. Place these in the incubator overnight, and then check. You will be amazed at the range of readings you get. Each thermometer is likely to be accurate within itself, i.e. once the thermometer has been calibrated against the master, one can safely assume that it will be constant with what it reads. Thus, if a thermometer reads 37 deg when the master reads 37.5 deg, the former can be trusted always to show 37 deg when it actually is 37.5 deg. In my experience, I use the clinical thermometers for mapping the incubator. These thermometers are cheap and yet very accurate, to 0.1 deg. Their disadvantage is that they only go one way, i.e. up, and have to be shaken down to get the next reading.

However, this is a decided advantage too, because these thermometers will show up the temperature spikes, which the normal thermometers do not. I find that an empty match box with 2 of these clinical thermometers stuck in at an angle will give a very good reading of the temperature at the top and bottom

of the egg. Indeed, the bulbs can be placed almost touching the egg, and very accurate local readings can be obtained. Incubator mapping is essential, and is outlined in the reference above. Essentially it is discovering where the hot points and cold points of the incubator are. Usually the cold points are where there is turbulent air flow and the hot spots where the air movement is less. Each incubator will vary with its map depending on the number and size of eggs being incubated. Thus, after placing any new eggs in, recheck the local temperature around that egg and any other eggs with the matchbox thermometers. Move eggs around according to their response to incubation. 37.5 deg C is a good temperature to work with. Don't go above 38.

Humidity control per se is not necessary for falcon eggs, because it is more usual to desiccate the environment than to humidify it. However, humidity measurement is essential. The hair hygrometer is the most practical. These must be calibrated against the wet and dry bulb technique annually, since there is quite large latitude within a given instrument. Remember that humidity is a relative thing, and varies with temperature. Calibration must take this into account. Consult the RH tables for details. Wet bulb thermometers tend to generate enough humidity to be a nuisance when incubating, so once the hair hygrometer has been calibrated, remove the wet bulb thermometer. As a general rule work on 35 % RH, but this might need twice daily changes of silica gel. Otherwise try running the incubator just dry (the RH should then be around 40-45 %), and check the weight graphs of the eggs.

Weighing eggs is essential. I weigh initially every 2 days, and then when things are underway every 3 days. Eggs that lose weight too slowly (by far the most common problem) need to be desiccated. If the silica gel doesn't work, I move the problem egg to another incubator, and start with the egg spraying with sterile water, 6 X per day. This works very well but is labour intensive, and there is a risk of introducing infection from the surface of the egg. An alternative is to drill a hole with an 18 gauge needle into the air cell (round end of the egg). If this is not enough, then a few days later drill another.

Up to about 4 holes can be drilled. Practice a few times on chicken eggs first! It takes a bit of skill to get the needle to start the hole, after which the drilling is easy. Hold the egg so that the bits of shell don't fall into the egg via the hole that is forming. If the egg's weight graph falls into the 12-16 % weight loss, then I don't fiddle, except for moving an egg to a hotter spot within the incubator if it is losing about 12 - 13 % weight, and vice versa if around 16 %. If it is outside these parameters, I do all I can to bring it back to within the norms. In order to find the correct weight graph, I do not use the published techniques of egg measurements. Instead I find the following calculation very acceptable and practical. It makes one assumption that is not necessarily true, but nevertheless usually is, namely it assumes that the weight loss during the portion of natural incubation will be normal, i.e. 15 % over the 30.5 days to pip. Thus, if the egg has received 7 days of incubation, and weighs x, then there are 30.5 minus 7 days of incubation left (=23.5). The egg must therefore still lose 23.5 divided by 30.5 times 15 %, = 11.6 %. Thus the egg must lose an additional 11.6% times x grammes, and this divided by 23.5 will give the daily amount the egg must lose. For example, if x is 40 g, in the above equation, this egg must lose 0.197 g daily from days 8 to 30.5, giving a total of 4.64 g and a final weight at pip of 35.36 g. A very simple graph is all that is needed to see whether an egg is on line or not. It sounds complicated. It isn't, and in fact it is essential. So practice a few times on chicken eggs. And don't forget; if at all possible give at least 5 preferably 7 days of natural incubation, either chickens or the falcons themselves.

Egg turning should be done once an hour, automatically if possible. Egg rolling by 180 degrees is far preferable to egg turning within a cradle by 90 deg. The best incubators seem to have a very haphazard turning mechanism, namely a rolling carpet (Grumbach). The one which gave me the worst results was the rocking cradle type (Brinsea Octagon)

Check the incubator regularly! Daily fluctuations in temperature cause fluctuations of incubator temperature. So check, and recheck, right the way through the incubation period. If possible, try and house the incubator in a room where the diurnal variation is as low as possible. At best the room temperature should be around 25 deg. If the night temperature drops 10 degrees below the day temperature, be careful! You will have to adjust the incubator temperature accordingly. Don't forget that the ether wafer types are sensitive to passing cold fronts, so keep an eye on the weather also.

At pip, move the egg to an incubator running at about 60 % RH. Remember that just adding water will drop the temperature (evaporation causes cooling), so adjust this. Leave the egg alone, with the pip uppermost, the turning off. Don't open the incubator at all if possible for the first 24 hours of pip. With luck, all will go well. Problem hatching: this is bound to happen, but sometimes rolling the egg to a different position (e.g. 90 deg to left or right, depending on where the pip is) is enough to get the egg to continue. The final breakout can be quite dramatic, and is always a relief. It can be as quick as 15 minutes, after staying in the same position for 40 hours. The best indicator of the need to interfere is the response of the chick. If the chick is giving the distress calls, and is getting weaker (the calls getting slower in frequency and softer in volume) it is a good idea to intervene. GO SLOW! Break open in front of the pip, and stop if there is any bleeding. If the membranes are dry, wet with sterile water and a paintbrush. The blood vessels should be obvious.

Unretracted yolk sacs I have treated successfully with replacing the yolk with betadine moistened gauze swabs, followed by massage of the navel, and keeping in place with Micropore bandage. The bandage can be removed the next day with alcohol. **DO NOT TRY TO REMOVE THE MICROPORE WITHOUT ALCOHOL.** While the bandage is in place, regular dabbings with betadine are recommended.

Parting shot: KEEP IT CLEAN. Sterilize the incubator with formalin (solid or gas) before all incubations. Every time you open the incubator, wash your hands with betadine or hibitane or spray with D-germ. Use sterilized swabs to put the new chicks onto, and to put the eggs onto when weighing and even permanently under the eggs to prevent damage during turning if the turning mesh is not smooth enough for your liking.

If you want to buy a good incubator, I recommend for quality and price the Turn X. This is half the price of the Roll X (\$210 vs. \$450), and can be brought in from America without too much trouble. The manufacturers are not keen to sell direct to us, since they have an agent here. So find someone in the US to buy it, and ask them to post it out. I have tried a wide range of incubators, and have consistently been satisfied with the Turn X. Unfortunately I can't say the same for most of the other brands I have tried. Unfortunately I don't have shares in the company!

Good luck. It is very satisfying to do it right.



Sky Trial Scenes

The Falconers and their
birds in big sky country.

See pages 10-13



Wattle-tailed plover hawking...



...the conclusion (p. 22)



Above - Lanner Falcon
(p. 17)

Below - Kwaaitjie, a Supercharged African
Goshawk - a well known character
at S.A.F.A meets





Greg McBey with J.D., imprint peregrine tiercel at wild hack most of the year



Francois Breedt with Zin Zan (see p.16)



Penny on a Yellowbill duck



Penny and Zin Zan await the action

SAFA Field Meet 2002



Top left: The Yorkshire falconers with ferret and Harris Hawks (p.25)



Top right: Goshawk hunting at the Welsh International Falconry Meet (p. 25)



Bottom left: A hatched egg showing drilled holes to aid weight loss, from Nic Fox's breeding establishment (pp. 10 and 22)



Bottom right: Steven Squires' peregrine on a "Rockie". (p. 28)

WATTLED PLOVER HAWKING (A SOUTH AFRICAN ALTERNATIVE TO ROOK HAWKING)

Roger Nielson

I received 'Topaz' from my friend Francois Breedt on 29 December 2000. She was the daughter of Francois' African Peregrine 'Penny' and a niece of Tim Wagner's 'Witch'. So I guess you could say that she came from 'good working stock' as the doggie people put it.

