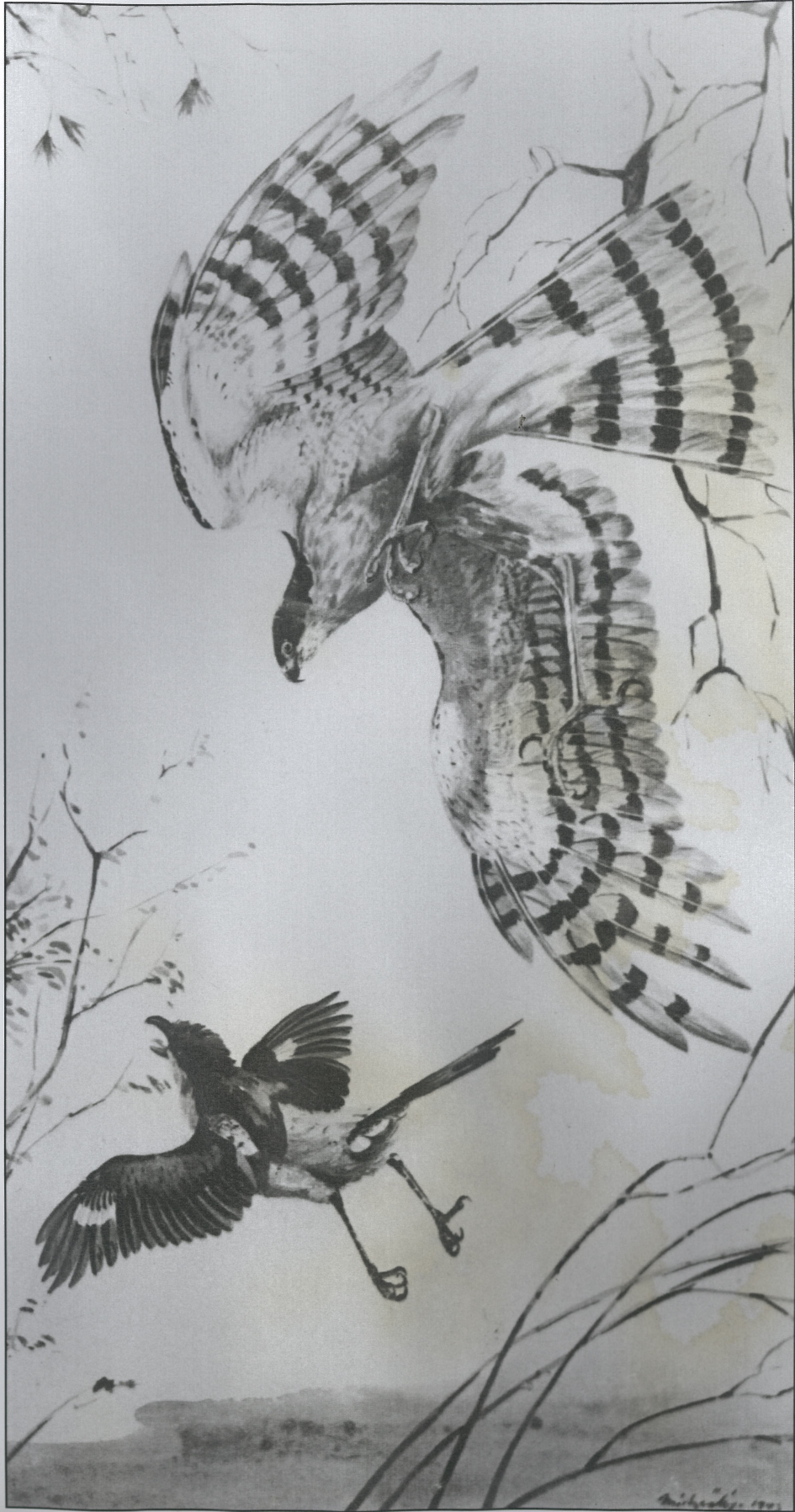


# MEWS VIEWS

Magazine of the South African Falconry Association  
Volume 3, July 2005





*Red Breasted Sparrowhawk of fical shrike, by H. Von Michaëlis*

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## Editorial

*"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair,"*

Dickens, in his immortal words, goes on to say that he was "in short" describing a "period so far like the present period" and how often can these words be applied to the present day. Certainly they can be applied to the past year in South African falconry.

We have taken our place in world falconry by taking up our membership of the IAF. We have gained acceptance in conservation circles and are entrenched as members of the Bird of Prey Working Group. Falconry in South Africa has never been of so high a standard and compares with the best, internationally. All these positive aspects are reflected in articles in this publication.

Much sadder events are also recorded. We have lost Rudi De Wet, a real character, and one of South African Falconry's "old guard". We have also lost Ron Hartley, whose untimely death has left us all the poorer and whom all who knew him will sadly miss.

It has been the custom to use the work of a South African Falconer and Artist for the cover of Mews Views. This year's cover is the work of H. Von Michaelis, perhaps our greatest falconer/artist and author of several books, the best known being; *Birds of The Gauntlet*. The painting is used with kind permission of his son, Helmuth Von Michaelis who has also contributed an article recalling memories of life with his father.

I think that this picture is both unusual, but also very appropriate for this publication. It shows the obvious fascination and wonder on the faces of the two boys handling the hawk. How many of us can identify with the sentiments of these two youngsters. How many of us started falconry in just this way, our life-long enthusiasm sparked by contact with an often inappropriate but enthralling bird. This is the hope for the future of falconry and emphasises our need to invest in the youth.

I hope that this year's contribution will give pleasure, food for thought and some useful information. My thanks go to all the contributors, both those I have bullied and cajoled into writing for us and those, often unexpected, who have contributed without prompting. This publication is yours, enjoy it.

Good Hawking

**Adrian Lombard**

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Contributions are welcomed, as are photographs and artwork.  
Please send articles as a word document attachment.

Cover picture: *My twin boys with Tonka*, H. Von Micaëlis.

*The opinions expressed in these articles are not necessarily the opinion of the editor or of SAFA.*

## Regional Reports

### EASTERN CAPE

There has not been much change in the Eastern Cape over the past year. Our club membership has dropped and only two members have been active. Our dealings with nature conservation have not come to anything with our area being divided up into several regions and none of the deputy directors willing to make a decision or even comment on our policy draft and regs.

Our club membership stands at six, with Alan Stephenson, Bryan Reeves and Aiden Zimmerman inactive this past season. Andrew Pringle has recently joined us from Gauteng. He will be flying a gabar.

Arnold Slabbert flew his old female lanner and has recently acquired an eyas tiercel peregrine that fell out of an eyrie in central PE. This pair bred in a disused lift shaft and produced four chicks this year.

This past season I flew my 3 times intermewed red naped shahin Shakira and a passage female Peregrine. The red nape had a good season taking 41 assorted ducks and a few greywing and orange rivers. The Peregrine was a pleasure to train and fly. She took to ducks with no trouble and ended the season with 43 duck and 12 partridge. Shakira has been retired to a breeding pen and I will fly the Peregrine again this 2005 season.

My new bird is another passage Peregrine which I trapped in the western cape courtesy of the Western Cape Falconry Club. We spent a week down in the windiest cape, travelled about 5000 kilometers and saw 24 Peregrines of which only two were immatures. She is big, dark and beautiful

Kayla, my 3 times intermewed hacked eyas Peregrine of 2001 was flown briefly at the beginning of the season and then put out to hacked back. She did not leave and set up territory here. I had some ausome flying from her during the three months before she dissappeared for two months. She arrived back suddenly one day in July with a badly hurt wing. I caught her up and got her going again for Dale Guthormson who was staying with me to fly at the SAFA meet. She has now been placed in a breeding pen.

*Alan Harvey*

### FREE STATE

Francois Breedt continued to fly his intermewed Gyr-Prairie, Zin Zan, during 2004. Zin Zan took duck and partridge in fine style.

Penny, the nine times intermewed African Peregrine, retired to a breeding project during 2004. Penny's was first paired with Freddy, but Freddy appears to be like his namesake, not quite straight. She was then paired with a 4 year-old tiercel, Kalgor, bred by Allan Harvey and flown by Steven Squires. They produced 2 beautiful tiercels at Steven's facility; both these birds will be flown by Steven in 2005.

Francois has disproved the current theory that the size of falcon flown is inversely proportional to the falconer's kit. He and Haley have produced an eyas of their own. She will be attending the 2005 field meet with her dad, and may enter the new black gyrkin for the sky trials. Be sure to be there!

Anton Muller flew his intermewed passage peregrine female and she continued to impress, so much so, that she was the winner of the National Skytrials.

Angelo Grobler flew Storm, a seasoned African female peregrine. Good fun was had on waterfowl.

Leige Strapp flew his Black Spar musket on quail in the Bethlehem area.

Carel de Jager flew his African Goshawk female in and around the streets of Bethlehem and posed a real threat to the Indian Mynah population.

Tim McPherson flew his Black Spar musket with great success, taking a variety of quarry. He also flew a passage female Lanner that was given to him by Anton Muller. This bird produced spectacular stoops out of thermals.

Steve Lodge joined the Club during 2004. Steve has fun with a Martial Eagle which he obtained in the UK as well as an African Hawk Eagle obtained locally. Steve was a helicopter pilot in the RAF and is now residing in Bloemfontein with his partner Kelly. Steve flies the well-known Rooivalk helicopter at the Bloemspruit airforce base. The jury is still out on which bird is the most challenging to fly, but according to Kelly who is chief lure puller, the Rooivalk is less exhausting. We hope they have a long and enjoyable stay in the Free State.

Gert Pretorius is working on a potato farm in the UK. He has purchased a Peales peregrine tiercel, which he hunts with in Scotland. He plans on returning to SA with this bird, which rumor has it is called Spud.

Steven Squires continued with his cast of tiercels flying mostly doves, but also adding shrikes, barbets, cisticolas, larks and about fifty bats to his bag. The three year old cast of Norbit and Mervyn are going to be retired to the breeding establishment and will be replaced by a new cast of Oliver and Paddy, bred from Penny and Kelgor in 2004.

Despite the low member numbers, the FS Falconry Club has managed to achieve and maintain a high standard of falconry during the last year.

*Steven Squires*

## TRANSVAAL FALCONRY CLUB, GAUTENG

Club President:	Tim Wagner	Coordinator Beginner Falconers:	Colin Williams
Vice President:	Dirk Verwoerd	SAFA Representatives:	Dirk Verwoerd
Secretary:	Greg Jean Jacques		Paul Strydom
Committee:	Mark Labuscagne		
	Paul Strydom		

Life in Gauteng can be frenetic and hectic for most falconers. Most all predisposed to having to work to make a living, fighting through traffic snarl ups, managing time constraints, balancing falconry time with family time, procuring hawk food and rushing to far flung flying grounds many kilometers away with limited available quarry.

All this adding to the recipe for stress and poor quality falconry, at the very least, which is unfortunate. They say someone has to do it and so we do it, day after day with no sign of respite unless one heads for the Free State or the KZN Midlands for some R&R and the prospect of some serious falconry!

No ground breaking or noteworthy news from Gauteng for 2004, suffice to say Mark Labuscagne flew his four year old Gyr Pairie Tiercel Hybrid with spectacular success on Quackers. His captive bred African Peregrine Falcon was doing nicely, but succumbed after eating a Rock Pigeon that had ingested some poisoned grain.

Dirk Verwoerd's four year old Gyr/Peregrine Hybrid Tiercel has become a most proficient performer on Quackers notching up a very respectable score of ten and in fine style to boot. His African Peregrine Falcon notching some thirty head assorted Quackers.

Time Wagner flew his team of 2nd year Gyr/Peregrine Hybrid Tiercel, Passage African Peregrine Falcon, 1st year captive bred African Peregrine Falcon with various degrees of success, finding suitable quarry an ongoing challenge.

Gary Warren flew his two intermewed captive bred African Peregrine Tiercels now in their 4th season flying mainly Redwing and Orange River Francolin and proving very effective.

Grant Neale flew his 3 year old captive bred African Peregrine Tiercel and 1st year captive bred African Peregrine Falcon. He passed his other Tiercel onto Herhold Gauche to fly.

Ray Thompson flew a Black Spa Imprint female ex Free State Angelo Grobbelaar proved to be most capable on Orange River Francolin.

Greg Jean Jacques flew his 1st year captive bred Female Black Spa taking Guineas and Francolin quite proficiently. Also his 4 year old Black Spa Musket took a handful of Francolin.

Rory Jean Jacques's Eyas Black Spa Female taking Guineas and Francolin.

Mike Thompson's 1st year captive bred Musket Black Spa died from Aspergilliasis at the start of the season. He flew his African Gos female.

Colin Williams tried and trusted African Gos female

Elco Meyis captive bred African Gos Musket

Leon Hawerman African Gos female

Pieter Rabie African Gos

Rowan Becker African Gos female

Byron Magaw African Gos female

Heinrich Schreuder Eyas Black Spa Musket Killed while hunting (flew hard and fast)

Paul Strydom 2 Eyas Black Spa females - both amassing good scores. Inadvertently released at the end of season

Leo Oodendaal intermewed Ovambo

Ronnie Watt Lanner Tiercel (rehab bird)

#### Captive Breeding 2004 Season

Tim Wagner: Produced 12 Peregrines out of 13 eggs  
Black Spa's 7 eggs  
3 lost in incubator  
3 lost in breeding pen  
1 egg fertile raised 1 chick

Mike Thompson: African Peregrines  
3 chicks from 1 pair  
2 chicks from another pair (died at 21 days of causes unknown)  
Black Spas  
Produced 3 eggs - Hatched 1 male  
African Gos none bred

Pieter Rabie lost his female out of the pen.

Mark Labuscagne no breeding.

Transvaal Falconry has had a chequered existence over the years. Between 1969 and 1970 the Transvaal Falconry Association was formed and in the mid seventies falconry was banned.

The Club was resurrected in 1985 as the TFC, based on the premise that falconers would police themselves and ensure that all members abide by the policy guidelines that allowed the legal practice of falconry and hunting. This has worked really well and a healthy working relationship with Conservation has been fostered, which opened numerous doors for falconers. Notably the establishment of captive breeding programmes and the granting of permits to import exotic falcons and legal access to all forms of quarry across a twelve month hunting season window.

What is important to note however, is that the TFC will be 20 years young in 2005. We intend building on its solid foundations and guarding the privileges and rights we enjoy so that future generations can also enjoy the unbridled pleasures and traditions of falconry pursuits in years to come.

*Greg Jean Jacques*

## **LIMPOPO FALCONRY CLUB**

The Limpopo Falconers Club at present holds 28 birds, made-up of 12 Captive bred, 12 wild taken and 4 rehab. birds. The following is a list of species held:

- 7 Peregrine Falcons
- 3 Lanner Falcons
- 2 Black Sparrowhawks
- 12 African Goshawks
- 3 Gabar Goshawk and 1 rehab. Black-shouldered Kite.

As can be seen from the above list of birds, the bulk of our membership is C and D grade falconers (3 and 8 respectively). Most of these hawks and members have made their first kills and are looking forward to cooler weather to really get some action.

Our senior membership (7 A grade and 2 B grade falconers) have all had a good past season and are taking up birds after the moult, as well as training a few youngsters. The three Peregrines, from Tim Wagner's breeding project, flown by Richard Harper Ronald, Paul and Pierre Venter are all showing great potential and we look forward to seen great things from them. At present the heat has been their greatest stumbling block roll on Winter.

Our relationship with the Limpopo Conservation Authorities over all is very good and we are grateful for all their assistance. The department recently provided the LFC with 3 GPS's to assist them with surveying and monitoring of raptors in the province.

There are two issues that we are taking up with the Limpopo Conservation Department. One is the handling of a Taita Falcon chick that came into rehab. and the subsequent passing on of the bird into non specialist hands. The other issue is the "Cost Recovery" on falconry permits. It was pointed out to the authorities that we are a recreational club and the present fees are prohibitive. Hopefully these issues will be sorted out in due course.

The 2004 SAFA Field Meet was attended and enjoyed by 5 LFC members. It would be nice if this year more LFC members find their way through the "Boerewors Curtain".

*Trevor Oettel*

## MPUMALANGA FALCONRY CLUB

Mpumalanga Falconry Club is a small but active club. Our members are not only involved in Falconry but also participate in trapping and ringing, rehabilitation, the Birding Big Day, education on birds of prey and raptor conservation.

In 2004 we saw Dullstroom Bird of Prey Centre move to a new location. It is now situated just before Dullstroom as one enters from the Belfast side. The Centre got a nice new clinic and is also officially registered as a rehabilitation centre. We wish Mark Holder / Mark Bett team the best of luck and hope that business will be good.

We also witnessed the confiscation of raptors from James Buttell in Dullstroom. Mpumalanga Parks Board visited his site and found numerous raptors in a horrific condition. These were confiscated and given to Ben Hoffman in Kwazulu Natal. Sadly Mr Buttell released some of the birds in his care. One can only speculate their fate. I am pleased to report that at the time he was not a member of our club.

Steven van Rensburg flew a Gyr/ Saker, a Lanner and an Afgos. He reported that he had various successes and great fun. Since Ray Jansen has moved to Gauteng to reap the greener grass, Steven will be heading the Penryn Falconry School. He is flying an eyass Black Spa female now.

Mark Botha from Doornkop Fish and Wildlife Reserve progressed to a B Grade. He again flew an Afgos with great successes. He also rehabilitated a female Rock Kestrel. Mark later found her nest with chicks and I must admit it looks very cool to see a wild falcon with anklets feeding chicks. At present, he is flying a Black Spa female.

Willem Breytenbach flew his peregrine and lanner. At present he is flying a Black Spa female and a minute Little Spa musket (84 grams).

We have got 6 (six) C grade falconers all with Afgosses. Some more successful than others but they are all having fun.

George McAllister (A veteran falconer) from Zimbabwe and Botswana joined our club and is presently flying a young tiercel peregrine.

*Steven van Rensburg*

## NATAL FALCONRY CLUB

The NFC has continued to weed out so called "ghost members" resulting in membership numbers decreasing to a total of 25. This is a most favourable situation in that the NFC is steadily becoming a smaller club with more active members enjoying excellent falconry in Kwa-Zulu Natal.

For 2005, the NFC committee is as follows: John Bamber (Chairman), Angus Burns (Secretary), Ben Hoffman (Co-Secretary), Greg McBey (Grading Co-ordinator), Bruce Padbury, Kyle Solms and Charles Woods.

We continue to enjoy a healthy relationship with our provincial Conservation Authority (eKZN-Wildlife). Special thanks must go to Bill Howells, Sharon Hughes and Wendy Cowley for their continued support and assistance.

At present, our members are flying a range of different hawks:

Greg McBey - Cast of Lanners, the usual Peregrines, a Red Breasted Sparrowhawk & a Black Sparrowhawk (to mention a few).

Ben Hoffman - Captive bred Lanneret.

John Bamber Captive bred North American Peregrine, a captive bred Red Naped Shaheen & he has been handed an injured tiercel Peregrine that he hopes to rehabilitate and fly.  
Angus Burns Captive bred Lanneret & a captive bred Gabar Goshawk.  
Bruce Padbury Black Sparrowhawk.  
Alan Howells Black Sparrowhawk & Passage Lanneret.  
Kyle Solms Cast of Lanners.  
Charles Woods African Goshawk.  
Kevin Hutton Red Breasted Sparrowhawk & captive bred Gabar Goshawk.

Other members are flying African Goshawks successfully and a few will be progressing on to Black Spars / Lanners later in the year.

The NFC looks forward to a great year of falconry and hawking for 2005!

Please note our new contact details:

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*Angus Burns*

## WESTERN CAPE

As with most clubs, our CFC membership fluctuates a bit, and we currently have 64 members, with 27 actively hunting with an interesting variety of hawks. Up to the time of the moult, these were; 1 rock kestrel, 12 afgos, 2 jackal buzzards, 4 Harris' hawks, 4 black spas, 2 lanners, 2 sakers, 1 gyr/saker, 3 peregrines and 2 gry/peregrines. Since then Odette Curtis and Ian Little acquired black spas and are successfully hunting them, Edmund Oettle now has a tiercel gyr/peregrine and Adrian Lombard is training a peregrine. Lanners seem to be have been getting the better of Kevan Hearschaw this season, so we're holding thumbs that his latest will be the one that doesn't take off for Siberia, and doesn't land on a power line.

Taking an overview of the different birds hunted, one is reminded that falconry can be enjoyed on many different levels, and none should be dismissed as less worthy. Seing Michelle Walter's delightful little rock kestrel flying to the lure at our annual CFC Meet was just great, and I have no doubt that the her first kill of a large redwing starling probably brought the same adrenalin rush as the taking of considerably larger quarry with a big macho raptor. However, that said, we are all dying to see Edmund Oettle fly his tiercel gyr/peregrine, who sounds like an absolutely awesome handful. He apparently attains a pitch which takes him way beyond the reach of the human eye, necessitating telemetry tracking just to locate him in the air.

There are several captive breeding projects in the province. This year saw limited success with 2 African Goshawks bred by Adrian Lombard.

At our annual small hawk meet which is held in June each year to give the apprentices and other falconers who fly small hawks an opportunity to strut their stuff, the floating award went to Jannis Kruger's Charlie, a prolific hunter.

This meet is coupled with our AGM where we were privileged to be able to welcome Ron Hartley to the club. The news of his tragic death in April this year was devastating. We also welcomed Rudi Giesswein, from Zimbabwe, who was made an honorary member of the club.

Our annual CFC Meet held at the Sandveld Bungalows near Redelinghuis in August was enjoyable, although less well attended than the previous year. Game birds were plentiful, but the thick bush and generally difficult terrain on the mountain slopes made finding your hawk, your dog and your hunting companions a real challenge. The alternative of stomping around for miles through the very sandy ploughed lower fields obviated any need for gym membership. These conditions notwithstanding, a respectable head of quarry was taken.

Wentzel Coetzer's beloved afgos "Cutie" spent a night out, but the two were happily reunited the next day when Solly went into thick brush in the lower fields to look for Hank's black spa who had stooped in after a francolin - and found the truant Cutie instead! The meet was held in typical Cape weather - an extremely hot first day, followed by the full spectrum of temperatures to icy cold, with rain belting down by the Saturday. Driving back to the cottages on the extremely wet and slithery dirt roads on the last night after a pretty good dinner at a restaurant in Aurora, was an instantly sobering experience.

Our hawks are once again having success in the field, getting fitter by the day, and the delicious anticipation of a whole new season lies ahead. Good hunting!

*Suzette du Toit*



*Wimawey Resort, Tweespruit - 2004 Field Meet*

## 2004 Sky Trial Results Tweespruit Eastern Free State

TIME SLOT		JUDGES SCORES			AVE. SCORE
08H00	FRANCIOS BREEDT 4 <sup>TH</sup> YEAR GYR/PRAIRIE HYBRID TIERCEL (ZIN ZAN)	63	68	63	64.6
08H15	ALAN HARVEY 1 <sup>ST</sup> YEAR CAPTIVE BRED AFRICAN PEREGRINE FALCON (KAYLA)	98	90	76	88.0
08H30	GREG MCBEY GYR/SAKER HYBRID TIERCEL (MOJO)	66	56	46	56.0
10H45	GREG MCBEY 5 <sup>TH</sup> YEAR PASSAGE AFRICAN PEREGRINE FALCON (SKY QUAKE)	63	73	74	70.0
11H15	ALAN HOWELL PASSAGE LANNERET (HORACE)	40	36	45	40.3
11H30	GREG MCBEY 7 YEAR OLD HAGGARD LANNER FALCON (WINDSHADOW)	83	82	84	83.0
11H45	ANTON MULLER PASSAGE LANNER FALCON (DELTA)	86	86	87	86.3
12H00	RICHARD HARPER LANNERET (GIZMO)	64	53	57	58.0
15H30	GARY WARREN 4 <sup>TH</sup> YEAR CAPTIVE BRED AFRICAN PEREGRINE TIERCEL (WIZARD)	36	30	44	36.6
15H45	ANTON MULLER 2 <sup>ND</sup> YEAR PASSAGE AFRICAN PEREGRINE FALCON (AVALON)	93	96	87	92.0
16H00	ALAN HARVEY 3½ YEAR OLD CAPTIVE BRED RED NAPED SHAHEEN (SHAKIRA)	DISQUALIFIED			
16H15	JOHN BAMBER 2 <sup>ND</sup> YEAR BROOKEI PEREBRINE TIERCEL (SLIM SHADY)	DISQUALIFIED			
16H30	TIM WAGNER 2 <sup>ND</sup> YEAR PASSAGE AFRICAN PEREGRINE FALCON (SHADOW OF DEATH)	82	68	52	67.3
16H45	ANGELO GORBLER 1 <sup>ST</sup> YEAR CAPTIVE BRED AFRICAN PEREGRINE FALCON (LUCY)	89	88	77	84.6
17H00	TIM WAGNER 1 <sup>ST</sup> YEAR GYR/PEREGRINE HYBRID TIERCEL (WINSTON)	93	91	86	90.0
17H15	ALAN HARVEY PASSAGE PEREGRINE FALCON (SHADOW)	92	84	92	89.0
17H30	MARK LABUSCHAGNE 4 <sup>TH</sup> YEAR GYR/PRARIE HYBRID TIERCEL (SHAKE)				

1ST: ANTON MULLER - Once Intermewed Passage African Peregrine Falcon (Avalon)  
 2ND: TIM WAGNER - Once Intermewed Passage African Peregrine Falcon (Shadow Of Death)  
 3RD: ALAN HARVEY - Passage African Peregrine Falcon (Shadow)

## IAF Annual General Meeting Report - 2004

The 2004 Annual General Meeting of IAF was held from 14-19 September in Abu Dhabi, hosted by the Emirates Falconers' Club. Delegates attended from 29 of the 40 IAF member nations and observers from a further 7 non-IAF countries. VIP observers were welcomed from Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iran, Iraq and from the UAE itself.

The assembly was addressed by His Excellency Mohammed al Bowardi whose address is hereby appended in full:

"Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, to the 2004 Annual General Meeting of the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey. Falconry is close to our hearts - handed down by our forefathers over thousands of years. It is a constant reminder of the balance of nature itself, and also of our relationship with it. Falconry in the Emirates remains, as it always has been, a sport of great nobility - not because of its practitioners, but because of the way it reflects the most noble aspects of the interaction between man and nature.

This sport of ours, however, cannot survive unless falconers - and others - recognise the need for effective conservation, both of falcons and their prey. As far back as 1976, long before 'conservation' became a fashionable word, our most prominent UAE falconer, President His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, sponsored the holding in Abu Dhabi of the first International Conference on Falconry and Conservation. This meeting is a direct descendant of that event.

Among the most popular birds for falconry are Peregrines and Sakers. In much of Europe and Central Asia, the numbers of both are now declining rapidly, often for reasons not associated with falconry. In response, we in the UAE have launched a large-scale programme of captive breeding, hoping thereby to reduce the number of wild birds trapped for falconry. At the same time, since 1995, the Zayed Falcon Release Programme, created by the President, has seen around 1000 Sakers and Peregrines - all wild caught - released back into the wild at the end of the hunting season, to replenish native stocks.

We have taken other initiatives too. The UAE works closely with national and international organisations abroad on research into raptor populations and their conservation. In 2003, we organised a special Symposium on Sakers, to discuss protection and conservation. This resulted in the Abu Dhabi Declaration on Saker Falcon Conservation, which lays down a framework for multi-lateral cooperation throughout the range states on this important issue. We have too, recognised the need for falconers to work with conservation organisations. We have developed, in association with CITES, a special Falcon Registration scheme, to regulate the orderly movement of falcons used for hunting. This, in turn will help to curb unsustainable traffic in illegally-caught wild birds.

Falconry' of course, cannot continue unless there are healthy populations of the prey species, both in their breeding territories and their wintering grounds. For Arab falconers, that means the Houbara, in particular the Asian Houbara.

In the UAE, our wintering Houbara are migrants. Their numbers are in severe and rapid decline, as they are throughout the range, countries, including their breeding grounds. Our initiative in 1989 to establish the National Avian Research Centre, NARC, was intended to achieve two objectives:

1. To undertake research to improve our knowledge of the species
2. To commence a captive breeding programme that can be used, eventually, to supplement wild stocks through carefully planned releases.

NARC is now carrying out research, in association with local organisations, in many of the range states, in particular in Central Asia and adjacent countries, while our captive breeding programme continues to become more successful, year by year. Through such methods, we in the UAE hope to contribute, both to the continued sustainability of falconry, and to the continued viability in the wild of both the falcons and their prey.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we have the obligation to devote our efforts to conservation, as well and to falconry. Thereby, not only will falconry continue, but it can do so in accordance with the need for sustainable and balanced use of the world's wildlife resources. We need conservation, but conservationists need us too. Let us not forget that some of the world's major wildlife conservation organisations owed their birth to the efforts of people who were also keen hunters - who understood the balance of nature and the importance of sustainability. Falconers and conservationists need to work hand in hand. That, after all, is one of the main messages of this Association.

I bid you welcome."

The 2004 IAF President's Award was presented to His Excellency Mohammed Al Bowardi and to Mr. Majid Al Mansouri of the Emirates Falconers' Club for their work in conservation and the promotion of sustainable falconry.

Candidatures: there were two candidates for membership Federazione Italiana Falconieri ('Federation of Italian Falconers') and International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation, CIC (see below). Both were accepted. An application from Serbia was too late for this AGM, but the meeting was very happy to receive an observer from the Serbian Falconers.

Financial: treasurer Antonio Carapuço presented the Financial Report for 2004 and Budget for 2005 indicating that we would reach the end of 2004 with a positive balance. He stated that while the main financial source is still membership fees, during 2004, additional funds were obtained from sales at the Falconry Fair (England), which included magazines, buttons, car stickers, donated prints, etc. The Irish Hawking Club should be acknowledged for this. Several efforts have been also made to advertise the IAF and attract possible sponsors. At the moment we are offering to include the sponsor's logo and a short message on our website, Newsletters, banners etc. Any help from members in identifying potential sponsors would be very much appreciated.

Donations and increasing support from several organizations, affiliated clubs and contributions from individuals has resulted in a growing number of delegates participating in the AGM and helping to continue our promotion of the Art of Falconry throughout the World:

President's report and strategy for 2005. President Patrick Morel began his address by stating that 2004 was a busy year for the IAF even with only 9 months since the last AGM. He thanked VP Bond for his wise advice and drafts of 'diplomatic' letters and VP Rodriguez Villa who inherited the area where most of the problems affecting falconry arise. He described how we had to deal with problems in Slovenia and reminded us that although falconry was not included in the new hunting law at the very last moment, it is nevertheless still not illegal in Slovenia, but continues to be permitted under a licensing system as it was before. Help was requested from following European countries: Finland, Denmark, Slovenia, UK and Germany and in Asia from Japan and Kazakhstan.

Patrick discussed relations with the CIC (see below) and spoke on IAF attendance at the CITES Consultative meeting on Trade in falcons hosted in May in Abu Dhabi, describing how IAF had worked on rings - DNA tests - micro chips - mark & bank scheme - CITES survey.

He reported on three major threats we had to deal with: "Anti-falconry" campaign, web-sites and discussions groups and saker falcon issues.

\* We had to face problems of organised anti-falconry campaigns. An "anti-falconry" campaign already started in Slovenia under the banner of the "Eurogroup Against Birdcrime". Christian de Coune and President Morel met the president of this group trying to convince him not to attack falconry. This campaign was extended to Belgium (during the discussion on the new hunting season in Flanders) and in Germany. Our 'enemies' are very well organised and are seeking help and letters of support in most of Europe.

\* Websites and discussions groups: the web is a fantastic tool for communication, but a very dangerous one. The development of the IAF is due to the benefit of ease in communication between the members but at the same time the web could prove to be a real threat for falconry. He reminded delegates of the danger of participating in these

discussion groups. Most of the arguments against falconry were picked up in them. For instance, all the arguments against hybrids were "fished" from the 'anti-hybrid' website opened by falconers themselves in Germany. The falconers themselves are not innocent because they themselves open their own discussion groups, for instance the 'Falconry Forum'. Considerable discussion pro and contra falconry was seen on the Yahoo raptor discussion forum (including Bulgaria, saker and so on...) and on a Russian discussion group. IAF reaction was to prepare answers to be published only after approval of the PRO.

After considerable discussion, the decision was made to close the NAMEAN and we made some changes in the MERWG. The main reason was that we could not afford anti-falconry statements by some of the participants (a handful of the 50 members of this discussion group).