I worked Topaz hard to the lure (as there seemed to be no winds for kite work in early 2001) and let a lot of sub standard racing pigeons go for her to tail chase. I think the 20 to 30 stoops per session that I regularly subjected her to and kilometre long tail chases after pigeons, equipped her well for the out of the hood and very often high ringing flights at Wattled Plover that became her trade mark later in the season.

My first kill (like the first kill of many other South African trained long-wings), was a Cape Dikkop. My score book records the date as 4/05/01, the weight of the quarry as 582 grams, and the weight of the Falcon as 623 grams. Dikkop are great 'confidence builders' to an inexperienced hawk but very few got away from a fit falcon and Dikkop hawking soon bores me. I do not consider it sporting, it is merely a way to enter a falcon and improve her steadiness at wait on.

My 'Modus Operandi' with Dikkop was to proceed on foot with the falcon hooded, mark the Dikkop scuttling through short, often burnt grassland, unhood the falcon and throw her off in the opposite direction to the Dikkop. Any Dikkop – and there were usually 2/5 in a group – would immediately freeze and rely on the camouflage for protection, whereupon I would wait for the falcon to gain pitch and come overhead.

The Dikkop would invariably be within 2/3 yards of where I marked it, and sometimes I would bump one closer to the one I had marked (of 8 Dikkop flushed during the 2001 season, only 2 got away, one by kicking and wing whipping its way to freedom and the other one out flew the falcon.)

Like I said before, Dikkop hawking with a fit experienced hawk is not sporting.

I took my first Blacksmith Plover with 'Topaz' on 18/05/01. It was kill no 4. Topaz chased several birds round the sky and in so doing got up to a really decent pitch. The Blacksmith was forced down into a small patch of reeds about 20 m in front of me. I flushed him out underneath the falcon, from the same patch of reeds five or six times before being taken into the air about six feet above my head. From that moment on I realised I had found my ideal type of quarry for my favourite type of hawk. Plovers are the answer to a South African falconers' prayer! They are numerous, are generally found in open treeless country and they tax a good falcon to her utmost. We are lucky in that we have three species of very hawk-able plover to choose from. The crowned plover (weight average of 2 individuals taken, 185 grams), is the most numerous and also the most difficult. Slightly smaller, and a little slower than its crowned relative, is the Blacksmith plover, averaging about 170 grams. I found that both the crowned plover and the blacksmith plover could only be taken from a good pitch (200 feet or more) and with a very near perpendicular stoop, and unless the falcon clipped her quarry, it was very unlikely to get another stoop in. Attempts at tail chasing were useless as both the crowned plover and the Blacksmith could out turn the pursuing Peregrine any time they wanted. Any falconer who can take the two above mentioned quarry species on a regular basis has a dammed fine hawk, and is using it the right way.

I took my first wattled plover at Bergland lawn farm on 2/06/01, which is the closest thing to a plover heaven I have yet come across. About 85 acres of lawn with no fences, save a fence along its western boundary, constantly being watered, treated with sewerage sludge, dug up for sale and regrown. One group of plovers numbered over 150 birds and there were three main groups. The birds involved were mainly blacksmith Plovers and wattled plovers (wetland species) but there were also a dozen or so

crowned plover on the drier areas of the lawn. When I unhooded and threw the falcon off there was pandemonium as about 300 + plovers, +/- 30 sacred Ibis, 50 odd Hadedah Ibis and a dozen grey headed gulls simultaneously took to the sky. Topaz locked on to a blacksmith plover's tail which took her nice and high. As she was going I noticed a wattled plover not 20 yards in front of me that had decided that he was going to sit this one out. Predictably the tail chase after the group of Blacksmith plovers came to naught and Topaz returned overhead at a height of more than 200 feet. I rushed at the crouching wattled plover and the finest flight of my more than four decades of falconry unfolded before my eyes. The plover turned to meet the oncoming falcon and flew up to meet her above my head. At the last possible moment the plover expelled a little 'flick flak' manoeuvre with his wings and was narrowly missed by the stooping falcon. The falcon threw herself up tight and high above me (70 or 80 feet I'd guess), jerked herself around with her train at the apex of her climb and threw herself at the wattled plover who again flew straight at the falcon and again saved himself with his neat little 'flick flak'. A beautiful and deadly aerial ballet was being performed in the sky above my head. I counted seven stoops, all happening within a radius of 40 yards with me in the middle. On stoop no 7 the plover may have been 'clipped' because he began to yikker with fright and turned tail. He was overhauled and taken from behind a meter short of some shade cloth covered barns. I weighed him (minus his head and neck which I gave to the falcon), and he checked in at 273 grams, considerably bigger than the two blacksmiths I had taken a few days earlier. They say nothing succeeds like success. Topaz went on to become a bit of a wattled plover specialist and I found that I could 'hawk' these birds off the first, into the wind and they would try their damndest to out climb the falcon. If unsuccessful the falcon would put in a couple of not too serious stoops and then force the plover down wind (in the classic style of Rook Hawking.) These were the flights I loved best. We do not see much of the 'Ringing Flight' type of falconry in South Africa, in fact, the only ringing flight I have ever watched before was a flight my first African Peregrine put in after a great snipe that out climbed her in a thermal.

My first season's score (arranged in order of difficulty) goes as follows:

- 2 Crowned Plover (the trickiest of them all)
- 7 Blacksmith Plover
- 10 Wattled Plover
- 1 Ethiopian Snipe Knocked down and lost
- 1 Laughing dove (accidentally flushed and taken)
- 6 Cape Dikkop

I used to think that Snipe Hawking was the ultimate form of Falconry available to us in Southern Africa. Of three snipe I served Topaz in one evening, she forced two into cover within 200 m and the third she knocked down and lost when a dog rushed in and spooked her. Give me Plover Hawking any time and if they are wattled Plover, I'll fly the Hawk out of the hood at the bird 100 yards distance and watch a ringing flight.

That's Falconry!

THE KITE TRAINING METHOD AN UPDATE AND SOME THOUGHTS

Alan Harvey

The technique of training falcons to take a pitch using the kite has taken off since I first developed the SA version after corresponding with falconers in the US namely Carlton Green, Dave Scarborough and Tony Head. The system, either with the kite or balloon is the norm for most long wingers in the US as it has become in South Africa. A visit to our annual SAFA sky trial leaves one in no doubt as to the improvement in the pitches of the falcons being flown. Some of these positive developments in the overall standard of falconry are also the result of the free exchange of ideas that SAFA has encouraged and the desire to emulate the feats of some of the falconry displayed here.

The use of the kite in the initial training of a young falcon will without a doubt produce a fitter bird that is less likely to learn to sit. It also encourages the falcon to fly up and out, i.e. not to fly in your pocket. The invaluable thing to me is that it encourages a mindset at a time when the young bird is very susceptible to successful methods of taking quarry. The technique reinforces this behaviour at the critical time in the development of the young falcon. By using the kite you have an invaluable aid in making your high flyer.

In the past some falconers have run into problems using the kite. The notion that all one has to do is to kite the young falcon to a 1000 ft for a couple of weeks and you have a sky trial champion has led to the disillusionment of more than one hopeful falconer. To me the critical part of kite training is the changeover from flying to the bait on the kite to stooping at fleeing quarry from the big pitch. In essence all the kite has to do with the plan is to get the falcon up to the desired pitch to show it the advantage the height gives it in speed and position over its quarry. Being able to reinforce this behaviour with a flush and a sure kill are what makes mounting to a high pitch preferred behaviour.

The timing of the changeover is important before the falcon becomes a super muscle bound athlete from weeks and weeks of pumping up to the kite. If left too late it leaves the door open to bad traits such as clearing the horizon of doves and rockies, and only flying high when the kite is up in the sky. Having now worked out the theory one wonders why every falcon trained to the prescribed method does not become something special. The reason is of course Murphy and the fact that all living creatures vary in temperament, ability and inclination all within the same species and sex. You get some that will do it irrespective of training technique. Others can be vastly improved and unfortunately some are destined for the 75% that would not make it in the wild. Murphy has his say as soon as you start hunting in the field. Quarry flushes while the bird is at half its pitch, the dog false points, partridges bale out in front of the big stoop, and sometimes ALL the ducks on that "kill me" pond turn out to be flightless babies or moulting adults. I think the ability to produce as close to perfect flushes and kills while hunting has as much to do with how your falcon ultimately turns out as any initial training method. The kite is only one step in the making of your dream falcon.