President Morel went on to mention the infamous 'Save the falcon' website which he described as injurious to respectable scientists and falconers. The main targets of this site were Arab falconers. Legal action will be taken against the authors of this website: two American citizens. It is interesting to note that these 'conservationists' are less interested in the rescue of the saker populations than in controlling of the Mongolian saker market.

\* Saker falcons: President Morel stated that most of the Arab guests do not know the IAF very well and described the organisation as a non-profit NGO which has as prime objective the preservation of falconry. IAF is very concerned with the future of Arab falconry. The main issues of concern being the decrease of saker and houbara populations. According to most experts, Asian saker populations have faced a decline of about 60% of their population.

The saker falcon meets all the conditions for an uplisting in the CITES. What does this mean - the uplisting of a species? It simply means that no more birds could be harvest from the wild. Quotas are only allowed for birds listed in appendix two. Uplisting the saker to Appendix One means the end of traditional Arab falconry. I remind our members that the roots of Arab falconry are the flights of wild trapped saker on its traditional quarry - the houbara bustard. Except an 'electric shock' this uplisting can't be avoided. The IAF offers help to solve this complex issue, but without the support of the concerned parties, we cannot do it.

Arab falconers have now to face a challenge that western falconers had to face 40 years ago with the decline of the Peregrine falcon. The decline of the Peregrine was due to other factors - mainly the use of DDT and pesticides in agriculture. It took time for the Peregrine to recover, but the present Peregrine populations are at their best they have ever been. In some countries like in the USA, falconers are again allowed to harvest peregrines from the wild. Immediate action for the saker can bring immediate results, the saker is a prolific bird. He stated that IAF would like to propose a resolution at the end of this meeting.

Houbara: the general decrease of quarry populations is another matter for concern. In the USA, North American grouse populations are decreasing due to habitat loss. In Western Europe (except some privileged places as Spain or the UK) most small game populations are decreasing. In Asia and Africa, numbers of houbara are falling and face an incredible decline- it is likely that the population will be extinct in the next decade! Falconers have to play an active role in habitat restoration and more than ever adopt principles of sustainable harvesting.

Report of the Vice President for the Americas: in his report Frank Bond stated that IAF is operated by dedicated volunteers who devote a great deal of time to promote the practice of falconry world-wide. He praised the leadership of President Patrick Morel and the work of Vice President Jose Manuel Rodriguez-Villa. He reported on the CITES Consultative Meeting on Trade in Falcons for Falconry (reported last News Bulletin in the 2004 Newsletter). He explained the Advisory Committee wishes to have the IAF hybrid policy reviewed and he will chair a working group to report to the Council in 2005.

In his report on falconry in South and Central America, VP Bond welcomed delegates from Mexico, El Salvador and Brazil went on to describe moves to form falconry clubs in Peru (approx 144 falconers with a long history) and Chile (around 17 known falconers). Argentina's 130 falconers are already federated into the Asociación Bonarense and the Club de Cetrería Argentina.

In his report on falconry in North America, VP Bond welcomed the North American Falconers Association representing Canada, the U.S. and Mexico. Unfortunately, the NAFA-Canada delegate, Bruce Hanbidge, could not attend the meeting, but Dr. Alberto Palleroni later expanded on NAFA's issues in the U.S. as did Juan Carlos Rojo for NAFA-Mexico.

Falconry is practiced in 49 of the 50 states under the federal regulatory framework. Only Hawaii, where there are no falconers, does not permit falconry. U.S. federal regulations will be revised later this year, the first revision in 15 years. The harvest of eyass *Anatum peregrines* began again this year in four states. When the Fish & Wildlife Service first permitted an eyass harvest, several environmental groups sued the Fish and Wildlife Service to stop the harvest. NAFA defeated the opponents. Some of the same groups sued again this year and NAFA is seeking to intervene to defeat the opponents. Because the population of peregrines is growing to huge numbers, the environmental group is expected to lose again. VP Bond expressed NAFA's gratitude for IAF's support of the US peregrine harvest with President Morel's letter to the Fish and Wildlife Service and Dr. Robert Kenward's expert testimony statement justifying a harvest. These letters become part of the permanent administrative record.

He concluded by thanking the Emirates Falconers' Club for hosting this superb meeting and stated their generosity made it possible for many delegates to attend.

Report of Vice President for Europe, Asia, Africa And Oceania: in his first report since his election nine months ago in Jerez de la Frontera (Spain) VP José Manuel Rodríguez-Villa outlined the position in this vast geographical region:

"Europe has the most complicated map due to legislation developed over decades. There is also a politically well-organized environmental concern including powerful anti groups and animal welfare lobbies. In European Union Countries the status of falconry varies a lot from one country to another, as does the political environment towards falconry. It is "stable" in most of the countries but with growing pressure of restriction and over-regulation. Germany faces the threat of total ban due to pressure by influential anti groups. It is a complex and a very serious problem and IAF is ready to help as much as we can. It goes without saying that a ban of falconry in Germany would be a huge loss itself but also would have very negative repercussions throughout the world." He proposed that, due to the increasing relevance of European Union legislation in our sport and its application to a wider group of countries a European Union Working Group should be created.

He went on to describe how the "accession states", now full EU members, have been undergoing a harmonization process in their hunting and environmental legislations with varying success for our sport and reported on links with falconers in Eastern European countries not in the EU - Bulgaria, Croatia and Georgia (all IAF members with delegations at the meeting) and contact with a club in Romania and a recently formed association in Russia. VP Rodríguez Villa stated the need to study carefully any future partnerships in that huge Eurasian country that has so many implications regarding raptor conservation concerns. He hopes that IAF will be able to find the right partners in Russia to build a creditable image for falconry in that big country.

"In Central Asia we also have several members, some of them attending this Meeting. In that area of the world falconry goes back to its origin and we are pleased that generation after generation it is kept in people's heritage. Our aim is to help to keep that happening in the future. As the international falconry representative body, IAF must consider these countries also as range countries of saker falcon, the most significant conservation concern today among raptor species used in falconry." He also stressed the need to forge contacts with falconers in China in order to enrich IAF's wealth and representation. In Japan we have an IAF long time member, the Japan Falconiformes Center and since 2002, the Japanese Falconers' Association. A legislative threat against falconry is currently being addressed by the falconers of that country."

Middle East: "I am particularly proud that it was last year, in my country Spain, that the IAF started to solve a traditional deficiency which was not to count with a member representing traditional Gulf falconry. Last year at the IAF AGM we welcomed the Emirates Falconers Club and less than one year after we are very pleased and thankful to our Emirates friends for hosting our Annual General Meeting. Falconry in Gulf countries is a national heritage and emblem and a distinguishing mark, more than in any other people in the world.

We are happy and feel honoured to see here prominent observers from other Gulf countries. We look forward to cooperating with them in finding the ways to properly approach the very serious problems that Arab falconry is facing and that, at the same time, are affecting our sport worldwide due to increasing globalisation. In our limited capacity, the IAF is more than willing to support the right initiatives of Arab falconers to tackle the serious concerns that threaten the sustainability of their traditional hawking. As falconers we are proud and pleased to commend the long lasting conservation work carried out in this region by falconers.

To this respect and again within IAF's limited role, we find it is a key element for future survival of our sport that falconers themselves get organized. A falconry organization, a falconry club is a vehicle for two directions flow of information, an element of control. It is also a source of education, proposals and initiatives by falconers. Therefore we encourage Gulf falconers to follow Emirates Falconers Club and find the way to get organized with full respect to its traditions in order to efficiently face the new challenges."

He continued by welcoming delegates from Africa: from Magreb Countries (Morocco - our Tunisian member was absent) and from Southern countries (South Africa) representing the two forms of falconry in the continent. Unfortunately, the Zimbabwe delegate, Ron Hartley, was also unable to attend. From Oceania the Wingspan Birds of Prey Trust of New Zealand apologized for not being able to attend and looks forward to future cooperation as we also do.

Finally VP Rodriguez Villa reported on his own attendance at International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation, CIC, General Assembly last April in Bucharest. As it was planned and reported in Jerez IAF had drafted a Memorandum of Understanding between IAF and CIC that was finally signed by Presidents of both organizations. The purpose is to join forces and coordinate efforts to more efficiently represent the interests of falconers as hunters. Under the agreement IAF will apply for CIC Membership and vice versa. VP Rodriguez Villa was appointed as Vice-president of that the CIC Falconry Commission. This action sets a secure alliance with the rest of the hunters mutual benefits arise from it.

VP Rodriguez Villa concluded by stating there is a lot of work to do to successfully face the serious threats and challenges ahead. He said that those aiming to put falconry into difficulties are many and well organized, but so are we and our passion for falconry is wholehearted.

The meeting continued with reports from Tony Crosswell (Executive Sec.) on Membership Liaison, Gary Timbrell, PR Officer on work done since June 04 and from the Chairmen of the Working Groups on Eastern Middle Eastern Relations, Hybrids, CIC, IUCN, Baltic and Scandinavian States, CITES, the Bern Convention, FACE, and the Science Committee. Dr Matthew Gage then spoke on the Mark & Bank Scheme to identify individual birds for falconry against their legal origin and ownership, while removing incentives to trade in illegally-taken wild raptors. IAF envisages a system that uses an electronic marker (E-tag) that can be checked against a central (global) database, and which has the added protection of reference against that individual's DNA in a 'Bio-Bank'. This was followed by a presentation on the Europet passport and microchipping in rings by Dr Michel Schoffeniels.

A Resolution to Encourage Conservation of the Saker Falcon was discussed, agreed and approved by a vote of the delegates. The text of that resolution is:

Recognizing that populations of Saker Falcons have declined in some countries;

Noting that, when pesticides caused declines in populations of Peregrines and other raptors, falconers pioneered breeding and release techniques, worked successfully to restore raptor populations and helped to organize the regulation of falconry;

Welcoming the vision of the World Conservation Union (IUCN 2.29 and 2.74) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD Article 10 and Decision VII/12) that encourages conservation through sustainable use of wild living resources and to benefit local people;

Appreciating cooperation from IUCN, CIC, WWF, Birdlife International, TRAFFIC and the secretariat of CITES; and

Applauding the strong engagement of United Arab Emirates with IAF, the falcon research conducted by ERWDA and the innovation of marking regulations by UAE;

At its 35th Annual General Meeting on 15th September 2004 in Abu Dhabi, the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey (IAF) requests falconers in the Middle East and other range states to work urgently with IAF to help conserve and restore Saker Falcon populations, by:

- (i) adopting marking and registration systems that identify and encourage legal supplies of Sakers;
- (ii) encouraging scientific studies of all Saker populations to assess their status;
- (iii) working to restore populations of Sakers that have declined (e.g. by breeding for release);
- (iv) motivating authorities and local people in range states to maintain wild Saker populations, especially the breeding birds;
- (v) encouraging scientifically managed release, after use, of wild-caught Sakers that are suitable to enter breeding populations.

The IAF accepts its responsibility, within its available resources, to assist falconers and organisations with initiatives that fulfil the intent of this resolution.

The reports of the delegates took up the rest of the meeting.

The next AGM, 2005, will be in Opočno, Czech and in 2006 in Colorado, USA  
Gary Timbrell, Public Relations Officer (PRO)

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*SAFA's presentation to the IAF General Meeting,  
Abu-Dhabi, September 2004*

## The SAFA takes its place as a Member of the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey

It was my great pleasure and privilege to represent SAFA at the IAF Annual General Meeting (Council of Delegates) in Abu Dhabi on 15th September 2004. In so doing, SAFA became a full member of this organisation and thus achieved international recognition and support.

### THE MEETING

The IAF meeting in Abu Dhabi was hosted by the Emirates Falconry Club. It was timed to coincide with the International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition that was held in Abu Dhabi and this added interest to altogether fascinating visit. The conference itself occupied a whole day of intense work. Reports were presented by the President (Patrick Morel) and the two Vice Presidents, (Jose Manuel Rodriguez-Villa and Frank Bond). There were then report backs from the 12 Working Groups of the IAF. Finally, there were the reports of all the National Delegates of the countries represented. I shall limit myself to a few of the issues and comments that were particularly relevant as a full report of the conference appears elsewhere in this publication.

Patrick Morel noted that there is a well-organized anti-falconry campaign that has been mounted in Europe. This has extended from Slovenia to Belgium and then, Germany. He cautioned against participation in falconry "discussion groups" on the web as issues can be taken out of context and used against falconry. He noted that a web site, Save the Falcon, was particularly "Anti-Falconry" targeting, mainly, Arabian falconry, Houbara Hunting and the use of Saker Falcons.

There is particular concern about the Saker falcon and the future of Arabian falconry as Asian Saker populations have declined by about 60%. This is not comparable to the decline in the peregrine population. He noted the need to adhere to the principles of sustainable harvesting and hunting.

Frank Bond noted that the harvesting of wild peregrines in the USA would happen. It has been the result of 40 years of effort, to complete the circle. The role of falconers in the USA's greatest conservation success story is acknowledged.

Jose Manuel Rodriguez-Villa noted concern in Germany that could face a total falconry ban as a result of the efforts of an influential green group. He also noted that the Saker falcon is the most significant problem facing the falconry world today. The threat to Arab falconry must be seen as a threat to world falconry as a result of globalisation.

Much useful information was derived from the reports of the working groups. One of particular relevance was the "Mark and Bank" proposal presented by Dr Matt. Gage. This concept envisages the banking of DNA material, coupled with the permanent marking of Falconry Birds using Implanted Micro-chips. The aim of this is to overcome objections to the Falcon Passport allowing free movement of falconry birds in Europe. The system is excessively technical and sophisticated for us, but provides examples of ways that birds can be identified to avoid illegal activity. (Self-policing and tamper-proof rings currently provide our best option and the authorities agree). This proposal has been presented to CITES, primarily to dispel the myths that falconers are all illegal bird traders and demonstrate the lengths that we can go to, if necessary.

Robert Kenwood presented for the International Union for the Conservation of Nature- Working Group. The IAF is a member of this prestigious worldwide conservation organization. The IUCN represents a union of some 1035 member organizations, employs over 1000 staff members and has a network of 10,000 voluntary experts. It has 6 commissions and 125 working groups. The IUCN drafted much of "The Convention on Biological Diversity". Article 11 of this convention encourages incentives for conservation by the sustainable use of components of biological diversity. This is an alternative to old-fashioned protection-based conservation that was simple and effective, but polarized attitudes and landscapes. Sustainable-use activities (falconry) become an accepted part of conservation. However, the onus remains on the users to show that their use is sustainable and benefits conservation of species and habitats. Responsibilities for groups, like falconers must not become too onerous. Rights should come in exchange for appropriate responsibilities, not for a socially or economically unsustainable burden.

The IAF was established in 1968 to defend falconry. Much recognition has been achieved by falconers through their efforts to restore the peregrine falcon. We cannot rely on this indefinitely. Negative impacts are resulting from increased Animal Rights activities, concern over genetic manipulation of birds, concern regarding possible invasive alien species and extinctions caused by man. Positive impacts result from the increasing appreciation of conservation through sustainable use. It was resolved to seek acceptance of Falconry as a "World Heritage Activity" by UNESCO.

A working group was established to draft a policy statement regarding the IAF approach to Conservation of The Saker Falcon. I was invited to be part of this working group. The statement is reported in the IAF Report elsewhere in this publication. Along with the other national delegates, I presented a brief talk on the status of falconry in South Africa. I also presented the talk for Zimbabwe on behalf of Ron Hartley, who was unable to attend. We received assurance of assistance should this become necessary, in support of flying Hybrid and Exotic Raptors.

## THE DELEGATES

The most pleasurable aspect of the whole trip was the interesting and diverse group of people whom I met. These ranged from the falconry icons such as Patrick Morel, Nick Fox and Christian de Coune, to delegates from such varied countries as San Salvador, Bulgaria and Japan. Without exception, these people were courteous and friendly. They were interested to hear about South African falconry, as well as our activities and problems. They were also keen to share information about falconry in their own countries. The experience was overwhelming for a somewhat insular Southern African and space does not permit much detail, although some anecdotes do stand out.

I was fascinated to meet falconers from Turkmenistan and we struck up a friendship although conversation was through the Bulgarian Delegate who could converse with them in Russian then translate to me in English. They threatened to invite me to come and hunt desert hares with them, travelling between wells on camel. I am not holding my breath for the written invite, but if it ever comes, watch this space!