It might just give you the heads start you need.

A FALCONRY SAFARI

Adrian Lombard

In 1999, at roughly the same time as the last Rugby World Cup, I had the immense good fortune to be invited to spend a week on the Scottish Grouse moors and to attend the Welsh Hawking Club's International Field Meet in Ruthin. Having grown up with the belief that southern Africa is the hunter's Mecca, the concept of going from here to Britain for the purpose of hunting may appear somewhat bizarre. As I was soon to discover, it proved to be a highly enlightening and satisfactory experience. I would like to share with you some of my thoughts and observations.

I travelled with my wife, Sylvia, having left hawks, children and dogs looking after each other in Cape Town. We spent a few days in London doing the tourist thing and sampling British beer (a very pleasant occupation) then took the train to Weston-Super-Mare where we met up with Dave Jones and Lindsay. Our first stop from the station was a quarry in Weston, where Dave pointed out a Peregrine nest. Payback for all the times I bored him silly by pointing out the peregrine nest, round the corner from my home in Fish Hoek! One of our observations in Britain was the apparent health of the raptor populations, which seem to have recovered from the depredations of game-keepers and DDT. Not without, one realizes, the help of their enthusiasts, including falconers. During the course of our trip we managed to see most indigenous raptors, including wild goshawk and a Red Kite. Sadly, I just missed seeing a Merlin on grouse moor in Scotland.

We went to Dave's home where I was introduced to his superb imprint musket Finish Gos, Nomad. It was to be my privilege to fly this bird for the next two weeks and I could not have wished for a better hawk. We wasted no time getting into our hunting gear and off to the pheasant woods. I managed to bag two cock pheasants that afternoon and I returned to Dave and Lindsay's in seventh heaven.

After two days of enjoying Dave's home hunting, it was time to set off, in convoy, for Scotland in a hire car courtesy of our British friends. With Dave and Lindsay in front, complete with hawks, dogs and a spade to bury his ancient lurcher, should she die en-route. It was dark, cold and windy by the time we reached our destination, Lochindorb, and I have an abiding impression of bundling through the door into the warmth and having a whiskey thrust into my hands; what a marvellous welcome.

Lochindorb was to be our home for the next week, along with old friends, Bryan and Martyn Patterson and a group of other falconers, including some very hazardous denizens of Yorkshire. This was a very special experience for me, flying goshawks on rabbits and pheasants in the mornings and grouse with Dave's Gyr/Peregrine tiercel in the afternoon. My own bag included the only wild quail in Scotland and I was ribbed for coming out and exterminating a species.

The grouse moors were a completely new experience. What really impressed me was the tremendous effort that goes into maintaining the grouse population. Driving through Scotland, one soon notices that the hillsides are strip-burnt in a three year rotation to provide fresh heather shoots for the grouse to feed on. When walking across the moors, you come across white-washed poles which are erected as markers by the keeper. Here he puts down grit for the grouse which serves two purposes. First, it discourages the grouse from going down onto the road for grit and also, allows him to mix in medication for worms and other disease in the grouse. The moors are covered with heather which is very like fynbos, and equally difficult to walk through, but the ground beneath is marshy and covered with moss. The grouse themselves proved to be wily and exacting quarry. The falcon managed to knock out tail feathers a few times but we didn't succeed in putting one in the bag. (Dave's success has improved and, I believe his tally for the past season was 14.)

As we have no rabbits in South Africa, I had never seen hunting with ferrets, so I spent a day with the Yorkshire lads and their Harris Hawks. The ferret proved to be the most obliging of little animals and fascinated me. It tolerated any amount of handling and only really 'lost it' when one of the Harris's

grabbed it by mistake. (This was a remarkably infrequent event as the Harris Hawks are conditioned not to go for the ferret.) I am glad that the Scottish soil is softer than that of the karroo as we had to dig the ferret out on a number of occasions.

This was assisted by the fact that the ferret had a telemetry transmitter on a collar to locate it underground. Hunting with the Harris Hawks was great fun and we finally retired to the Strathspey Arms to sample the local bitter and the real hazard began. I was treated to Yorkshire hospitality and was soon finding myself plied with pints accompanied by whiskey chasers. I realized that desperate measures were required if I was to survive the night and took to pouring the whiskeys into my gumboot. As the evening progressed I watched Sara, a Swedish lass working for Nic Fox, thrash all the men in a 'down-down' competition and then had the dubious pleasure of being mooned by the Yorkshire contingent, (my memory remains hazy and I am grateful for that). Finally we had to go home. Dimly I recognized a similarity between Yorkshire and the Free State, so I marched off towards the vehicles shouting Yorkshire and was soon at the head of a small procession behaving similarly. With one sober driver we managed to get home and then I had to take off my boots. Fortunately no one had noticed that I squelched every time I put my left foot down. By the way it was awful putting the boots back on the next morning!

Lochindorb itself was the most wonderful setting for our Scottish 'Safari'. The lodge stands on a small headland protruding into the loch and had a rather dramatic atmosphere in the sombre autumn weather. Out in the loch lies an island with the ruins of a castle, reputedly occupied in the thirteenth century by the Wolf of Badenoch.

The legend goes that the wolf tossed out his wife for a young belle thus offending the Bishop of Perth who excommunicated him. Enraged, the Wolf set out, with his henchmen, for Perth. They sacked all the churches on the way, and then they sacked Perth Cathedral and went home. The Thane of Cawdor took exception to this and he came down from the north and sorted out the Wolf, who, according to legend, later died a converted man. One morning, while we were there a flock of geese arrived and flew across the loch giving their haunting calls; an evocative sound in this spectacular setting.

Sadly our stay at Lochindorb drew to an end. We had enjoyed the best of company, food and hawking so it was with some regret that we said the first of our good-byes and set off as tourists once more. Our route took us across Scotland to Skye, then down the west coast and, finally, via the Lake District to North Wales and Ruthin, for the Welsh International Hawking Meet. By this stage, all the nations represented were in mourning over the Rugby World Cup and I was grateful that my passion is falconry not rugby!

Once again we were treated to the most wonderful setting. We stayed in Ruthin Castle, originally built in the 13th century, in a room complete with four poster bed and resident ghost (or noisy pipes). Once again we were subjected to tremendous hospitality and superb beer. The hunting was all on kept lands and was first class, with more than adequate quarry. Once again I found the gamebird management of great interest. Certainly the high quality of British hunting comes at a price but, with increasing numbers of hunters in South Africa this may be the route of the future. I was also impressed by the high standard of hawking furniture and the obvious good hawk management.

The hawking was most enjoyable with some top class hawks being flown. I found it particularly interesting as I am one of the few falconers in southern Africa who have had the opportunity to fly a European Gos and I relished the chance to see others flown and to see how problems that I had experienced were dealt with. It also gave me a yardstick for comparison with the Black Spars, which are my real love. I found the one European Sparrowhawk that was being flown, most interesting. She was only marginally bigger than our Red-breasted Spar. But had a huge heart, tackling everything that flew, including mallards, and actually holding a hen pheasant. The management of a small accipiter like this in the British climate must be fairly exacting. I spent one day out with the longwings. Once again we had excellent country and plenty of quarry but the weather conditions were not conducive to flying and none of the birds performed in the heavy air.

On the final night of the field meet I was invited to make a brief speech at the strachenlechan (a laying out of the game) in praise of the quarry. In this I made mention of the wonderful brotherhood of falconry which unites falconers around the world. After the hospitality and friendship we had enjoyed, this speech came right from the heart. Afterwards we returned indoors to a banquet which was a suitably festive event, followed by an auction at which David Jones was a most entertaining auctioneer. The following morning, with mild hangovers, it was time to say farewell to new friends once again and head south.

We travelled with Martyn Paterson to visit Nick Fox's establishment in South Wales. Unfortunately Nic was away so I did not meet him, but found his establishment a real eye-opener. The sheer scale of his breeding establishment is incredible. He has "natural breeding" pairs as well as imprints. The Natural breeding birds are monitored constantly on closed circuit television. There are banks of incubators in the incubator room and, in stacked cardboard '2doz. Egg' egg-boxes were the hatched eggs from the previous season. Examination of these revealed pencilled markings indicating the changing shape of the air sac and, in some, holes drilled to encourage weight loss. The amount of work involved is mind-bending. He no longer free-hacks the birds he breeds but releases them into huge flight pens. These pens are so large that he puts in a small herd of sheep to mow the grass. One of my abiding impressions will be the outpouring of lust that occurred when Martyn Paterson walked into the courtyard in view of all the imprint falcons. Here were all varieties of falcon and hybrid, including some really stunning birds. I saw the legendary Spitfire, the first New Zealand Falcon/peregrine hybrid tiercel that turned out to be a stunning hawk on magpies, rooks and crows, along with other birds including white Gyrs and the Peregrine/Saker hybrids used by the Northumberland Crow Hawkers.

I saw there, the method used to satisfy the authorities on paternity issues. Feathers from all the breeding birds are lodged on file, both at Nic Fox's establishment and with the authorities. In the event of a dispute these feathers can be used as a source of D.N.A. to establish the paternity of progeny.

The final leg of our journey was upon us and it was a quick trip back to Weston-Super-Mare and farewell to Martyn, Dave and Lindsay, and to Nomad who had given me so much pleasure in the field. It was with heavy hearts, we set out for London and the long trip home.

I must make final mention of Bryan Paterson who taught me how to 'pop' a rabbit. One takes a freshly killed rabbit and, holding the head towards you, you squeeze the rabbit firmly, hand over hand, towards the tail until its guts start to bulge out beneath its tail. You then give the rabbit a firm shake and the guts fly out, leaving you with the cleaned carcass. He informed me that it took a real man to 'pop' a hare, but I assured him that, in South Africa, we 'pop' Springbok, you just have to be careful of the horns.

ALTERNATIVE FALCONRY IN THE FREE STATE

Steve Squires

Much is written by falconers in pursuit of the Nirvana of falconry. Loosely translated this involves stoops from out of sight at huge fast flying quarry by falcons (preferably white in colour) ending, in a spectacular explosion of feathers and the instant death of one or both of the birds involved in the collision.

If one is to believe the literature, the North Americans take their hawks and dogs to the Prairie in huge trucks, usually with a name like Penetrator, Thruster, Raider, Bandit or Bronco on the tailgate. Depending on how late at night the tale is told the falconers arrive home with the truck loaded with "grouse", "quackers", "jacks", and the odd moose taken by the Harris in the headlights on the way home. This entire quarry is taken from vertical stoops.

Across the Atlantic the Brits regard wandering around in rain soaked knee high heather, while dressed in skirts, the ultimate falconry experience. If the falcon can fly faster than the driving sleet it has a fair chance of overhauling a rain soaked grouse which travels at about the same velocity as the constantly howling wind. Again, late at night in the relative shelter of a mouldering hostelry stories are told of falcons waiting on out of sight in a clear blue sky and killing two grouse with one stoop. The fact that the cloud base is seldom higher than three hundred feet seems to elude the speaker as he describes the hissing fall of a huge "Scottish" peregrine in pursuit of grouse.

Further South in Johannesburg falcons are loaded into large four wheel drive Japanese vehicles and driven for endless miles on six lane highways to a place where the smog is thin enough to observe the hawk mounting. When quarry can't be found because the pointer is coughing so much a hapless pigeon is tossed to induce that roaring hissing reckless stoop from the waiting on falcon. Rumour has it that several Gauteng falconers have asthma pump attachments for their hoods and give each falcon a shot of oxygen after its flight. As the moon rises over the suburban braai and the coke in the glasses gets progressively paler a familiar story pattern emerges. Falcons that have to be called down because they were straying into the flight paths of 747s approaching Johannesburg international, pigeons broken in two by stooping falcons, telemetry that can't pick up the falcon overhead and so the Klipdrift declines.

Still further South in the vlaktes of the Free State and the Mountains of the Eastern Cape the falconers appear poorer and wear older cloths, often torn by thorns and barbed wire fences. The hawks and pointers are taken to the field in old bakkies and walk home when the bakkie breaks down. Small trees and even telephone poles are removed from the vicinity of the duck ponds so that the falcons will not be tempted to sit. Balloons, kites and late at night even flying saucers shaped like 'bills are used to lure the falcons ever higher into the air. Falcons from around the globe have been tested for "mounting" and stooping ability in this harsh environment and most have been found lacking. Kill records are kept by carving notches on the bakkie dashboard. A big one for a duck, small one for a francolin. Some of the Eastern Cape falconers replace their dashboards twice a season. At the field meet, as the temperature falls below zero and the stars illuminate the icy black sky, the talk lingers only briefly on the subject of the aardvark spit braai and drifts to the topic of pitch and stoop. When the final soetes bottle hits the ground the falcons are being likened to the endless procession of satellites curving their way through the black dome of sky. No pitch is ever too high or quarry too big for a Free State falcon at 2.30 am in mid July.

The point of this article is not however to report on more breath taking stoops, but to assure you, the falconer without the 4x4 Gyr falcon combinations that there is life after a Free State Field Meet. I should know. I have been to all of them, flown four lost four, and now I am content to be a spectator and fly my birds at home, where my old bakkie, low pitched falcons and hawking poodle don't get laughed at.

I live in the west of the Free State, a place of huge open plains, scrubby acacia thorn trees and large, hairy, politically incorrect farmers. We have few traditional quarries for falcons, ducks occur in summer when it is too hot to hunt, geese for the rest of the year. Orange River francolins are found mostly to the East and Sand Grouse to the West. We have doves and pigeons by the score and that noble king of the plains, the white quilled and black Knorhaan.

Dove hawking is a sport close to my heart. I have pursued it ardently every year since 1988, first with a lanner tiercel and latterly with a cast of peregrine tiercels. It is indeed an exciting substitute for game hawking, far less structured and predictable than francolin and duck hunting it is a cross between game and traditional magpie hawking. It can take place on a fairly small area of land, the quarry is plentiful and flights of exquisite beauty often take place only meters from you. I clearly recall my lanner tiercel pulverising a dove about six feet in front of a young lad I had taken hawking.

He didn't speak for about half an hour afterwards.

The art of dove hunting is however a branch of the waiting on flight and not the subject of this article. Before long in the heart of any falconer there will stir the desire to be part of the conversation at the field meet, and if everyone else is flying 1kg plus gyr/crosses at ducks then you want to do the same. The problem these days is not getting the falcon, but rather the availability of ducks. I learnt this the hard way, having obtained my self a large European peregrine and trained it to wait on I found nothing to get up and fly underneath it.

After she had caught a few guinea fowl and the dog had caught a whole lot more I gave them up as a bad joke. As my mind wandered, I fanaticized about the books I had read on Arab falconry and tried flying her at Knorhaans out of the hood. The results were tantalisingly exciting but cut short by the advent of summer hot weather. The next season I tried again and caught several Knorhaan in very exciting chases, but for the most the Knorhaan bailed out still well ahead of the falcon never to be seen again. A veterinary accident cut short the career of this bird and the next bird I thought I would try was a large dark Saker from Germany.

She flew at about 930g, wanted to kill most things that flew but was as prone to heat stress as the peregrine. I had even less success with her. The Knorhaan just seemed to bail out when the falcon started to close with them and it was almost impossible to get a re-flush. This bird was lost when it hit a fence while chasing a Knorhaan, fell into a canal and drowned.

The next attempt was a Falcon Howardiensis. Its mother was a saker and its farther was a peregrine, a saker or a gyr. The bird flew at about 820g and I suspect strongly that it was a male Gyr/saker. On its first free flight it flew it down a baggie pigeon over a distance of several kilometres, killed it and ate it. I recovered it the next day at about 2pm still some 80g heavier than I flew it at. This was an awesome bird to watch, but I continued to have the problem with Knorhaan bail out and corresponding falcon sleep out. This bird's best attempt was a 23km trip at night while 'sleeping' out. He managed to catch one Knorhaan which my Brittany pup kept in the air for long enough to be grabbed. Several days later he was lost while chasing a Knorhaan and the telemetry died. Back to the drawing board.

After this I gave up Knorhaan hunting for a while until with some reservation I collected a smallish hacked peregrine falcon from Alan Harvey. This bird was intended to fly small quarry such as doves and pigeons and this is where I started.

I found when I got home that she was a very sweet natured bird, the total opposite of my tiercels spicy temperament. She trained quickly and before three weeks were up I was trying to fly her to the kite. However, weather being what it is in the Free State, I had numerous fiascos when the wind died as she was getting airborne. Being the clever girl she is she just cut bossies until the bait hit the ground and then landed on it. When the wind did blow late in the evening it was usually as a result of a thumping great thunder storm with lightning attached. In these conditions, and not wishing to replicate Thomas Edison's experiment, the kite remained furled and the falcon unflown.