The Japanese delegates were formal and polite, swapping cards at every opportunity. I learnt how much falconry is part of the fabric of their society. The Japanese use a lure made from a stick ending in a paper tassel. The commander of their forces traditionally carried such a stick to assist him give directions. Not being a member of the "inner circle" had its benefits as one could spend ones time meeting the broad range of delegates who generally were the cheerful rogues that falconers tend to be. Abu Dhabi is obviously a Muslim country; hence we were given a string of lavish banquets (and yes, I did eat camel) at which one had a choice of sparkling or still water from wine glasses. I recall one German delegate remonstrating jovially with a waiter, "In your country water is the custom, in my country Beer!" He was returning, with some relief, to the October fest.

The Brazilian delegate, who has a contribution in this publication, has a passion for owls and an amazing ability to meet women, even in Abu Dhabi. There are falconers in a number of South and Central American countries but, from what I could gather, falconry tends to be less organized and is not regulated in several of them. There are more falconers in Mexico than there are in South Africa.

## THE HUNTING AND EQUESTRIAN EXHIBITION

This exhibition was the reason for the particular timing of the conference. It was a truly spectacular event, with hundreds of stalls promoting a diverse range of goods and activities from ornate Arabic saddlery to falcons to hunting safaris and all the equipment that you may possibly need for one. There were a number of South African safari companies represented and I came across our own Tim McPherson, promoting the Wing Shooting operation that he works for. In the background was a whiterobed contingent from the Emirates Army on-parade, who chanted, drummed and swayed, apparently without rest, for the entire duration of the exhibition. Various falconry organizations had stalls, promoting their activities. The Japanese Falconry Club had some extraordinarily beautiful decorative hoods on display. There were falconry equipment stalls with a vast array of equipment. There were a number of stalls selling falcons, mainly from Europe. The birds on sale appeared to be, almost entirely, large female hybrids of various sorts. Trade in these appeared to be fairly slow until the last day, when, realizing that unsold birds had to be shipped home, the bargaining heated up. Even kids appeared to be in on the action, haggling busily over birds and communing with advisors by cell-phone. One of the birds got free and flew about the rafters until its leash snagged. There it stayed, for two days, until Tim McPherson managed to climb up and rescue it.

Several other activities were planned for delegates and these provided a fascinating insight into Arab life and falconry. Highlights included:

### **VISIT TO ABU DHABI FALCON HOSPITAL**

The visit to the hospital was accompanied by a seminar on First Aid for Falcons by the facilities' senior veterinarian, Dr Margit Muller. The Hospital provides "state of the art" medical care, exclusively for falcons. It is the largest falcon hospital in the UAE and is governed by the state Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency. It is a truly awesome establishment, well staffed and wonderfully equipped. We were shown a number of procedures including endoscopy, treatment of bumble-foot, imping of feathers under general anaesthetic and the treatment of fractured wing and leg bones.

### **SALUKI BREEDING CENTRE**

In the midst of their newfound wealth and sophistication, there is a strong move by the Arabs to preserve their cultural heritage and traditional pursuits. These include falconry, the Arabian horses, and their dogs, the Salukis. A centre has been established to promote this dog and its breeding. These dogs live in rather splendid conditions and great effort goes into providing the correct nutrition and care. They are housed in a building, divided into stalls, each occupied by two or three dogs. I was interested to note that one stall provided accommodation for their handler. We were shown the training ground for the dogs. Salukis are trained to course and turn hares, but must not bite or kill the hare. It was explained that the dog is mans servant and, according to the Koran, one cannot share ones food with a servant. On the other hand, the falcon is seen as an equal partner, and thus one can share ones food with a falcon. My Turkmanian friends disagreed. They explained that they train their dogs to assist the falcon by biting the hare's legs if they are kicking. Once the legs stop kicking, the dog must leave the kill and sit on top of a sand dune, thus showing the falconer where the kill has taken place.

### **THE HOUBARA BUSTARD BREEDING CENTRE**

This visit proved to be one of our most fascinating activities. The Houbara is the preferred quarry of the Arab falconer and has undergone a dramatic population decline in recent years. The effort to breed these birds in captivity is not a simple undertaking. The Houbara, being a desert species with sparsely distributed populations, is incredibly vulnerable to disease in artificially concentrated situations, so surgical hygiene has to be maintained in the breeding facility. The Houbara does not imprint and will not readily breed naturally in artificial conditions. The breeding birds were housed in 3 large sheds, each manned by two keepers who must spend 8 hours a day, habituating the birds. Each bird's daily food and water intake is weighed and charted. Birds are fed by hand if they start looking restive or unsettled. Semen is collected by persuading males to copulate with stuffed (as in taxidermy!) females. The females are then artificially inseminated and their eggs are pulled and put in incubators. I had always imagined that the plan was to release these birds to augment the wild population. In fact, these birds are being bred to undercut the illegal trade in Houbara used for "baggies". This trade is a huge problem and stopping it would have a significant impact on restoring Houbara numbers in the wild.

### **VISIT TO H.H. SHEIKH MAHAMMED BIN ZAYED AL NAHYAN'S DESERT CAMP**

One afternoon was spent visiting the Sheikh's desert "camp" where his collection of over 200 falcons is housed. This was our one exposure to the desert and arab falconry. We were greeted with the traditional dates and coffee then presented with iced drinks and fruit. We then went to view his falcons, predominantly female sakers and hybrids, kept in 3 huge circular flight pens with air-conditioned "side boxes" for the birds when they became too hot. We were then taken to a banquet at the Hotel Intercontinental where all delegates were presented, individually, to H.E. Sheikh Sultan, who is Head of Protocol in the U.A.E. government and son-in-law to the king. Patrick Morel had the unenviable task of presenting each of us by name. Sheikh Sultan is responsible for the Profalcon breeding centre in Abu Dhabi, which we, unfortunately, could not see. He was interested in our breeding efforts in South Africa and questioned me about our local peregrine sub-species.

## CONCLUSION

Membership of the IAF is something that South African Falconers should value. The leadership of this organization expend considerable effort in defending and promoting our sport, and they deserve our support. We derive credit for belonging to an international organization and, particularly, one that is a member of the IUCN. Through this organization we can make international friends and contacts that can promote SAFA's efforts as well as enhancing our individual falconry practice. We cannot hope to remain unaffected by events and threats that impact on falconry elsewhere in the world

*Adrian Lombard*

## THE BIRD OF PREY WORKING GROUP REPORT - 2005

The Bird of Prey Working Group of The Endangered Wildlife Trust has grown from the amalgamation of The Raptor Conservation Group (RCG) and The Vulture Group. Previously, the leadership of these organizations was critical of falconry. Since our invitation to the R.C.G. Workshop at the Gariep dam in 2004, a welcome change in their attitude and approach has become apparent. Once again, we were invited to attend the AGM and Conference of this organization in the Magaliesberg in March 2005, and I was privileged to be present as the SAFA representative.

The Conference was well attended, with a broad range of interested persons including Raptor Biologists, Representatives of the Provincial Conservation Authorities, Conservationists, officials of the BOPWG and the EWT, Rehabilitators and the representatives of organizations, such as ourselves, that are involved with raptors. I had the company of two other fellow-falconers, who were representing their own organizations, Trevor Oettel and Ben Hoffman. It was evident that there is now little or no animosity towards falconry in this organization. We have been integrated into it to help by playing our role in Raptor Conservation. Representation of SAFA at these conferences is of real benefit to our sport as it allows us the opportunity to present our case and to interact with those who may otherwise be critical of us. The chance to meet with influential conservators allows us to open doors and create friends.

The conference involved 3 days of intensive work.

The first part of the conference involved the presentations by various role players, such as SAFA, discussing activities and conservation related efforts over the past year. A wide range of reports were presented, which included some very impressive research work as well as reports from groups such as The Poisons Working Group, The ESKOM/EWT cooperative project and TRAFFIC.

We received a presentation on the Indian Vulture population crash and details of work that is being done within this country to assist in resolving the problem and to avert a similar catastrophe here. The problem revolves around the use of an anti-inflammatory drug, diclofenac, (Well known by its originator trade name of Voltaren.). This drug is readily available and very cheap in India. Virtually no sick animal dies without administration of this drug. The problem is that it is lethal to vultures, destroying their kidneys at low concentrations. Efforts are being made to identify a safe anti-inflammatory agent and to promote its use as an alternative. This is an important lesson for us all, in that conservation crises may well arise when least expected.

The second part of the conference involved Workshops, which dealt with the conservation threats to raptors that had been identified at the Gariep Conference. The workshops aimed at developing strategies to deal with these threats. Falconry is recognized as being of little significance as a threat to raptors. There were a number of areas within the strategies that were developed, where falconers could assist. Falconers have a role to play in increasing public awareness of threats to raptors and in education. They can assist in the collection of data regarding raptor populations and breeding success, as well as information regarding the persecution or poisoning of raptors. They can also become involved in specific research projects, such as the Taita Population Survey and a proposed study of normal haematological and biochemical values in raptors. A number of researchers asked for our assistance and cooperation with their projects.

The third part of the conference examined the restructuring of the Bird of Prey Working Group and planning its future activities.

A National Steering Committee was elected. This committee will advise on the activities and policies of the BOPWG. Ben Hoffman was elected to this committee, so we shall have some voice and insight into the group at this level.

It was decided to create Regional Committees that would be representative of the interested parties in each region. It was determined that a falconry representative would be invited to join each of these committees. The regions will be:

- 1) Gauteng and North-West Province
- 2) Limpopo and Mpumalanga Provinces
- 3) KwaZulu-Natal Province
- 4) Northern Cape and Free State Provinces
- 5) Eastern Cape Province
- 6) Western Cape Province

Our participation in these regional committees will give us access to all the people of influence in raptor conservation within our provinces. This is a wonderful opportunity to influence those who perceive us in a negative light and to network with significant individuals within our region. It is important that we grasp this chance and become actively involved within the BOPWG.

The new relationship that has been forged with the Bird of Prey Working Group, and indeed with the Endangered Wildlife Trust presents a true Win/Win situation. We have a real contribution to make to the conservation of birds of prey that are our passion, whilst having the recognition that our activities constitute an acceptable and sustainable utilization of a natural resource by the major conservation group concerned with this resource. Indeed this is a situation that will be the envy of many falconer groups around the world.

*Adrian Lombard*



*"Where is that bird?" - SAFA Field Meet 2004*

## Hunting with Black Sparrowhawks “memoirs from the field”

by Angus Burns

When I was 15 (over 15 years ago!), I remember going on a hunt with John Bamber to an area known as “Doornkop.” At the time I was flying a female Black Sparrowhawk named “Lady” which had been passed on to me by Rob Booth. Lady was an awesome francolin & guinea fowl killer and I will never forget the heart-stopping chase we had with her that one afternoon....

John and I were walking through the savannah grassland when Lady began to crouch on the glove and assume that sharp-eyed familiar sparrowhawk expression which says, “I have just spotted something to kill!” About 100 meters on, a flock of guinea fowls had run into the open next a maize field and Lady had decided that she wanted one. I released her and almost immediately, the flock took to the air and tried to make a getaway. Lady closed the gap very quickly forcing one of the fowls to drop to the ground in an attempt to hide. I ran as fast as I could to where Lady had landed and found her sitting on the edge of a shallow contour which had become overgrown with grass. She was looking with intense concentration into the grass but I could not see what she was looking at. The next moment she jumped into the grassy contour and began running after something. All I could hear was “ching ching ching” and then a pause and then another series of bell sounds as she pursued her prey on foot (or is it claw??).

I ran after her and tried to lift her out of the donga but she took offence to my meddling and flew off landing about 30 meters away from me. In desperation, I continued to walk through the donga in an attempt to flush whatever she had been chasing and sure enough out flew a guinea fowl. The guinea unwittingly flew towards where Lady had landed and the next thing she was off the ground in hot pursuit of her prey. They both flew over a maize field and the last thing I saw was Lady binding to her victim in mid air and dropping earthwards. I ran like the wind through the maize field and after 60 meters hit a barbed wire fence at full speed falling head first into a small farm dam! I recovered my composure and looked around for lady. It was then that I noticed a small head of what looked like a hawk sticking out of the dam water about 20 meters from me. I waded in and lifted Lady from the water with her guinea fowl prey firmly in her claws! Lady was too wet to continue hunting so I fed her some of the guinea and John made a Potjie from the rest which was thoroughly enjoyed later that evening.

Another occasion brings to memory the time I went hunting on Rob Booths farm (also with John Bamber). Lady was super keen that day and was chasing almost anything that flew past her. Some freshly planted cane fields were home to numerous LBJ's (Little Brown Jobs) and I will never forget the aerial ballet that ensued when Lady took off to try and catch a miniscule bird. I remember us all laughing as the relatively massive black hawk tried to outwit a very agile and tiny LBJ sadly failing in her attempt but treating us to a wonderful flight in the process. Later on, our pointers found some quail and Lady dispatched two fairly rapidly.

Another hawk, another time “Leuca” was a semi haggard Black Sparrowhawk that I was privileged to have flown for a period of time. She was caught attempting to kill chickens on Rob's Farm and handed on to me that same night. Remarkably, she tamed down very quickly and just over two weeks later, I went out with John to hunt her for the first time. I can't remember the exact location but it was on a private farm in the KZN Midlands that we found a covey of redwing francolin. The covey flushed right under us and I remember seeing Leuca shoot off the first like a bolt of lightning. She chased the francolin into cover and we second phased the bird ending in a kill. I will never forget the thrill of my first wild trained Spar catching its first francolin!

After that success, I thought I was going to have it easy and went to stay on Rob's farm thinking I would catch every game bird in existence. A late winter's afternoon found me standing over Rob's pointers about to flush what I thought would be my hawk's second kill. The shelley's francolin did flush and my hawk did chase but suddenly (and unexpectedly) the sun dropped from the sky and we were in absolute darkness! We used telemetry to locate my hawk which had obviously broken off from the chase and gone to roost. Rob drew me detailed plans of how to get to where she was and loaned me a bicycle. I was up at 4:30 the next morning and after a few wrong turns and a 10km early morning ride, I arrived safely at where my hawk was sleeping. I was there for less than 2 minutes when I heard a bakkie engine and along came Rob to see that I had found my way!

I was not that skilled with telemetry at the time and Rob just sat back and let me go about my business obviously very amused by what he saw. I didn't realise that my hawk was very nearby and I ended up walking through head-high black jacks covered in dew at 5:45am during winter in completely the wrong direction! Let me paint the picture: I was wearing a thick woollen jersey with a woollen scarf and denims with thick woolly socks sticking out at the bottom of my pants.

After I realised I was getting further away from my bird, I turned around and headed back through the wet, extremely cold black jack jungle. Besides getting soaked, I appeared out of the jungle covered from head to toe in black jacks and looking, I would imagine, like a South African version of "the Yeti!" Rob joined me and together we located my hawk sound asleep at the top of a thin blue-gum tree. I shook the tree and she woke up with a rather surprised look on her face. It took me another ½ hour to get her down and I often wonder if it wasn't my "Yeti costume" that caused the delay.....then again, it was most probably because I was flying her too high.

Moving on some years to the present and Charles Woods, accompanied by his son "Spider," joined me on a hunt with my musket Black Sparrowhawk "Moses." As we were walking, the pointer I was using found something in the grass and I got ready to flush whatever it was. Out popped a rufous naped lark. Moses put on a wonderful display of aerial prowess and chased the hapless victim through three phases eventually ending in a spectacular kill. It was incredible to watch how Moses successfully flushed the lark himself by hunting it on foot when it put in and then pursuing the bird in flight to its eventual death.

One of the quarry items that Moses became very adept at catching was the orange throated longclaw. I found that he hunted them very successfully in the late afternoon and did so with much determination usually resulting in thrilling flights. One such afternoon springs to mind when Steve Eatwell (a new NFC member) came with me to Cato Ridge hoping to see Moses in action. I had found very little that day in the way of available quarry but persevered until last light. Fortunately, I scared a longclaw out of the grass and Moses went for it. Hawk and prey flew down a slope and into the middle of a golf course. What happened after that was textbook Sparrowhawk hunting with Moses relentlessly pursuing his meal around a line of pine trees. The flying display went backwards and forwards, up the trees and down again with Moses continually pushing the longclaw until it grew tired and gave up. He was well rewarded that night with a full crop!