After several months of this sort of circus I did the sensible thing and phoned some other falconers to commiserate. Alan Harvey had scant sympathy and said he just used the kite as the wind in Dordrecht was always howling and as a sheep farmer he never had any rain to bother him. Francois Breedt suggested that I take up fishing until the hot rainy weather passed, but mentioned that the Transvaal falconers had the same sort of problems. I then phoned Time Wagner who politely asked why I didn't use a balloon on days when the air was calm. Eureka!

Soon I had my weather balloons, filled one with gas and up went the bait. Several minutes later up went the falcon. She climbed into the slight breeze turned and came back at the height of the bait, snatched it then was brought gently to earth by the parachute. How easy everything suddenly became.

A few days later she went up to the balloon without bait and put in a magnificent vertical stoop at the pigeon, bouncing it into the ground. I chose an easy pigeon for the first attempt but found to my dismay that she thought all my pigeons were easy. Unlike the tiercels where the captured pigeon can often be recycled, the falcon killed them very quickly and easily so within a month I was virtually pigeon less.

Now you must remember that I live in an area where there is very little suitable quarry for medium sized longwings. I tried her at doves but she did not have the manoeuvrability to hunt them in thorn bush. I tried her at a teal and she chased it for several kilometres before returning and try as I might I could not find any other suitable duck slips for her. Eventually I resorted to trapping rock pigeons with a mist net and tossing these for her. After a while she became quite adept at catching these and one evening while waiting on saw a flock of these birds passing by and took off after them. Several minutes of spectacular flying took place until she forced one to earth and killed it under a bush.

A few days later a similar thing happened and I lost contact with her. I had my two year old daughter with me who burst into tears when I told her we had lost Meg but who quickly recovered when she discovered how telemetry works. To cut a long story short we eventually found her about three kilometres away from where she was slipped under a bush next to the main road with two thirds of the rockie inside her.

This uncontrolled falconry is for the young and reckless so back to the drawing board I went. In the course of our excursions I had bumped many white quilled Knorhaan and she had shown no interest in them at all. They also did not seem to be very scared of her. I figured if I could get her to wait on while the dog found and flushed them I could be onto some sport. With due perseverance I obtained a baggie, and entered her without any trouble. The next day out we put up a blacksmith plover from amongst some sheep and this she flew with enthusiasm. It dumped back into the sheep and had to be reflushed.

The hunt rapidly turned to a farce, as the poodle, who has been longing to chase sheep all his life, decided that at last I had come to see reason and that he was now allowed to flush sheep. The wild yipping and stampeding sheep did however deprive the plover of its cover and after a rat hunt of several minutes the first wild quarry was taken. Fortunately the sheep were not too phased by the poodle, probably because he looks like them and with some stern language was discipline was restored. With that feather in our caps it was back to the Knorhaan.

Some days later I flushed a female Knorhaan right under Meg. She put in a lovely stoop but pulled out at the last moment, just nicking the bird. The Knorhaan flew off and landed about four hundred meters away. I decided to try again and Meg started to climb as the dogs and I ran in to the reflush. Half way there Ginger, the Brittany, stopped short in her tracks and locked up on point. Thinking it was another Knorhaan I piled in to flush and lo and behold out popped two Orange River Francolin. Meg was heading the other way but turned on my shout, closed her wings and stooped. She tucked in behind the male francolin and plucked him out of the sky like she had been doing it all her life. Then after having killed half of the farms breeding population of Orange River Francolin it was back to the Knorhaan again.

After a period of no success I spied a flock of Dikkop in a ploughed land. Thinking I could get a good stoop at these tight sitting birds I removed Meg's hood to put her up. Just at that time one of the wretched creatures moved and she left the fist and piled straight in. By the time I got to her the Dikkop was beyond rescue and then the penny dropped. Why not try Knorhaans out of the hood with this falcon?

Another baggie was obtained and a slip engineered. Meg took it without hesitation and was given a full crop of the dark read meat for her reward. Two days later I tried her at a young Knorhaan and a stunning flight ensued. The quarry, encouraged by Ginger, made the mistake of heading out over a ploughed land. Meg immediately gave chase and when the Knorhaan realised it was in trouble it tried to double back to cover. She took it as it tried to put in to a patch of weeds.

Thereafter, followed several months of fantastic if very tiring hawking. The Knorhaans are not always easy to find, and long distances have to be covered in order to get a flush. The Brittany, Ginger, played a pivotal role in this exercise, finding the quarry, flushing it and making sure it stayed airborne. This last condition was achieved by sustained direct pursuit of the Knorhaan and is the most important ingredient to successful hunting.

As described above and also by Ryan Hartley the normal reaction of the White Quilled Knorhaan on being pursued by a big falcon is to bail out into the first cover available and try to elude the field on the ground, eventually disappearing into thin air once the falcon has had enough of the rat hunt. When running in our dry climate they leave little or no scent trail for the dog and they can run like a guinea fowl. Once airborne they are very fast and I have seen them out-fly a hungry saker when given more than a few hundred meters start. The secret with this quarry is to use a smallish falcon that does not immediately intimidate the quarry. This results in the Knorhaan getting up high to escape the attentions of the Brittany and by the time it realises that the falcon is on its tail it is too late. The male Knorhaans are exceptionally tough birds and fight on the ground like an oversize Dikkop. This necessitates getting to the birds once they are on the ground as fast as possible, and usually means a hard run of between 200 and 2000 meters. I managed to save and release about half of the birds she took, but on the longer flights where up to ten minutes can elapse between contact and falconer's arrival, the Knorhaan was usually defeated.

One particular flight stands out in my mind and occurred almost mid season. A female Knorhaan got up about twenty meters away from us and before it had gone another ten the hood was off and both Ginger and Meg were in pursuit. The flight went directly away from me for some four or five hundred meters when the Knorhaan bailed out. Both birds and the dog all seemed to converge on the same spot. The falcon must have missed her strike completely because some seconds later the Knorhaan exploded out to the grass and headed back towards me, this time with its ears really pinned back. Meg jump started off the ground and gave chase sticking close to the ground and getting in underneath the Knorhaan which was steadily climbing. The Knorhaan kept its course and came straight at me about five or six meters off the ground. As it got to me Meg whipped up from underneath and executed a bind to the head and neck which brought both of them cart wheeling to the ground almost at my feet. I fortunately had a fresh pigeon in my pocket with which I pacified Meg and after extricating the Knorhaan from her clutches released it with only a few small punctures.

After the end of July the weather started to get hot again, and this very taxing hunting started to pall. I tried to get Meg to convert to duck and waiting on flights but she took to pole sitting and I to cussing. A week into August I tore a hamstring in my left leg which left me unable to walk or run for three weeks. Meg never really got into top gear again and I put her down to moult in the middle of September. Her tally for the season was:

Black Smith Plover	1
Orange River Francolin	1
Rock Pigeon	2

This experience has caused me to think more deeply about what it is we are trying to achieve in flying falcons in Southern Africa. We have an ever increasing number of exotic falcons available as well as our own local species and their hybrids that are potentially available to us. We have a huge variety of "non traditional" quarry available to us that usually only features as "various" or an embarrassed silence in our game books. Many of these have potential to make fine quarry, particularly for out of hood flights.

For example I have noted that cattle egrets are a curse if a large falcon learns to kill them. They just bail out and get caught. On the other hand when pursued by a small peregrine tiercel they mounted in tight rings and eventually out flew the tiercel several hundred meters high in the air.

Wattled, Pied and European Starlings and some gulls all have great potential for ringing flights for the smaller falcons and my tiercels have all been keen to chase them. They have however never had the degree of fitness required to bring a flock to bay and put in a good stoop at them. This must be a function of training and I am sure will be possible if the time is put into it. Plovers are another elusive quarry for small falcons, and a cast of tiercels at a crowned plover makes for exciting falconry but to date a rather thin game bag.

Larger falcons could be flown out of hood at the traditional Heron, long considered the peak of European falconry. Other quarry could include our larger gulls, ibises, crows and dare I say it even the likes of black kites.

These flights need not only be confined to falcons. Anyone that has seen a Garber or Black Spar chasing down quarry in the open can attest to how aerial these birds are. I have several times seen my local Black Spars take rock pigeon and doves in high ringing flights, and have seen Garbars trying to do the same with laughing doves. This is perhaps the true calling of the very fit social imprint and one hopes to see more made of these birds in the future. They are certainly capable of such flights.

So, with so much potential out there and so much to say for myself you may well ask what I am doing at present? The answer is training a cast of tiercels to the balloon, and at doves, so that when the next American comes to stay I can boast, late at night, of how they put in a stoop from out of sight at Kori Bustard as it put on a territorial display flight over my property. This stooping thing just won't go away!

NOTES FROM MEXICO

Bob Dalton

I have been fortunate the last year or so to have made three separate hawking trips to Mexico. In fact by the time this article comes out in print it will be four. This year has been exceptional, but I do normally try and get to Mexico at least twice a year.

Many people ask what the fascination is that draws me back so readily. There are several reasons and I will try and briefly explain them, though not necessarily in their order of importance to me.

The weather is simply superb. The sun seems to always be shining and it makes such a pleasant change to wake up to a bright warm day more or less everyday. Blue skies are clear and excellent for falcons to thermal up in and then watch them wait on. When it comes to the actual falconry most British falconers would be envious of what Mexican falconers tend to take for granted.

Eyas and passage hawks are taken under licence and there is no shortage of them. The paperwork that has to be gone through in order to get a hawk or falcon from the wild is relatively straight forward and costs next to nothing. It is importing captive bred hawks from other countries that seem to throw the officers of local government into turmoil. Importing hawks is certainly not a job to be undertaken lightly. But then not many people want to when they can legally go out and trap a fresh passage hawk or falcon.

There is a very small trade in illegal hawks, as there will always be some people for whom even the most basic paperwork is too much trouble. A Harris hawk on the black market is around ten dollars and a peregrine falcon something like forty dollars. That's seven pounds for a Harris and twenty-eight pounds for a peregrine. But many red tails, red-shouldered hawks and Harris hawks are sold in the illegal bird markets to be eaten. Along with hawks you can also buy endangered reptiles and animals in these markets. Many of the truly rural people in Mexico are exceedingly poor and selling wildlife is probably their only means of survival.

Coopers, sharp shins, red tails, Harris hawks and peregrine falcons are all very common. Obviously there is an abundance of quarry or else there would not be the abundance of predators. When it comes to getting permission to fly this is also very easy. Mexican people are very friendly and try to be accommodating. The exception to this is when they drive. Then they become a totally different race that barely resembles anything human. But when it comes to getting permission there is not the interest in recreational shooting that there is in other countries, so land is not as jealously guarded as it is here. Many landowners are more than pleased to have falconers take a few ducks, rabbits or jack rabbits.

When it comes to game birds there are no pheasants or partridge only quail. Getting permission for quail is not quite so easy as most farmers in Mexico like to see them on their land. They use them as a barometer as to the health of their surroundings. But for those that are set on hunting quail there is a lot of federal land, which is public land that tends to hold quail. There are three different species to be hunted. Bob White, Scaled and Montezuma's quail. The last are particularly beautiful and make good quarry for coopers and aplomado falcons.

When I explain to Mexican falconers that we here in Britain normally have to pay for a great deal of our sport they are horrified. But then monetary values are so very different in Mexico. What seems insignificant to us may seem a luxury to Mexican falconers. The majority of falconers over there do not use telemetry. This is because it is so very expensive. When you think of it from the Mexican's point of view a telemetry transmitter is around one hundred and fifty dollars and the paperwork for a new falcon is eight dollars. Also bear in mind that the average weekly wage is something like forty pounds a week,

it is not difficult to see why so few people use telemetry or top of the range falconry equipment. A normal falconry glove in Mexico is around six to eight pounds.

Just to put costs into perspective I can give you a very good example to make a comparison with.

I wanted to go over for twelve weeks and take a passage tundra peregrine falcon under licence. The intention was to stay and train it and then fly it at ducks for a few weeks. Having enjoyed some good sport the idea was to release the falcon just before coming back to the UK. A friend of mine in Montemerellos, a good duck hawking area, said he would cost the exercise out for me. He was going to get me a price for renting a house and a small VW Golf sized vehicle and the relative insurance. The house he found came complete with cook/housekeeper and a gardener/handyman. He came up with a package that included everything except telephone and food. When my friend came on the phone he apologised profusely that he would not be able to sort things out for less than around £700 to £750.

We all know what a month's grouse hawking costs in Scotland and I told him that this price was more than acceptable for each month. He was then horrified. The price was fully inclusive for the full three-month period, not per month. So you can see that Mexico is very much like Eastern Europe at the moment in that money tends to go a long way. Getting there is not very expensive either providing you are prepared to shop around for your air ticket. It may not be expensive but it is tedious. The route I take is a ten hour flight to Dallas or Houston and then a further two and a half hour flight to Mexico City from there.

I have made many good friends in Mexico and therefore have a range of venues and types of hawking that I can visit. My own preference is to see hunting with falcons, particularly waiting on flights. But I have also enjoyed seeing aplomados and bat falcons flown at small birds. Bat falcons are incredibly quick and are extremely manoeuvrable. They are similar to hobbies in both looks and style of flight. They live mainly on bats and small birds although they will also, like hobbies, take and eat insects on the wing.

One of my friends flew one for several years at mourning doves. But she would often check at her favourite quarries, which were butterflies. Having caught one she would fly back to the falconer's fist and exchange it for a small reward of meat. The falcon was eventually lost when she went off to chase an interloping passage peregrine away. The peregrine took exception to the behaviour of the bat falcon and killed it.

I do not think that bat falcons would do well here. They are a tropical falcon and do not fair well even in northern Mexico. As soon as the heat had gone out of the day the ones I saw flown needed to be fed up or they would get all slitty eyed and sickly looking. I dread to think what an English summer, never mind winter, would do to one.

Aplomado falcons I have always found to be terribly disappointing. Those I saw flown were all taken as eyass falcons except one. The one passage aplomado I hunted with flew well and took small birds and many quail. But all the rest seemed to prefer insects to birds. We would get slip after slip at quail and the aplomado would shoot off the fist or the T-perch only to suddenly drop on the ground and clutch a locust or a cricket. Very frustrating.

Other flights I have enjoyed are coopers hawks at quail and grackles. Grackles are similar in both size and cunning to our magpies. They are an abundant quarry but not too many falconers seem to bother with them. But just like our magpie they offer very sporting flights to both long wingers and short wingers. Various small birds are taken with sharp shined hawks although not too many people fly them. They are very small and extremely delicate. General opinion is that they are not worth the trouble of training when so many other larger hawks are readily available.

Ornate Hawk Eagles are flown at rabbits and jack rabbits and are very fast and extremely agile. Much more so than their looks imply. Also flown at ground game are Harris hawks, red tails, goshawks and

golden eagles. The one golden eagle that I spent any time with was flown in high county and went up well on thermals. Its quarry was primarily jackrabbits. These are nowhere near as heavy as our European hares and are probably closer in weight to a decent rabbit.

I have also seen male Harris hawks flown at roadrunners and nightjars. Although having witnessed many flights I have never seen either killed by hawks. Roadrunners are members of the cuckoo family and when you see them foraging for food you would think that a trained hawk would easily catch them. But although they are not quick fliers they do not panic and are just simply far too clever for the average hawk. Nightjars are staggeringly quick off the mark and very reminiscent of snipe in the way they accelerate and rise. If the hawk does not grab the nightjar as it first lifts off from the ground then it has no chance.

But of all the flights I have been lucky enough to enjoy my own particular favourite is passage peregrine falcons at ducks. There are around ten species of ducks that make good quarry for falcons in Mexico. Most are migratory and therefore the hawking lasts for approximately the five and a half months that the ducks take up temporary residence. I have a group of friends that, between them, fly eight falcons at ducks. Seven were taken as passage hawks and one as an eyas. Of the passengers six are anatum and the other is tundra. Personally I like tundra falcons very much and think they are one of the best looking peregrines. They are the western equivalent of the calidus form of peregrine. They have very white chests and dark caps and moustaches. Slightly bigger in size than anatoms they do not tend to be so popular with Mexican falconers due to their desire to migrate.

Anatoms from the USA do migrate through Mexico but the country also has a large resident population. Where as tundras purely pass through on passage.