Late afternoon again and John Bamber and myself went in search of African Quail. John was flying "Jake" the brother of Moses. Whilst walking through the grass, I bumped a quail and Moses was off. He chased it hard and went in low. The next thing, the quail flew over a large anthill and Moses went around and not over it. This must have given the quail a momentary sense of (false) security because it slowed down and was subsequently caught on the other side of the anthill! John's hawk also caught a quail in fine style chasing it for a good 400 meters before catching it. I went off by myself looking for more quail and successfully flushed one resulting in a long chase down a valley and a second African Quail in the bag. That was a great afternoon!

Another day and John went hunting francolin whilst I focused on smaller quarry. I witnessed an awesome flight with Jake chasing a Shelly's francolin down a valley for a long distance. It was wonderful to watch John's musket perform as it reeled in the francolin and killed it over a kilometre away....great flying!!

My final story involved Bill Howells, his daughter, John Bamber, Quiton Bell and Quinton's friend (I can't remember his name). Bill had asked if his daughter could come along to see Moses fly. I agreed to this and was also joined by John, Quinton and friend. I was walking along telling Bill about how Moses would second-guess rufous naped larks and catch them first phase over 90% of the time. John's amazing pointer "Jasmine" must have overheard me because the next moment, she was on point and out popped a lark! Moses was off like a bullet and chased the lark for about 150 meters towards a thick acacia clump.

Moses then slowed down somewhat and tailed the lark closely before both of them disappeared over the clump of trees. I told Bill that Moses used this tactic to figure out what the lark was going to do before closing in for the kill. I remember Quinton saying there was no way that Moses would have caught the lark and I jokingly replied, "oh ye of little faith." After tracking him, we found Moses on his freshly caught bird, tucking in as I approached him. What a great way to end the day especially when your hawk does exactly what you said it would!

# Taita Breeding Project

## AIMS AND POLICY.

Product of meeting on Taita Falcons future conservation actions, held at Moholoholo Mountain View Lodge, 27 January 2005.

## BACKGROUND

The Taita is a near-threatened and globally vulnerable species. It occurs sporadically from northern Kenya to the north-eastern escarpment (Limpopo and Mpumalanga) of South Africa. Small, inconspicuous and somewhat secretive it is easily overlooked. Nevertheless, intensive surveys in optimum habitats confirm its rarity (Moller 1989, Hartley et al. 1993, Hartley 1995, Hartley 2000, Thomsett 1998, Weaver et al. 2002).

Poor breeding success and desertion or loss of breeding sites to the larger Peregrine has characterised patterns in Zimbabwe in recent years. For instance the Batoka Gorge was considered a key zone for this species, but there have been few sightings of the Taita in recent years, and no record of breeding since 1995 (RH unpubl. data). The same pattern has been noted in two other study areas in the Zimbabwe Valley. In a review of the Taita in Kenya Thomsett (1998) was unable to report on a successful breeding attempt. Moller (1989) described 19 pairs of Peregrines, five pairs of Lanners and four pairs of Taitas along 72 km of cliffs at Mt. Elgon. No Taitas were found in a recent survey of this zone (K. Otte in litt.).

The Peregrine Fund (TPF) collected four Taita chicks from two sites in Zambia in 1983 in order to start a captive breeding project. The Zimbabwe Falconers' Club (ZFC) assisted TPF in this effort from 1984, which resulted in the collection of another three Taita Falcons. A pair first bred in 1989. The ZFC started a captive breeding programme in 1991 (Hartley 2002) and the first success was in 1997. The aims of the project are:

- To establish a pool of these rare and vulnerable falcons in captivity
- To learn effective techniques to manage and breed them
- To release captive bred falcons to the wild at appropriate venues

The goal of the project is to establish five successful pairs of breeding Taitas in Zimbabwe. This will probably necessitate a pool of ten pairs of Taita Falcons as experience with these and with African Peregrines *F. peregrinus minor* has shown that roughly 50-60% of suitable pairs produce young. The ZFC has a very successful breeding programme with Peregrines, with 28 pairs having produced nearly 300 young since 1981, over 80 of these having been released to the wild. To date two pairs of Taita Falcons have produced 12 juveniles, and up to eight pairs have been constituted. In time it is hoped that Taita Falcons will be released to the wild as well. At the same time falconers in Zimbabwe can obtain experience with these hawks, as successful breeding and release has best been obtained with hawks managed using falconry techniques.

Of great concern to the Zimbabwe programme has been the premature end to egg production by two established females (taken as chicks from two sites at Batoka Gorge), who ceased laying at age 9 years and 10 years. These two females were paired at two years and first laid at five years. In 2004 we withdrew these two females (now 13 years old) and redeployed the two established males with younger females. Mindful of other potential problems we have sent blood samples (in 2004) of each of the key bloodlines to the USA for DNA analysis, in case there is evidence of inbreeding. Captive bred females at TPF and Zimbabwe have tended to lay earlier (viz. three years old) than those taken from the wild (four to five years old), which may suggest that there is a need for out-crossing. Such problems may have contributed to poor breeding success in the wild.

In 1987 a pair of Taitas was located in the Blyde River Canyon area of South Africa (D. Rushworth pers. comm.). This pair was found breeding in 1990 (Jenkins et al. 1991). Another pair was found breeding near the Strydom Tunnel in 1998, while at least two other pairs are known in this area (D. Rushworth pers. comm.). This area must be considered an important zone for this species.

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*31st January 2005*



*Steven Squires following a successful flight  
(See opposite)*

## Small game hunting with Tiercel Casts

by Steven Squires

Falconry can be a time consuming occupation. For those of us, the unfortunate majority who have to work for a living, there is always a trade off between the time spent flying hawks, and earning money to put fuel in the hawking vehicle in order to go hawking.

Some who live in large cities take this to the extreme, and travel for hours each day just to get to suitable hawking areas. Others just fly hawks at weekends and accept that they will never achieve excellence.

I am fortunate to live in the country, but in an area where game birds are thin on the ground. My occupation entails long working hours and my young wife is demanding. In short I do not have time to commute. I have therefore adapted my hawking style to take advantage of the super-abundant small bird population, in particular doves. This style of hawking is also imminently suitable to the opportunistic hunting of game birds such as quail and francolin, "rat hunting" at shrikes and sometimes produces stunning flights at coursers and plovers.

I started my small bird hawking with a Lanner tiercel Alex, who I flew for eight seasons. He was without a doubt the most effective killer of birds I have ever flown, recording kills from Swainsons francolin of 800g to white rumped swifts of about 20g.

When I moved from Mafikeng to the Western Free State my access to game birds was limited, and Alex became a dove specialist. In the first few seasons he was tolerant of the wild lanners that used to come and join the fun, but as he got older he would chase away any other bird of prey in the area before coming over to hunt. I therefore never really got to see what multiple lanners could achieve. Alex was killed by a local pigeon owner and for a time my dove hawking stopped.

After several excursions into houbara hawking with big falcons I returned to the doves with a tiercel peregrine, Freddy. He was a flashy performer, but was terrified of other birds of prey. On his second week flying free he was pulled from the air by three young lanners one of which had started to pluck him by the time I came to the rescue. While he became a very stylish hunter there was no way he would stick around if other hawks were about and flying him in a cast was out of the question.

I flew Freddy for four seasons and by the end of this time I had figured out the mechanics the dove falcon interaction. It goes something like this. The dove is evicted from its tree by the falconer, the falcon starts stooping and the dog starts running. The dove is now forced to choose between trying to get to the next cover before the falcon, dumping and risking the dog or making a U turn back to the tree. If the eviction has been forceful enough it will choose the first option, giving the falcon a chance. If it is caught short it will perform a variety of spectacular maneuvers, the most common of which is a vertical stall. It either stands on its tail and the falcon passes underneath, or it rolls vertically down and the falcon scrapes over the top. Less often the escape takes place in the horizontal plane with an abrupt swerve to the left or right.

Of these maneuvers the stall downwards usually results in a dump and jump, while the other three result in the falcon shooting past on the outrun and the dove making it to the next cover.

Once the falcon learns to read the falconer's movements and starts stooping before the dove is flushed, success increases dramatically. This is because the dove is intercepted before it has gained enough air speed to perform any evasive tactic. From this it can be deduced that the quarry is most vulnerable when it has low air speed. This occurs on leaving cover from a stationary position as well as immediately after a stall maneuver or a dump and jump.

When two falcons are flown, the second falcon that is following the first fairly closely almost always strikes the momentarily helpless dove as it rights itself after the stall, often with great speed and spectacular results. This is the objective when flying a cast at doves.

As usual with falconry plans they seldom work in practice as conceived in theory. I am at present training my third successive cast of tiercels and the purpose of this article is to elucidate the pitfalls and illuminate the successes that this style of falconry presents.

The first problem to surmount is that of compatibility. If the two birds constantly crab, or one always chases the other out of the district then either take a course of Prozac (Dr. Lombard will prescribe but not dispense) or fly the birds individually. Nothing is as annoying as having a good slip wasted by delinquent behaviour from one or other or both of the birds. This should not however be confused with the natural playfulness of young birds who will chase each other about for a while before coming over to hunt. This exuberance dissipates with time and by the end of the season the birds are normally all business from the moment they leave the fist.

I have flown hacked and unhacked birds, and the hacked birds have so far proven more inclined to hunt together. My worst combination has been one hacked and one pen raised bird of differing ages. These seldom hunted well together and often screwed up a perfectly good flight by having a go at each other when at full pitch, causing my blood pressure to mount higher than the hawks. Individually they were both effective game hawks but together they would not concentrate.

My latest combination is two brothers from the same clutch, taken from the pen a day apart and trained together at all times. They seem to be the most compatible so far in that they will both fly around without crabbing at all. Apart from one moment of chaos when they collided at top speed six inches behind a pigeon's tail there has been no aggression between the two and they seem to have learned to each grab a different part of the pigeon and not each other. What they will do with a much smaller dove remains to be seen.

I suspect that the best option will prove to be two birds from the same clutch that are hacked together and then trained together. Circumstances have unfortunately conspired to prevent me trying this so there is still much to learn about it. I am sure more experienced falconers such as Rudi Guieswein and Ron Hartley would be able to expand on this topic.

The second pitfall of small game hawking is the size of the quarry. By definition it is small and the tiercels can carry it easily. It is vital that anti-carrying procedures are followed from day one. I do this in several ways. The first and I believe most important is by not over training. I do all my initial training in a large room under artificial light. That way there are no strings to get in the way and few distractions. The bird is only required to catch the lure once in order to secure its entire meal. As fast as is practical I do away with garnish on the lure and feed the entire meal as tit-bits while the bird is on the floor holding the lure. If it flies away with the lure feeding is immediately halted. Very soon the bird will pull the lure towards you to obtain the reward and in the field will often do the same with its quarry.

A further refinement of this is to feed the last part of a meal on the back of the falconry truck. This serves as a secure, elevated and private feeding place and soon becomes the preferred place to feed. I have often had tiercels snatch quarry over long grass or crops, and carry it to the back of the truck. There they slowly pluck the prey while waiting to be picked up and given proper food.

An effective cure for the carrier is a frozen bird. This is tossed up to the waiting falcon who then packs it off. I have found that about half an hour of trying to pluck a frozen dove usually persuades the culprit that life is better on the fist and they usually seem pleased to see it.

Another important point is one kill per day. If the hawks kill then feed them. DO NOT behave like a pirate. You are their friend and this must be reinforced at all times. They must welcome you at their kill not resent you.

My learned associate Mr. Harvey may point out that carrying is easily prevented with a cast; just let the one bird pull the other plus quarry out of the air. This approach works well in practice as long as there are always two birds in the air. The moment that one bird is missing or if you wish to fly them singly then your tracking session starts.

The third pitfall is the handling of two birds simultaneously. It requires a little forward planning. If something can go wrong it will, and the consequence is usually both birds in a huff or panic. I start a routine during early training,

always feeding one bird first and leaving the tamer or slower bird to eat on the ground while I jess the first one up. I use two gloves, and secure the first bird to the glove. Once it is secure I then place it on an anthill or rock with the remains of its meal and pick the other one up. I then feed up the second one and hood it before fetching the first and hooding it. This method seems to generate no resentment against being picked up as long as the tit-biting routine is followed. Once again a large frozen pigeon will anchor a hawk for hours with no need for restraint, and I usually carry one to the field as an emergency hand brake.

Once the initial training period is over I keep the birds in a free mews, and find that this prevents them from exciting each other towards hunting time. When they are tethered one will begin bating as hunting time approaches and this sets the other one off. This rapidly becomes reinforced behaviour and results in unnecessary stress on the birds. When they are in the mews it is easy to call one to the fist, jess it up and then do the second one. Birds that don't want to come to the fist should not be flown.

For training I have found the balloon and kite very effective for getting birds fit and for building the confidence of young birds. I lure fly both birds together to sharpen their cooperation and have tried a double lure with some success. This provides a target for the bird that does not catch the lure and prevents fighting over the lure on the ground.

Once both birds are flying free I introduce pigeons to the mix and then the fun really starts. A good pigeon can easily outdistance most single tiercels but they have to be very good to evade two. When there is a pacey Brittany doing the ground work the pigeon has only one option and that is to fly upwards. Pigeons that learn this are worth their weight in gold, as they teach the tiercels that height advantage is essential. Pigeons that bail out are usually retrieved unharmed by the dog and given a free ride home where they are introduced to the falcon nutrition program at the first opportunity.

Once they are catching every second pigeon or so then it is time to go dove hawking. The first thing the falcons must learn about doves is not to follow them into cover. They invariably end up getting stuck in a hak en steek tree, but most learn not to do it again. When they are stuck they are very vulnerable to predation and I have had both Black Spars and Chanting Goshawks coming to help me retrieve my birds from the tops of thorn trees.

I have found that the tiercels attract the unwanted attention of Black Spars and have numerous unnerving encounters with these avian snakes. During one encounter one bird was waiting on, the other was in parts unknown and a female Black Spar came out of nowhere and locked onto the tiercel above me like a heat seeking missile. The tiercel fled in terror with Mrs. Spar gaining by the second. She made a grab for him and missed, but before she could try again was in turn raked by the second tiercel that had come out of a long shallow stoop. This turned the tables and she fled, closely pursued by both tiercels that were by now kek keking with anger. While I may not be so lucky next time if the second tiercel had not pitched up I would almost definitely have lost the first.

I have found it helpful to have a bagged dove in my pocket for the first few hunts. If the reflush is slow you can reinforce the waiting on and not crashing into tree lessons by providing an easy kill. I enter my birds separately so that my attention is focused and as soon as they both understand the plan I fly them together again.

I have done most of my hunting at doves, but whenever possible I have tried crowned plovers and coursers. The only tiercel that has had any success at these was Freddy, who caught coursers easily, but would never tackle plovers.

My first cast of tiercels gave some interesting performances at plovers, but usually ended up tail chasing separate birds always without success. The second cast almost caught on to the technique but would invariably end up crabbing when the pressure was on, thus permitting the plover to escape. I live in hope with the third cast as I think a flight at plovers could prove spectacular sport.

Other potential quarry are starlings, both from cover and on passage and cattle egrets. The last mentioned deserve some attention as they are common, and will ring up very tightly when pursued by a small hawk. This is the opposite of their behavior when confronted by a large falcon. Out of hood flights with one or more tiercels at egrets seems to be a miniature version of heron hawking and could surely be practiced in most open areas.

Rock pigeons out of trees make for spectacular displays as an extract of one of my earlier hunting reports reads: "One of the most spectacular achievements was the capture of a strong adult rock pigeon over an open land. Several of these birds had made the mistake of taking cover in a tree overlooking a fallow land. Once the lads were in position I flushed and both came hurtling out of the sky like thunderbolts. As usual Lance was leading the charge and narrowly missed the bird as it stalled. Kelgor hit it good and solid on his pass but not enough to put it down and Lance then rolled over and put in a short but lethal second stoop which bounced the pigeon off the ground and into the jaws of the omnipresent Brittany, Ginger. The pigeon was delivered to hand and both tiercels were called down and well rewarded."

I have yet to try my birds at Namaqua sand grouse but the mental image of two teardrop shaped specks falling out of the purple blue Karroo sky at a departing sand grouse is the sort of thing dreams are made of. All people yearn for perfection somewhere in their lives. I would be happy to find it there.