The group of falconers I fly with have duck hawking down to a fine art. Their success rate is around ninety per cent. The ponds flown are man made drinking ponds scattered across vast cattle ranches. Normally they are small enough that a group of five or six people is all that is needed to flush the ducks. For slightly larger ponds one of the group has a very enthusiastic Labrador.

The flush tends to be a very controlled affair as everyone in the party carries a walkie-talkie. Once the falcon has been cast off the group quietly gets into position. When the falcon is ideally placed then everyone rushes forward and tries to get the ducks to leave the pond. The next stretch of water will be at least a mile away so normally a decent flight will ensue. What tends to interfere with the flights is the abundance of wild raptors. Particularly peregrine and prairie falcons. On several occasions I have seen ducks flushed and the trained falcon and a wild one both take a duck from the same group. Prairies tend to be far more aggressive with regard to territory than peregrines.

Red tails are a danger to the falcon when she is on the ground with a kill. Most peregrines will see off a solitary red tail, but unfortunately red tails seldom are solitary. The other big danger is golden eagles. These are often found in the region where ducks are concentrated. So great care is taken not to fly if an eagle is seen to be active in the area.

One of the main reasons that I like Mexico so much is that it is on the passage route of migrating tundra peregrines. A good friend of mine is involved with a peregrine research project and so traps and rings a great many peregrines each year. When I go over I make a point of spending a week or two with him and go trapping. When the migration is at it's height it is simply amazing how many peregrines you can see and trap each day. I personally have caught sixteen peregrines in a morning.

Depending on the time we go trapping will determine if it is tiercels or falcons that we mainly see. Although there is some degree of overlap the falcons migrate before tiercels and will pass through the areas we trap for around three weeks. Then the number of peregrines drops for a week or so and then the tiercels pass through over a three week period. I have never caught a migrating tiercel and a falcon on the same day.

It is amazing how bold and fearless of man some of the peregrines can be when you are trapping them. I have had five passage falcons all trying to take the same decoy when it is less than twenty yards from me. But then, generally speaking, passage falcons are so much easier to trap than haggards. A passage will normally come straight in and bind to the decoy as soon as it is thrown out. Sometimes I haven't even got back into the car before the falcon is caught. But haggards are much more suspicious and make repeated passes at the decoy before binding to it.

Quite often they will make a series of passes and then fly away. They seem to want only to take the decoy in the air. They cannot seem to understand why, when they put in an attack, it does not fly off. Having failed to get their intended victim to make a run for it they have a tendency to give up.

As well as peregrines I have spent time trapping red tails and Harris hawks. Red tails are wary and will not usually come to the trap if they can still see the trapper. But Harris hawks are easy. As soon as the trap is out the family group gather. Always first on the trap are the males. Often as not you can catch two or three at the same time. Females are harder to catch but only because the males dive in first. It is after all the way a family group of Harris hawks will hunt. The males will make low level dashes to scare the prey into making a run for it and then the higher placed females will pounce. So my own ratio of Harris hawk catches is about one female for every eight males.

Another plus factor for me about Mexico is the abundance of wildlife. A wide and colourful diversity of birds as well as some interesting mammals such as coyotes, bobcats and jaguars. On this last trip I visited a foundation that was part of a breed and release scheme for jaguars and was able to spend a day with them.

Mexico has a great deal to offer in terms of falconry and wildlife. There is an annual falconry meeting in a place called San Luis Potosi, which is around four hours by car, north west of Mexico City. This year saw the second of the meetings and it was very successful. All visitors are welcome and overseas guests are made to feel particularly so. The meeting is in early December and well worth the trouble of getting there.

FALCONRY'S LIKE THAT.

I have permission to hunt on a superb historic Cape Wine farm. The hunting is very bad there as the cover is atrocious but the setting is so stunning that I like to try to fly it a few times each season. Needless to say, I don't manage to catch much there but generally enjoy trying. On one particular occasion I was able to get between the francolin and their cover and thought I was in with a chance. The francs were flushed and, true to form, they doubled straight back into the cover, hotly pursued by the hawk. I looked at the cover and figured that if I got in there with the dog there should be a good chance of a re-flush and I may be able to turn the table on the unsporting wretches. I found a route into the thicket and soon realized that I had seriously underestimated the situation. I was crawling on hands and knees through a mess of fallen gum trees, rotting branches, Port Jackson willow and some sort of tenacious vine with thorns. What is more this whole mess was hiding a deep donga.

Coming to my senses, I started back tracking towards the entrance. To my horror I discovered that on entering the thicket I had knocked against a tree stump that housed a beehive and against the sunlight I could see the bees buzzing angrily around. There was nothing for it but to head back in, on all fours, at high speed. The rest of my passage through the thicket is a bit vague. I can clearly recall hanging upside down from a slippery tree trunk over the donga and realizing that I could either go forwards or stay where I was for the rest of my life. I remember thinking that the choice was a bit of a toss-up. The moral of the story is: never doubt that Cape Francolin know their cover.

A FALCONERS' TALE

Roger Nielson

This is a 'when we' story plain and simple and goes back to 1974 when I was working at Sandawana mine in South East Rhodesia and was flying an African Hawk-Eagle named 'Betel' (Short for Betelgeuse, a giant pulsing star in the Orion Constellation.)

Betel was one of those birds that the old Austringers would have said was 'properly taken', as she jumped off the nest platform as the tree was being climbed and to be chased on foot a fair distance before being taken up from the ground. The only other 'well taken' Hawk-Eagle I've ever had anything to do with was a bird I sent to Falkenmeister Alfred Land-Schutzer in Austria in 1971. This bird managed to put scars on Alfred's cheek that he later passed off as 'duelling scars from my student days.' Strangely the bird I sent to Austria was a sister one year removed from 'Harmatahn', the most effective and most ladylike Hawk-Eagle I have ever flown. (76 kills with me and 19 kills with Rudi Giesswein and no damage done to either Rudi, any onlookers or myself.) The difference being Harmatahn was taken as a 2/3rd feather, 1/3rd down stage and both Alfred's bird and Betel were taken as branchers.

Because Betel was pretty nearly full-slimmed when I caught her, I could not place her on a hack table under a shady tree in the front garden and feed her by hand until she could stand and tear her own food, (which method produces a far more even tempered bird.) Instead I had to hood her take her on the fist and get food down her by presenting it impaled on a 'chopstick'. I also had to cut her weight down from 1550 grams to 1250 grams before she would tear her own food on the fist. To cut a long story short Betel took her first scrub whole on October 15th 1974, six weeks after having been taken up at a weight of +- 1400 grams. She was very free with her giant 'claspers and one had to be very careful to hold her in on short Jesses at all times.

One of the nicest aspects of 'Night Hawking' for me has been that it is a very social form of Falconry. One guys drives the vehicle, one guys holds the Hawk, one guy opens the beer bottles and as many guys as can comfortably fit on the back of your Land Rover or Truck pile aboard and away you go before moon rise, scouring hay fields, airstrips, harvested crop lands or open glades in the bush for Scrub hares, the Kangaroo like rodents we call 'Springhares' or if you are very lucky the Giant Red Rock hares that you sometimes find at the base of those wonderful Granite Kopjes in Central Africa. The action happens right in front of you and the Hawk is hardly aware of your field of spectators. With all this in mind I invited most of the single white male population of Sandawana Mine to come Hawking with me one dark moonless night in November. Betel was on her eleventh scrub hare and back to her wild caught weight of 1550 grams – at which she was lean, mean and strong. We sallied forth onto Liebigs Ranch in a Land Rover borrowed for the occasion from the mine and near Section Seven homestead found our first scrub hare out in the open.

My 'driver' cautiously approached the hare keeping the beam of the 'Landies' Brights on it until we had narrowed the slipping distance down to about 30 meters; I in the meanwhile had 'struck' but not removed the hood. When we reached what I thought was the optimum slipping distance, off came the hood and I pointed the Hawk-Eagle in the hare's direction. After three or four second the Hawk spotted the hare and I launched Betel at her target. As she dipped over the vehicles bonnet she as very briefly silhouetted in the 'Landies' lights and the hare recognised her for what she was and took off for the shrinking black pools of shadow behind some low bushes. The Driver accelerated and kept the beam of the lights on the fleeing hare, very soon it was all over except for the bleating.

We all piled off or out of the 'landie' and crowded around Betel and her kill. The hawk did a strange thing because she left the dying hare (scrub hares are only slightly heavier than European Rabbits, weighing in between 1 and a half and 2 kilos and experienced Hawk-Eagles often kill them in a few seconds) and flew straight at the mine secretary's face, probably because he wore horn-rimmed glasses.

Fortunately this gentleman was also wearing a thickly padded windbreaker, so when he threw his arm up toward the Hawk-Eagle, she grabbed mostly padding. I was quick to prize Betel off the No 2 man on the mines clothing, apologised profusely and suggested we all stand back out of the Land Rovers' lights before I placed Betel back on her kill. The wretched Hawk left the now dead hare for the second time and went looking for the mine secretary in the darkness. This time he turned and ducked hoping no-doubt that Betel would overshoot him. Betel did no such thing; she caught the guy by the seat of his unpadded pants! Being a rather Junior Employee of Messrs Rio Tinto Rhodesia Ltd, the episode left me feeling rather insecure about my future career with the company.

One week later – a Saturday morning and pay weekend – I was the only occupant of the Bachelors Mess who hadn't gone to the bright lights of Bulawayo for the weekend. The mess cook put my lunch in the oven about 11am and bade me farewell. I approached Betel on her Bow Perch and began to talk soothingly to her. The hawk shifted from the one foot up to the two feet firmly on the perch position. Being ever mindful of her feet I continued talking softly and began to gently stroke her chest with a moulted Black Sparrow-Hawk primary feather. Betel cocked her head from side to side (no doubt getting the range just right) and lashed out far beyond the Spar feather catching me half way up my ungloved right forearm.

The pain was awful, the front pounces went in relatively shallow and stopped on the bone, but that dreadful back talon, (well over two inches around the curve) drove deep into the muscle of my forearm. I tried to release the pressure of that dreadful curved weapon with the finger and thumb of my gloved left hand, but Betel frustrated my efforts by latching onto my glove with her free foot. I thought, "If I had undone the falconers knot first instead of bumbling around the back talon with my gloved left hand, I could have made a run for the swimming pool." Instead I was painfully handcuffed to a feathered maniac and had to bear the consequences until she thought of something else and let me go. In the next what seemed like three quarters of an hour that Betel had 'come to grips' with her handler, I was serenaded by a Kurrichane' Thrush and a Forked tailed Drongo from a wild Rubber tree in whose shade I had build my mews. I used to think that bird song was an expression of love, of life and the wonderfulness of nature. As I was being gripped by Betel I realised that both the Drongo and the Thrush were mad!

Finally a mood change overcame the Hawk and some of the fierceness abated from those pale brown juvenile Hawk –Eagle eyes. Withdrawing the back talon was nearly as bad as having it thrust in, Almost. At last I was free and staggered to my feet and got out of range of Betel! "You Bitch", I hissed at her through clenched teeth, "You are going before you kill somebody, and you are going while I can still use my right hand!" I was well of the opinion by this stage that I had had too many sweet natured Hawks in my time to want to put up with one that was painfully dangerous, so I withdrew a cape turtle dove carcass from the fridge, got Betel onto my glove-ever so carefully holding onto her Jesses – and put the hood over her head. My plan was to release her at some Granite Kopjes 8 miles away from the mine, that the locals called "Ma-nyanga". Ma-nyanga can mean 'of the moon' or 'the tusks', I never did find out which, because the full moon could rise in the gap between the twin batholiths if you stood due west of them, but with a big of imagination they could look like twin tusks. At ma-nyanga there were lots of Rock Hyrax, Natal Francolins, Squirrels and if push came to shove, there were lots of striped ground lizards. Betel would have to decide which of these numerous prey species she was going to catch, because I wasn't going to be around to feed her anymore. I left Betel eating her last 'free meal' on a granite boulder beneath one of the batholiths and headed back to the mine and sought out the medical orderly in charge of the mine clinic. This gentleman put me on a three-day course of penicillin, and an anti tetanus jab, this was Saturday afternoon.

On Monday morning I was in the mine clinic for the last of my three penicillin jabs at around 08:30. A mineworker I knew from underground came into the clinic with a bloodstained shirt that was literally in shreds. His back instead of being a healthy chocolate brown was covered in blue, purple and dark green bruises. On closer inspection I could see numerous small and some not so small punctures around the bruised areas in patterns suggesting that he had been attacked with a multi-pronged instrument like a braai-fork.

A SPECIAL REDBREASTED SPARROWHAWK

November 1990 – July 2002

Greg Jean-Jacques and Rory Jean-Jacques

This is in memory of a truly remarkable Red breasted Spa, a tribute to her fine innings and all the fun and delight she gave to those who knew her.

She was taken as an Eya at about 30 days old, from the Dullstroom District in mid November 1990. Her name was Olive as in 'Pop Eyes', my daughter Donn  called her Goldie. Once taken up her optimal flying weight was between 220 and 230 grams.

Her first season, 1991 saw her taking 179 head of quarry of which 98 were Crowned Plovers, some of these kills were in spectacular fashion. Plovers can be a particularly elusive quarry when on the wing and when under pressure, can make very tight turns to evade capture. She could make even tighter turns at the same time accelerating very fast and coming to terms with her quarry. She became extremely bold and confident and would take on slips of up to 100 metres on Plovers.

She would fly low over the ground and ambush the Plovers, forcing them to flush and fly. She would accelerate and either simply fly them down and binding or knocking them to the deck and them throwing up into the air the same as a falcon would, the Plover in the meantime would be trying to make a hasty escape in another direction, she would wing over and accelerate straight down into the stricken Plover.

Moulted through to her second season, 1992 she took 81 head of quarry and at the end of the season, she was placed in a breeding pen. 1992 / 1993 – No breeding success, I think the pair had not bonded properly.

1994 - Laid three eggs, raised one chick (female)

1995 - Laid three eggs, all infertile

1996 - Laid three eggs, hatched all three (females). This same season I took three wild Spa chicks, two females and one male which were about ten days younger than her own clutch.

To facilitate imprinting them on a breeding pen environment the wild chicks were exchanged for her clutch. The two clutches were alternated every week until both clutches had fledged and they were passed onto Falconers.

1997 - Her male partner died just before the commencement of the breeding season.

This was attributed to the attrition he experienced from the female in the lead up to the season in October. She was again taken up after her moult in March 1998.

From 1998 Rory took over flying her. She took 95 head

1999 93 head

2000 88 head

2001 69 head

2002 57 head

Sadly she injured herself fatally while chasing quarry in Aliwal North during our S.A.F.A. meet on 11 July 2002. The barbed wire fences in the district are strung with very narrow gaps between the strands; under normal circumstances she would negotiate fences quite easily. This time, she never made it and severed her jugular vein and couldn't be saved.

It was truly a sad day for Rory and me. She is survived by only one of her Spa's, a female which is in the good hands of Colin Williams, now in her 7th season. During her twelve years in captivity, she was flown for seven seasons and spent five years in a breeding pen. During the seven seasons she was flown, she caught 664 head of quarry of which 220 were Plovers, Crowned, Black Smith and Wattled, 9 Coqui Francolin, 2 Swainsons Spurfowl (hens), 159 Shrikes, 2 Crested Spur Fowl and 272 various comprising 36 different bird species. What was remarkable about her, is with all the rough and tumble of hunting the large quarries, she never once broke or damaged her tail or wing feathers. She was always in absolutely perfect feather.

At 12 years of age, Olive was still in fine fettle and as speedy and gutsy as she ever was, so one wonders, how many more seasons hawking she would have given. She will be remembered for her fantastic disposition, always reliable and consistent by giving of her best in all sorts of circumstances and if an opportunity presented itself.

Over the years it's been the high mounting and hard hitting falcons that tend to leave their mark. However, this diminutive Red Spa certainly left an indelible mark on my falconry experiences.

Her track record showing how versatile the small Red Spa can be for urban hawking exploits and your mainly weekend falconer. It is regrettable that more Falconers have not got involved in breeding Red Spa's as I believe that a lot more can be done with them given more varied hunting scenarios.

I would like very much to establish another breeding pair of Red Spa's so I am appealing to Falconers who come into possession of any juvenile Red Spa's that you don't want to keep, that you consider passing them onto me. I am contactable on Tel. 011 468-1826 home.

I hope this inspires other Falconers who have not experienced a Red Spa to try their hand at flying a Red Spa. Happy hawking with your Spa's.



A special Red-breasted Sparrowhawk
(p 41)