I hope this article gives some idea of the opportunities that small game falconry can provide and will encourage you to try it. If you do you will never be bored.



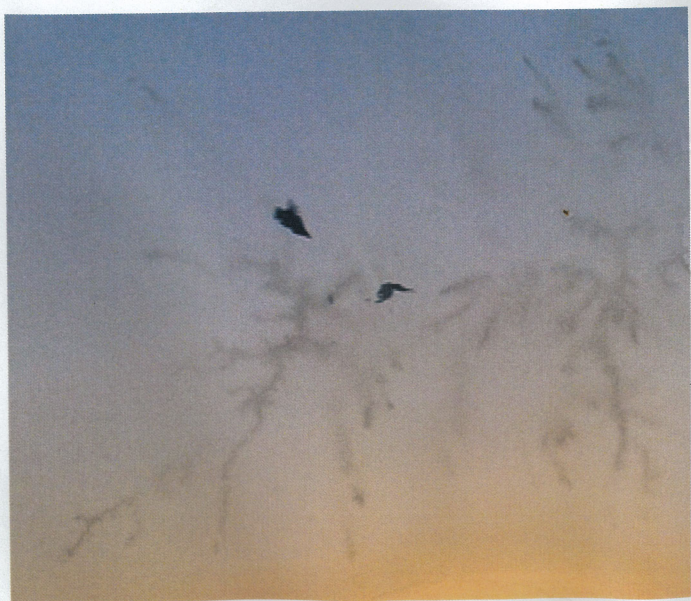
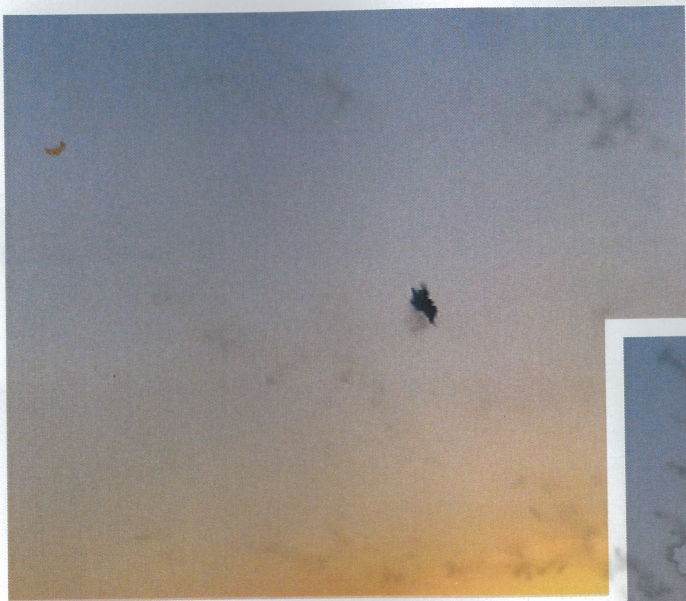
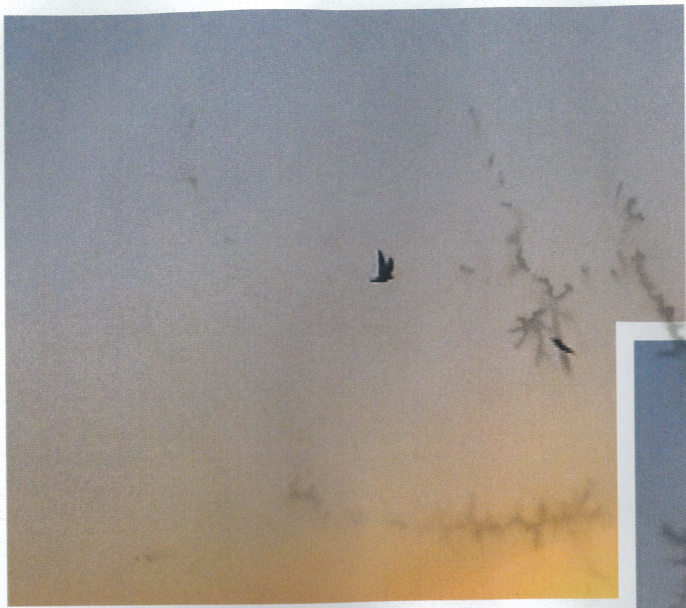
*Heime von Michaëlis - The artist with his peregrine (See page 31)*



*Hermuth Von Michaëlis with Florian - Painting by H. von Michaëlis (See page 31)*



*Adult Male Taita Falcon - Photo: Ron Hartley (See page 24)*



*Death in the Afternoon:  
African Peregrine Falcon takes a pigeon - the strike*



*Young Peregrine in flight (Alan Harvey)*



*Red Naped Shaheen on Shelduck*



*Stephen Squires - the hunting team (see page 27)*



*Angus Burns' Black Spar (See page 22)*



The IAF Conference, Abu-Dhabi 2004  
(See Pages 11 - 17)  
General meeting with delegation



Patrick Morsel (IAF President) in white hat, with  
Japanese, Turmanian and Moroccan delegates



Abu-Dhabi Falcon Hospital demonstrating  
rehydration technique on an anaesthetised falcon



Houbara Breeding Facility, Abu-Dhabi

# My father, the falconer

by *Helmuth von Michaelis*

Having been asked to write about my father, the falconer, I have come to the conclusion that his involvement with birds of prey went beyond falconry. There are chapters in his books recounting hilarious experiences hunting shrike with sparrow hawk, which accounts for the name of our family home, "Hawking", in Somerset West, but these adventures took place before my first recollections.

I can remember Papi flying Florian the lanner falcon both to the lure and to the glove but at the end of the session Florian, instead of being tethered, was usually allowed to fly free again. On one such occasion Florian was being flown at Paardevlei (the large AECI factory dam some five miles away, near the sea). When, after a long session, she'd had enough of it, she flew off home to "Hawking", where she was sitting waiting for us at her favourite roosting perch on the roof when we returned by car.

All the birds except the owls wore jesses and there were block and bow perches in the garden, but often birds were only tethered to keep them out of mischief.

So what was he? Primarily my father was a naturalist and an artist who observed nature with a lively creative intellectual curiosity and a great affinity particularly for birds and birds of prey.

He expressed his passion very beautifully in his exquisite paintings and drawings and his books "Birds of the Gauntlet", "Wings of the Wild" and "Birds of Prey a Kinship", by his lectures and his talks on the radio. In his time, birds of prey were considered vermin farmers used to shoot them and hang their limp bodies on their fences. He went to great lengths to change this perception and to promote the idea that they had a rightful place and that it was in man's interest to protect them.

He was a wonderful artist and at the same time had a true knowledge of his subject which is a very rare combination. His bird portraiture has been acknowledged to be of the finest in the world. His paintings and books made him famous, and "Hawking" was seldom without a visitor, local or from all over the world, who had come to share my parents' interest in birds, particularly birds of prey.

Although in "Birds of the Gauntlet" he describes how he obtained young sparrow hawks and kites from their nests, this was also before my time. He did it to obtain subjects to paint and write about. I never knew him to trap a wild bird or rob a nest. Our life was in fact a procession of wild birds and animals brought or sent to us from all over the country to care for. And there were more than enough! Black and martial eagles, African hawk eagles, falcons, kestrels, owls, buzzards, yellow-billed kites, black shouldered kites, hawks, harriers these were some of the birds of prey I can remember.

Where possible these creatures were kept untethered and uncaged. Often birds were given the running option of leaving or staying and they elected to stay some like Freia the hand-reared lanner falcon left, while Florian her sister stayed flying freely both indoors and outside around our home.

There were also the other birds swans, heron, cormorants, thrushes, hoopoes, doves, swallows and swifts, fiscal shrikes, sparrows, starlings, a red winged spreu, guinea fowl, Hansi the crow, Alan the cockatiel, wild duck and geese and also all the animals which inhabited our little home at "Hawking" with its large garden.

I can't imagine how we kept them safe from one another, but mostly we did. On occasion they had to be trained not to hunt each other. Sometimes they trained each other like Hansi the crow who had Dona, the large and very bold peregrine, taped. Dona had been sent to us from America because she was said to be 'untrainable and untamable' and by day was tethered in the garden. Hansi, who couldn't fly, swaggered around freely, owning the place. If Hansi was within reach, Dona could of course and indeed would be expected to dispatch him instantly. Over a period of time Hansi however decreased the distance between them. He warily and gradually sidled up to Dona on

her block perch, pulling at her leash, then pecking at her jesses. In fact after that they then regularly kept each other company. Eventually it was quite common to find Dona on the ground and Hansi on the Perch!

Tonka the yellow billed kite was also with us for years flying completely free and wild, sometimes disappearing for long periods only to reappear and become part of the family again. As young children we practised the techniques of 'falconry' with Tonka and Florian, particularly Tonka, who patiently put up with our first efforts. Excepting for those episodes, they were completely wild and free, yet also completely tame. As close as possible we got to know each other on our own terms.

Mostly we lived in harmony very rudimentarily by human terms of course and of course there was a lot of cleaning up to do. On one occasion Tonka watched from a perch high up in the lounge-dining room as our large family was seated around the dining table eyeing the meatloaf which had been served up for supper. From where I sat I had seen it coming, but had mischievously refrained from preventing the comic commotion which ensued when Tonka suddenly attacked the plump meatloaf mantling over it and thrashing all over the set table with her large wings!

We lived intimately with birds of prey. They were our everyday experience which stood us in good stead when we were falconers. As children we tamed and also trained everything that came falcons, buzzards, kites, kestrels, even butcher birds (fiscal shrikes). I even remember hooding a dove as a childish experiment! It went much further than falconry, but made much of the understanding and many of the skills needed for falconry second nature to us really.

Our home was very much like that of Konrad Lorenz that is described in his book "King Solomon's Ring" (understandably one of our favourite books). To us children this was of course a 'normal' life. Our peers who did not have wild birds and animals inhabiting their homes weren't normal, it seemed to us.

In his younger days my father was indeed a falconer he had even been trained as such in East Prussia. He found the excitement of the chase tremendous when hunting with birds, both hawks and falcons. But long after he had ceased to fly birds at quarry he took equal delight in flying them for the sole purpose of watching them in the air and enjoying their company. These are his own words and this was my observation too. It is not that he was squeamish "He who looks at the whole picture and does not flinch from the less endearing aspects of nature and has learned not to superimpose an alien morality upon a natural life, will be richly rewarded with a deeper understanding of the great spirit which has made the world go round since the first day" this is a recurring theme of his writing.

"That birds of prey must kill to live is not their vice but their virtue" this truth was the averred leitmotif of his book "Wings of the Wild". The chapters about his exciting adventures hunting shrikes with sparrow hawks are completely without apology. Indeed he berates those who ignorantly and sentimentally condemn birds of prey as cruel. About cruelty, however, he draws a strong distinction between 'moral' man and falcons.

When I was 12 years old I caught a wild lanner falcon and with his help trained Lana to wait on, so high you could not see her. I was quite in love with Lana who slept in my bedroom. To me, there was nothing so beautiful as my lovely falcon. We went hunting over the veld at Land-en-Zeezicht, which is now a suburb of Somerset West, and up the slopes of the Helderberg where the nature reserve is now. She did bag a young guinea fowl, as well as other quarry which I was able to release. Perhaps it was his influence. Now that I look back I remember he never overtly encouraged or discouraged my hunting with Lana.

However my main aim was not to bag a quantity of prey, but more the enjoyment and indeed the celebration of the beauty of the falcon flying, waiting on, stooping as well as the excitement of the hunt. I never saw the need of a dog to put up quarry or beaters or suchlike, which to me was unnecessary and an unnatural loading of the odds in favour of the falcon. Besides, it was between the falcon and me. We were the team we worked together and shared this special kinship of shared adventures.

# Conservation of the Taita Falcon in Zimbabwe

by Ron Hartley

## BACKGROUND

The Taita is a near-threatened species and it occurs sporadically from northern Kenya to the north-eastern escarpment (Limpopo and Mpumalanga) of South Africa (Hartley 1995). Small, inconspicuous and somewhat secretive it is easily overlooked. Nevertheless, intensive surveys in optimum habitats confirm its relative rarity. In Zimbabwe I have estimated the population at about 50-60 pairs. Throughout its range it is possible that its numbers have declined by as much as 30% owing to habitat destruction. However, most of its range consists of woodland in rugged hills, mountains and gorge systems, still relatively intact in some areas (Hartley et al. 1993). While a key habitat was the Batoka Gorge system below the Victoria Falls, from 1995-99 there were few sightings of Taita Falcons and no records of breeding. The same pattern has continued since then (Hartley unpubl. data). Up to six pairs were known and as many as ten pairs were estimated to have occupied the first 60 km, where Zimbabwe's next hydro-electric dam is planned (Hartley 1993).

Interest in the species increased in the early eighties when plans for the dam were seriously considered. In August 1983, Professor Tom Cade and Mr. Jim Weaver of The Peregrine Fund Inc. (TPF) visited me at Falcon College, en route to Zambia, where they collected four Taita nestlings (three females and one male) under a permit for a captive-breeding project. TPF led a highly successful programme to restore the Peregrine Falco peregrinus to North America, using a large-scale captive-breeding and release operation. In 1984 Jim Weaver returned to Zimbabwe to search for Taita Falcons and the Zimbabwe Falconers' Club (ZFC) and the Department of National Parks and Wild Life Management (DNPWM) assisted him. A juvenile male Taita with an injured wing from the Chimanimani district was given to Dr. Arthur Dunkley (ZFC) for treatment and training, and was in turn given to TPF project.

In 1988 Jim Weaver and Bill Heinrich (TPF) collected a male and female nestling Taita Falcons, under permit, from the Sebungwe area in the Zambezi Valley (Hartley & Mundy 1990). Meanwhile that year one of their captive pairs laid their first clutch (three eggs) in their fifth year, but the eggs did not hatch. This pair produced three young in 1989, the first successful breeding of this species in captivity. The second pair to produce included the cripple wing bird from Zimbabwe in 1991 and this pair recently produced young in their sixteenth year (W. Heck & J. Weaver in litt.). Perseverance can pay off, and the male with a crippled wing was nine years old when he figured out a way of mating successfully. Fortunately nearly all of the foundation stock has bred successfully, and another six pairs have produced young (W. Heck & J. Weaver in litt.). Unfortunately the procedure of pulling eggs, either by double clutching or extending clutches, has not proved successful. Despite several efforts to do this both by TPF and the ZFC, Taita Falcons rarely relay and the practice has been abandoned.

The goal of the project is to establish five successful pairs of breeding Taitas in Zimbabwe. This will probably necessitate a pool of ten pairs of Taita Falcons as experience with these and with African Peregrines *F. peregrinus minor* has shown that roughly 50-60% of suitable pairs produce young. The ZFC has a very successful breeding programme with Peregrines, with 28 pairs having produced nearly 300 young since 1981, over 80 of these having been released to the wild. To date two pairs of Taitas have produced 12 juveniles, and up to 8 pairs have been constituted. In time it is hoped that Taita Falcons will be released to the wild as well.

This note is based largely on Hartley (2002) and it focuses mainly on the captive breeding of the Taita Falcon in Zimbabwe.

## CAPTIVE BREEDING

### Obtaining stock

Serious efforts to breed this species in captivity by the ZFC started in 1989 when attempts were made to obtain breeding stock from the wild. Many hours of effort were spent in the field in distant zones of Zimbabwe, all of them in rugged country during the heat of spring and summer. Efforts were first repaid in 1991 when a team I led collected three female nestlings from two sites in the Batoka Gorge, while another led by Arthur Dunkley collected a female nestling from northern Zimbabwe (Hartley et al. 1993). The difficulties experienced in the Batoka Gorge are a story on its own,

including traversing a minefield. Two of the chicks were only ten days and the third 22 days old, so that there was a danger of imprinting them, coupled with the normal difficulties raising small chicks. To avoid imprinting, I fed them using a puppet in the early stages. Thereafter they tended to imprint on each other, which is the advantage of raising a group together, while a trained Sooty Falcon F. concolor also obliged by feeding them. Two of these females have bred successfully, and one has fostered young. Efforts to collect nestling males were unsuccessful until 1993 when Geoff Bodington (ZFC) collected one from northern Zimbabwe, while TPF kindly provided three captive bred males from two of their pairs (Hartley 1994a), including the first young from a female paired with the injured male from Chimanimani.

### **Condition of adults, courtship and incubation**

However, we have learned that Taita Falcons are not as easy to breed in captivity as first anticipated. Age at first laying has been 4-5 years for most of the females, although some F1 females held by TPF and the ZFC laid their first clutch at 3 years. In 1997 one female at TPF laid her first clutch at two years, whilst in a chamber with two other two-year old females and two males (Heck & Weaver 1997). In captivity Peregrines usually lay at 3 years, but a few have laid at 2 years (Hartley 1996). Normally smaller raptors reproduce earlier than larger ones, and the Taita is just 40% mass of the African Peregrine. Furthermore the Taita settles particularly well in captivity, even more so than the similarly tractable Peregrine. Consequently pairs of Taitas are very settled in their pens, a useful attribute in successful captive breeding. Other anomalies are the longer average pip-to-hatch interval for the Taita (72 hours, range 64-83 hours) and consequently longer incubation period (usually 34 days) than the Peregrine (37 hours and 32 days respectively). Peregrines usually relay, provided the eggs are taken in the first 10 d after start of incubation.

Courtship in well-established pairs started as early as May with sporadic, low intensity mutual vocalisations. More intense courtship (mutual vocalisations, ledge displays and food passing) usually commenced in late July to mid-August, three to six weeks before laying in August to September in Zimbabwe, which accords with laying dates in the wild (Hartley 2000). Eggs were laid about three to four days apart. Egg lethargy was noticed 2-3 days before laying, and incubation usually started with the second egg. Clutch size ranged from 2 to 4 eggs. Fresh egg weight was 26,2 g (range 25,2-28,3 g) in Zimbabwe and an average of 31,2 g in the USA (W. Heck & J. Weaver in litt.). Mean size of eggs was 43,97 x 33,41 mm (range 42,26-46,10 x 32,30-34,30; n = 24) in Zimbabwe and 45 x 34 mm in USA.

Both male and female incubated and the male was generally reluctant to give up the eggs to the female, probably accentuated behaviour in captivity where the male is unable to hunt. Curiously the female frequently fed the incubating male, behaviour not noted for Peregrines, but noted also for a pair of captive Rednecked Falcons F. chicquera (G. McAllister pers. comm.).

### **Hatching and development of young**

As I held one of 3 Taita Falcon *Falco fasciinucha* eggs over my candling light I saw the dark shading of a developing embryo. This was especially exciting as the previous year this pair laid their first clutch of eggs, which were infertile, despite courtship and copulation. A pair held by colleague Willie Gau also produced their first clutch the previous year, and a clutch in 1997, but all the eggs were infertile. On 17 September 1997 I took the clutch of 3 eggs from my pair of captive birds after eight days of natural incubation, hoping that they would relay and therefore accelerate production. Although two of the eggs were infertile, I kept the clutch in the incubator, monitoring them for egg weight loss, a key factor in successful hatching. The goal is to achieve 15% (range=12-18%) weight loss to pip (Weaver & Cade 1983). This involved monitoring the humidity (about 30%) and turning the eggs every three hours for some 27 days. The eggs were weighed every three days and weight loss amounted to about 0,1 g/day. Some intensive courtship displays from the adults ensued over the next month, but there was no copulation or a relay. Both adults spent a great deal of time lying in the scrape and they even paid attention to a large pebble, which they rolled into the scrape and brooded. However, the key focus occurred in and around the incubator in my house.

Early on the 11 October the egg started to pip. I had already stopped turning it as candling indicated that the chick had aligned itself ready to hatch, evident only from a view through the top (blunt) end, the air sac extending down one side (called draw-down). Although the pip to hatch interval was a tortuous 64 hours, my wife and I were able to witness the hatch (at 2200H). Break-up to hatch was 2 hours, but the final effort took just 15 minutes. Break-up signals the ultimate effort by the chick to escape the shell and normally proceeds in an anticlockwise direction. Although a number of things can go wrong during a hatch, this one was uncomplicated. Mean weight of chicks at hatch was 18,1 g (range 17,4-18,9 g).

A chick is not fed for the first 8 to 12 hours as it is still being sustained by the nutrition from the remaining yolk (Weaver & Cade 1983). Furthermore its digestive system is not yet ready to absorb meat and premature feeding can kill it. So the chick was left in a brooder until daybreak. Then it sat up and begged, signalling its readiness to feed. Great care was exercised to ensure that it was not overfed, a great danger in the first three days of its life. The first day it consumed 2,3 g over four sessions, amounting to 12,8% of its body weight (at start of day). Over the next week it was hand-fed using a puppet (a model look-alike Taita) to avoid imprinting. By the third day food intake had increased to 7,5 g, some 39% of its body weight (start of day) and this high rate of intake continued until day 15. Growth of chicks is shown in Hartley (2002), and development of chicks followed Hartley (1995), fledging taking about 44 days. Males are normally 210-220 g and females 300-346 g (Hartley & Heinrich 1991, Hartley 2000).

### **Diet**

The staple diet of my captive Taitas is Redbilled Quelea. They also get some freshly caught weavers and waxbills during the breeding season, at least six weeks prior to laying. Provision of fresh food enhances intake of vitamin E, necessary for fertility (Dierenfeld et al. 1989). This mirrors closely the food quality of Taitas in the wild (Hartley et al. 1993). The principal fare of the Taitas held by TPF is day old chicks and adult Coturnix Quail, fed on alternate days (Heck & Weaver 2004). For a period of five months (1 November to 1 March) supplemental vitamins (Vitahawk by D.B. Scientific) were added on the days when quail were fed. This was stopped a month before the onset of egg laying, based on prior experience reported by The Peregrine Fund involving egg hatchability problems associated with feeding vitamins through the egg-laying period. Small birds are also given to Taitas held by TPF (Weaver pers. comm). High quality food is an integral part of a successful breeding programme.

### **Foundation stock and mortalities**

Fortunately the foundation stock for the pool of birds held by the ZFC and TPF is from widely separated sites including northern Zambia, Batoka Gorge, northern Zimbabwe, the Sebungwe and the Chimanimani areas. Nevertheless, there have been some losses. One of the males from TPF died in October 1995 from a chronic infection. As it turned out the female of this pair subsequently proved that she was an imprint, responding to a human handler by laying two eggs! Sadly, however, she died in January 1997. A juvenile male died in January 2001 from hepatitis and an F1 male died in 2003 from an infection. TPF programme has also experienced losses, including two adults from avian malaria (W. Heck & J. Weaver 1997).

## **BREEDING PROBLEMS AND CONSERVATION ACTION**

In terms of longevity captive Taita females appears to breed for about the same period as the Peregrine, so far up to 15 years for one of the females taken from Zambia by TPF (Heck & Weaver 1999). However, our two established females ceased laying at 9 years and 11 years old respectively. Peregrines sometimes breed successfully in their 15th year, but not thereafter (Clum 1995, Hartley 2002). Courtship displays and vocalisations are similar to the Peregrine (Hartley et al. 1993), although the Taita is much quieter (with a raspier call) and less obtrusive than the Peregrine, a much noisier and demonstrative raptor at this time. It is apparent, including from studies of DNA (Bell et al. 1999), that these two species are closely related, so that it is not clear why the Taita is more difficult to breed in captivity.

Of great concern to the Zimbabwe programme has been the premature end to egg production by two established females. In 2004 we withdrew these two females (now 13 years old) and redeployed the two established males with younger females. In 2004 three females laid clutches, but despite copulation none of the eggs were fertile. Another three females failed to lay, including two with the proven males. Mindful of other potential problems we have sent blood samples of each of the key bloodlines to the USA for DNA analysis, in case there is evidence of inbreeding. Generally Taitas here and in the USA have taken 4-5 years to breed, contrasting with Peregrines that usually start at 3 years. However, some captive bred Taitas are showing an inclination to lay at 3 years earlier than those taken from the wild (4-5 years), which may suggest that there is a need for out-crossing.

Our studies have shown relatively low productivity at sites in the wild (Hartley et al. 1993, RH unpubl. data), mirroring some of the problems in captivity. Many sites in the wild are no longer active and several were occupied by Peregrines and even Lanners. The same pattern has been noted at Mt. Elgon in Uganda (K. Otte in litt.), while Thomsett (1998) failed to record productivity at any of the sites in Kenya.

There is a strong case for consolidating this programme and widening it. The Taita Falcon is clearly a rare species, which may need help in the future, including captive breeding and release. In South Africa conservationists, including falconers, would do well to join the programme. This is now a possibility after a recent workshop on the Taita Falcon held at Moholoholo in Limpopo, which was facilitated by Andre Botha, Manager EWT Birds of Prey Working Group.

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## Three Ballies, a Buckie and a Duck Dam

By Greg McBey

Two ballies awoke almost simultaneously on a cold winter's morning in the Vrystaat at a place called Awimaweh. These ballies occasionally answered to the names of McBey and Bamber. The beauty about a new day in a falconer's world is that any bad flights or misadventures of the day before are but distant memories, and being by nature an optimistic bunch, we believe almost instinctively that today will be a good one. After all how many crap days can a mere mortal falconer sustain? As one they pulled on their skunk kit and got ready to head out. Today, just for once, they would beat the rest of the field and head out really early to a secret dam where they would quickly dispatch a duck and be back in time for an early breakfast that they had ordered two nights before at Awimawehs drive through restaurant. As they skulked through the pre-dawn gloom they were rudely intercepted by a third and most decrepit ballie by the name of Labuschagne [Skattebol to Margaret]. Mark even for this ungodly hour was looking considerably the worse for ware. On enquiring as to his rather haggard state he muttered something about sharing a room with the Canadian falconer Dale and a pack of timber wolves on steroids. In a severe state of sleep deprivation he begged to come with us and we stupidly agreed.

We all bundled into Bamber's V12 double cab. We now had 3 ballies and a bakkie and were just short of the dam. After driving for some time we turned off onto a rough track as the first rays of sunlight brushed the distant horizon of the flat freestate vlaktes. As Mark felt the changes in the corrugation of the road he awoke from his most uninterrupted half hours sleep of the night. His batteries recharged he was no longer in a begging mood and was ready to cause coil like only a plumber can. "WHERE THE HELL ARE YOU OUENS GOING?" he politely enquired. On being informed that we were on our way to a secret dam to club a quacker he promptly informed us that this was Harvey's secret dam and that Alan was intending to fly later this morning. Bamber and I both being Natalians and thus raised as scholars and gentlemen we simply executed a U turn and headed the Colt out in a quest for virgin waters. After about another half hours travel we had located another 3 dams all of which Mark assured us were also Harvey's secret dams and thus out of bounds. Although we were scholars and gentlemen we were not necessarily intelligent scholars and gentlemen and it took us a long time to figure out that Mark was being somewhat less than truthful and was simply using this outing as a means of gathering a whole heap of secret dams for himself which he would no doubt use at his leisure during the course of the week.

It was unanimously decided that the next water we encountered we would fly on come hell or high water. Mark as punishment for his somewhat offside behavior was designated to get land owners permission. As we crested the next rise we saw in the distance [far off] a long dam wall with what appeared to be a puddle of water with a good scattering of waterfowl. Our spirits rose and the banter began. Words to the effect of how could I fly a 4-year old passage chicken over such a kill me puddle etc, etc. Good fortune was beginning to smile on us and right next to the roadside alongside his tractor we saw the farmer. With a screeching of tyres and a cloud of dust Bamber executed a hand brake turn of which Sarel v.d Merwe himself would have been well chuffed. The vehicle had hardly come to a standstill but already Mark had vaulted the fence and was hobbling towards the somewhat intimidated landowner. The farmer looked very much the same as a very fresh passage peregrine that had just taken its 1st kill [a Cape canary] and was deciding whether to carry or eat on the ground. Miraculously the boer stood his ground and in no time at all from the comfort of the cab we could see the farmer nodding his head in unison with Mark's and laughing merrily. The plumber was working his magic and since the plumber had recently turned farmer as well he was welcomed into the brotherhood of farmers. We could see him knowledgeable discussing the farmer's Jap raddish and telling him how to quadruple yields and avoid certain taxes simultaneously. For a moment it even looked like the farmer would get a word in edgeways and tell Mark that the Jap raddish was actually mealies and that he was just the tractor mechanic who was trying to get on with his job and as such was not interested in tax evasion. But alas it was too late and like a Saker falcon on migration Mark was on a mission. What felt like 3hrs later but was probably only about an hour later the poor mechanic was still nodding his head in unison with Mark's but his knees were bent and the smile had turned into a grimace. Abruptly Mark turned his back on the broken man once again hobbled back towards us, vaulted the fence and rejoined us in the vehicle. He looked as happy as Larry and as such we assumed that he had got permission.

However when we asked if he had cleared the dam he informed us that he had forgotten to ask for clearance but enquired of us that because our normal approach was to fly first and beg forgiveness afterwards why were we wasting valuable flying time?

We now realized that if we were to fly before midday it was time to get on with it. As we approached the dam from below the wall I immediately started having misgivings, the type of thoughts that an experienced falconer would heed. The dam wall was massive it stretched off into the distance and was so high I thought we would be safer broaching it with the assistance of climbing ropes. We pulled up and parked in the shadow of the dam wall. I was not in the mood for taking any abuse from my fellow falconers and quickly rigged and tossed the hunting chicken skywards. The passage used the dam wall as a cliff face [slope soaring] and by the time it was nearing the top of the wall it was probably the highest the bird had been all year. Armed with catapults, stones, rocks, binoculars and various items essential for a successful hunt the three of us (plus 2 pointers), finally arrived at the top of the wall. Stretched out below us was what appeared to be Midmar dam during a year of exceptional rainfall.

There were mega ducks and they were completely relaxed. They knew from passed experience that if a bevy of Vrystaat duck hunters armed with shotguns, G.S.P's and rubberducks could not budge them they were very safe with us. By now the falcon was way up in a thermal and being the only sane one amongst us was already drifting off downwind in the search of a realistic set up. We spread out and charged down the bank. One brain dead duck decided to make like a baby and head out first. This elicited a half hearted stoop from the falcon, the duck bailed back onto the water and the passage thermalled up out of sight. Bamber was by now peppering the water surface with well directed shots from his catapult, the fact that most projectiles were falling about 400m short and the ducks were continuing to feed, breed and preen as if we were not even there, was starting to piss on John's battery. It was time to utilize our trump card. The seasoned duck dogs were ordered to get the ducks up. They charged off like only Pointers can but before they even reached the waters edge they had become bogged down in the thickest mud I had ever encountered. It appeared as if the whole dam was encircled by a barrier of impenetrable mud.

The opposite side of the dam had a massive mud flat [probably about 1/2 km long] that appeared to have baked dry but was inaccessible to us from our side. The huge flocks of duck had now gathered on the far side and were now thumbing their noses at us [the more polite ones anyway]. Suddenly as if sent like a gift from above Mark stumbles over a canoe with a paddle nogal. He invites me to board the craft and assures me that he is a canoe launcher extraordinaire. In a short scenario that involved frozen water, rank mud, howling pointers and swimming falconers Mark and I convinced ourselves that we had lost this battle. As we lay sopping and exhausted on the bank we wondered where our third partner in crime had disappeared to.

For Bamber although we had lost the battle the war was just starting. From behind the massive dam wall we hear the throaty roar as vonBamber urges his v12 Colt into action. Deep down inside Lab and I know what is about to unfold but neither of us wish to believe it. Being somewhat seasoned duck hawkers we have witnessed this phenomenon first hand on several occasions. It is very similar to a severe case of road rage but much worse and practically incurable in these late stages. Symptoms include a vacant stare, slobbering at the mouth and a complete lack of caring for your own or your fellow falconer's well-being. Bamber having also clubbed many webbed feet in his time probably was subconsciously aware of the severe ailment which afflicted him, but like a rabid dog he was too far gone. All that mattered was getting those duck airborne and hence serving the falcon. Many of you may have witnessed attempts by various vehicles, including the legendary Bluebird, to set or break land speed records on the great salt pan of the U.S.A. Here before Mark and I, Bamber's own version was in progress. Bamber had his foot to the floorboards. The Colt was surging across the mudflats [it appeared to be aqua planing] in a cloud of dust and mud straight towards the now distinctly nervous ducks. John now had a faint smile, one elbow protruding from the window, the other hand juggling the wheel and his favorite c.d. [Chariots of Fire] blaring. Even these battle hardened Free State ducks could only take so much and so in unison they rose from the water surface and headed for quieter waters in Gauteng. The falcon was by now long gone.

Milliseconds later almost in slow motion the Colt did its best impersonation of a Russian submarine sounding. John baled out and went round to the back of the vehicle where with hunched head and shoulders he sat himself down on the tailgate. It looked as if his legs were shrinking as the back of the bakkie slowly disappeared into the mud as well. Explaining this scenario to the farmer was going to entail some pretty creative thinking. Some hours later 3 ballies, a bakkie and a falcon were once again at the cross roads. Right for camp or left for further hunting adventures? Many thousands of feet up, at a height which good falconers could only dream of, ensconced by a fluffy white cloud the falconry God looked down upon his subjects. As the bakkie turned left an evil smile crossed his face. Just how dumb can those mothers be?

# Presentation of the Bulgarian Association for Conservation of Birds of Prey in Abu Dhabi

## INTRODUCTION

First of all I would like to point out the enormous importance of my attendance to this forum. My love to this art the hunt with birds of prey has brought me here, on this fabulous land and made it possible for me to relish in this kind of entertainment that our colleague falconers the Bedouins have enjoyed for centuries. Touching these beautiful species is actually quintessence of each science studying birds of prey. That is the essence of communicating with nature. And the same way as every chain needs its loops, as the tree would not survive without its leaves, and as the tail of the bird cannot stay without feathers, so the hand of the falconer cannot go without a bird of prey. That is the senses of fulfillment and freedom.

Thanks to our wild brothers the birds of prey we have the opportunity to peep deeply into their nature and soul. Centuries on end we trod toward the horizon accompanied by our hunter partners. Deserts, savannas, steppes, tundra, forests all places of those have been waded across by the falconers and their fellow birds being partners in an eternal dance: the flight of the falcon as the flight of life.

## HISTORICAL NOTES OVER FALCONRY IN BULGARIA

Probably there are not many among you having heard about Bulgaria. It is a small country with ancient culture, famous all over the world mainly with its products of yogurt and rose oil. The country is also well known with its sports star-moments in football, wrestling, weightlifting, rowing, rhythmic gymnastics. Particularly of interest to foreigners is Bulgarian music, which has been enjoying, similar to Arab music, much of attention from the world music industry over the recent years.

Situated in South East Europe, with its territory of 111,000 sq km Bulgaria occupies a specific strategic place in the region the central part of the Balkan Peninsula, on both sides of the Balkan Mountain Chain (where the name of the peninsula comes from). Most of our north border stretches alongside the Danube River separating the country from Romania, to the south Bulgaria borders with Turkey and Greece; to the west our neighbour is Serbia and Macedonia, and our eastern border is washed by the Black Sea.

Tourism is among the sectors enjoying fast development in the national economy. Bulgaria offers various types of tourism, including mountain, sea, ecological, hunting, etc. We have 90 reserves for wild game breeding and 12 national parks. I would like to draw your attention to the fact that the population of the Saker falcon enjoys one of the best geomorphologic and climate conditions of living, which comes to explain the good genetic characteristics of the individual birds concerning their usage as hunting birds.

Probably few of you know that Bulgaria, which I have the pleasure to represent at this forum, is a country with centuries-long history in falconry. Its history dates far back to 3,000 (three thousand) years ago. The interwoven tracks of Thracian, Roman and Byzantine civilizations has made the country an exciting and picturesque place to visit. Bulgaria has existed and developed on its present territories for more than 13 (thirteen) centuries.

Bulgaria knows falconry and practices since ancient times.

According to old and reliable historical sources, including the Vatican library, old Bulgarian tribes migrated to the Balkan peninsula from the territories of modern Russia, Mongolia and China. During that migration, which started long before the new era, nomad tribes were relocating in search of new, more fertile lands, until they reached the lands of present Bulgaria, bring along with them sustainable knowledge about horse-breeding, hunting and falconry crafts deeply imprinted in our genes and historic development.

There are two theories about the origins of Bulgarians. The first claims we originated from ancient Iranians; the other one insists that Bulgarians came from Asia. Both statements, however, have something in common and that is the fact that migration was part of our everyday life. There is historic evidence that still in the first century, in 75, ancient Thracians a tribe living along the banks of Maritsa River practiced hunting with trained falcons.

Our migratory ancestors spent most of their time riding horses. For hunting they used eagles, falcons, hawks, lasso and the elongated, similar to piques spears named "rogatina", as well as one of the unique, multi-complex reflex bows the elements of which still preserve their secrets. The migration of old Bulgarians to the lands of modern Bulgaria has found place in the annals of those days. One of those say (quote follows): "...In 679, under the leadership of Asparukh, Bulgarians crossed the Danube River. According to an old legend, they were led by the sacred eagle flying in front of them, the God, Ikush, to whom they dedicated the bodies of dead. Old Bulgarians largely worshiped the eagle, as a symbol of mightiness and power. An evidence for that worship is the image engraved on one of the golden utensils in an old Bulgarian treasure found in Golemi Sveti Nikola, Hungary (nowadays stored in the Vienna Museum). The image shows a naked woman grabbed in the talons of an eagle, the woman offering the bird from the sacred drink with one hand and carrying a torch with the sacred fire in the other hand. Eagles, mainly the golden eagle, called also "berkut", were trained and used by old Bulgarians for hunting bigger game, while falcons were used for smaller game. The hunt was not used prevalingly for collecting food for the Bulgarians they had an abundance of it from the many herbs, rather they practiced hunting for pleasure and as good training of their human physical and spiritual characteristics: strong will, stamina, intrepidity, which laid the grounds of their insurmountable military and national might." (end of quotation).

Hunting was an everyday activity for the Bulgarian man whenever he was not on the battle field, he went hunting.

Belligerent tribes used to find serenity and joy in hunting trips. In the Middle Ages falconry spread widely across the country and acquired nationwide practice. An interesting fact to mention is that besides with falcons, Bulgarian and Byzantine nobles ("bolyars") used to go hawking with greyhounds, with the local breeds of dogs "palash" and "zagar", as well as with otters. In 14-19 century Bulgaria slid into Turkish slavery.

During that five-century period falconry became extremely popular across the country and Bulgarians were preferred for falconers as successors of sustainable traditions in care and training of falcons. Because of their cares for the birds of prey, those Bulgarians turned into a privileged category they enjoyed relatively more freedom than their country fellows; they were exempt from paying some taxes, they could hold guns and were remunerated more generously. In the Ottoman Empire falconry was grounded and on the military practice organized in two main groups: the first group occupies with caring and training of falcons and hawks for hunting. They received their salaries directly from the Sultan's court. The second group comprised falconers who served in exchange for some tax alleviations or for remuneration of small provincial land estates, exempt from taxes. Bulgarian falconers were called "dogandzhii" (those occupying with falcons), "kruguyari" (or "karaguyari") "athmadzhadhii" (those caring after hawks). Depending on the activities accompanying the hunt, another groups of falconers were formed, including people who search for the nests and stay on vigil to guard them until eyasses grow, change plumage and start to learn how to fly. Other categories are those of "transporting" the birds of prey and of "care-after" of those birds. A separate group included the hunters who caught birds of prey for hunt training in the Sultan's court.

The supreme power established falconry as an institution with hereditary character. Thus sons, brothers and grandchildren of Bulgarian falconers also became falconers. In the course of centuries falconry regions also took shape across the country where families and kinships of falconers lived centuries on end. Falconry existed mainly in Eastern Thracia, Aegean region, the south part of Vardar Makedonia (along the Vardar River), and Northwestern Bulgaria. It is also very well developed in several regions in North and Northeastern Bulgaria. There is a special register of the regions with predominantly care and training of falcons and hawks preserved since 15 century. According to the register, along with the Thracian and Aegean region, two more regions in Northern Bulgaria were specifically active in falconry. In 18-19 century the semi-armed wealthy falconers became the people to finance the revolutionary-liberation movement aiding for the formation of first detachments the so called "haiduk-chetta" (or "haidushki chetti") bands fighting for liberation of the Turkish slavery.

In the beginning of 20 century, falconry was quite popular not only among Muslims living in the Northeastern part of the country. There are many villages in that region where Muslims go hunting partridges and hares with trained peregrines. In the beginning of last century falconry was practiced also by Tatars living in Bulgaria, as well as in the regions around Thessaloniki and Ohrid. Throughout all centuries falconry was so popular that it was even memorized in Bulgarian national folklore. A song dated from 19 century narrates about a young girl praying to God to give her wings of bird to fly to the Bulgarian army and pick there her beloved man a hero of the heroes on whose knee there stands a falcon.

## THE SITUATION NOWADAYS

After all those beautiful poetic verses above, we must regretfully turn eyes back to the situation in Bulgaria nowadays.

In 1978 the capital city of Sofia hosted the annual meeting of CIC, the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation. Upon the proposal table by Pierre Basel, the representative of IAF, it was adopted a decision that a working group be established in Bulgaria to deal with the falconry affairs at CIC. However, it is not clear whether there was such a group established at all, and if not, on what reasons.

Today falconry is prohibited in Bulgaria. According to Article 65, paragraph 12 of the Game law (Act on Hunting and Game Preservation), it is prohibited to use hunting falcons and other birds of prey during hunting, irrespectively of their species and origins, as well as the usage of greyhounds.

The cited legal text expanded its application with the latest amendment in 2002 aimed exclusively to highlight one specific thing the negative attitude of the state toward falconry. The paragraph banning hunting with birds of prey were adopted with the active intermediation of non-governmental ecological organization who partner the government in drafting legislation concerning those affairs. Regretfully, poorly motivated and illogical commentaries, as well as the extreme stance of local ecologists over the issue of hunting with birds of prey served as a basis of the active legislation.

The discussion over legalization of falconry in Bulgaria reflected the cross-road of mostly disadvantages factors organizations illiterate in the falconry affairs and preaching strongly against it are at the same time authorized to draft the legislation concerning it and to control all attempts to popularize the matter and raise discussions over it.

In that sense, after incessant urges to start talks, representatives of the "green" organizations have intercepted any attempt to promote the idea. And although in most cases representatives of those non-governmental organizations demonstrated complete incompetence and misunderstanding of the matter, they use every opportunity to show unconcealed hostility and lack of interest.

The main reason of the ecologists behavior is that if there is falconry they will retreat from their traditional principles and, very likely, to loose finances provided by various European ecological funds financing pre-accession projects in our country. Because Bulgarian administration is still in a transitory period of harmonizing its work with the standards of the European Union, a member of which the country hopes to become in the near future, our partners from IAF are also facing difficulties in communication with authorized institutions.

Patrick Morel has a good idea of what I am talking about to all 17 letters over the matter of legalizing falconry in Bulgaria sent to different state institutions, not a single reply came back. Of course, the hopes of the Bulgarian falconers are that this situation be changed. We are aware that the countries aspiring for EU entry have to go through a complex and long procedure of negotiations over each sector, including the "green" one and to harmonize its national legislation with the *acquis communautaire* of the European Union.

We hope that the regulated practice of falconry in the Union will reflect here helping to authorize it legally in Bulgaria as well. However, one of the things that makes me preoccupied is that the European Union does not have a single, supra-governmental ruling on behalf of legal practice of falconry. Nonetheless, national legislation of each member country includes regulations over that type of activity. It may be useful that representatives of various clubs in the countries allowing falconry send letters in support of Bulgaria to the Bulgarian Association for Conservation of Birds of Prey that later we would be able to present as official documents in our fight for legalizing falconry in the country.

## CONCLUSION

Dear friends, we are grateful for your support and sympathy thanks to which we all continue ahead in the tracks of our first steps. Please keep going on with the same vigor, steadfast and staunch in standing up for your ideas in falconry. Keep on helping to those like ourselves who long for their love, but still cannot touch it, and stand by our common interests for better and cleaner hunt.

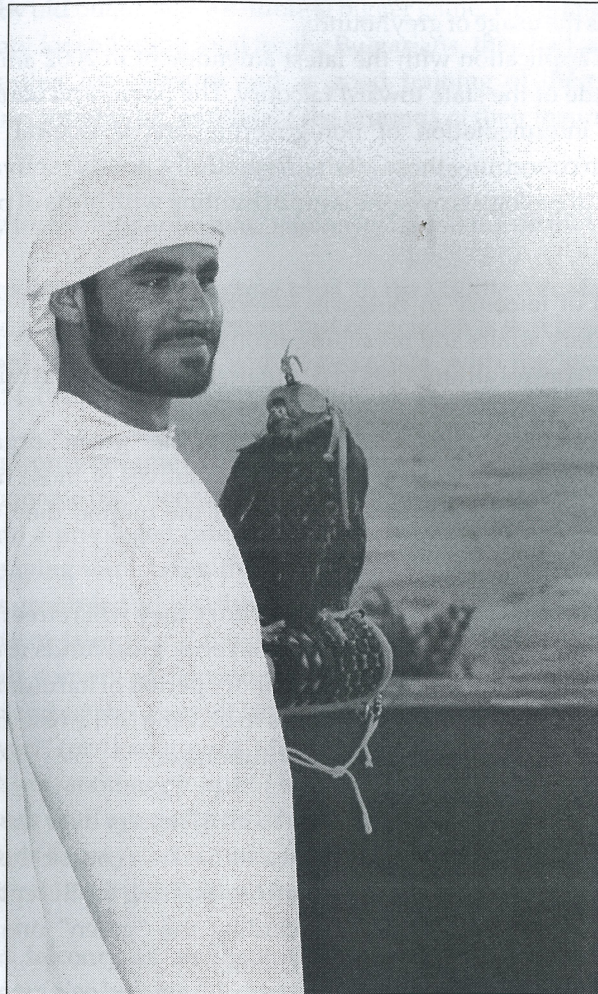
Falconry is in our souls and deep in our hearts. It is like a ship sailing in the ocean, and you, my dear friends, are those without whom we would not go on. You are the captains and it is up to you to secure the success of this ancient and unique "ship". Courage!

Thank you for your attention.

*Pavel Yakimov*

*President of BACBP*

*(Bulgarian Association for Conservation of Birds of Prey) The Falconer's Association*



*Falcon Training Camp of HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan  
(see page 17)*



*IAF Meeting 2004*

## Duck Hawking in the Vaal Triangle

by Dirk Verwoerd

I started my falconry season early this year; my 4th season intermewed Gyr/Peregrine tiercel "Shamal" was ready for free flight the first week of April. This bird has taken plenty of ducks ( about 70) over the last three years; he also knows all the dams we regularly fly on, to the extent that if a setup is not to his liking, he would fly off to the next dam and start frightening the ducks on his own. Unfortunately, occasionally this has led to a kill for him and a telemetry exercise for me, supporting my theory about his high intelligence. I have several theories about this falcon (don't we all ?), one of them on how he is able to use minimal energy to fly the required 1000ft (line) to the kite before we embark on every hunting season. We often have little or no wind for days on end this time of the year here in the Vaal Triangle so this year's first free flight was on a big dam, where he would naturally be enticed by ducks wheeling over the water (in theory), to chase them with strong motivation and thus shake off the stiffness associated with the moulting rest period faster than with the usual kite training. It worked beautifully up to the point where a Red Bill Teal (RBT) where pushed over the damwall and Shamal followed in exhausted pursuit. Unknown to me a baby RBT was also present and Shamal focused on it, following on foot through the thick grass, giving a new meaning to the term "Rathunt" in the process. He got his meal and promptly flew off to eat it at leisure on a high Bluegum branch, just when the other member of the team, my GSP "Rippel" came rushing back to me with a coot in his mouth. GREAT! first flight ... two "kills" ... what a disaster! All the wrong actions rewarded! This is bound to be an interesting season.

On driving back to Heidelberg I started to see the humorous side of the afternoon's fun & games, and decided to share some of the strange and unusual hunts Mark Labuschagne & I have experienced over the last few years with you. From our hunting journals....

A flight at some Yellow Bill Ducks at one of our killing ponds last year, with my second year African Peregrine female "Pezulu", just when she started to build some success-based confidence on this whole duck hawking thing, had quite a bizarre end. The ducks flushed well, but the inexperienced falcon focused on the wrong one and stooped too early, pounding it into the water. When she switched to the others the hunt became a high-speed tail-chase affair. The remaining group of YBD's narrowly missed a cattle fence just as the falcon caught up with them. One of the YBD's panicked and literally bailed out in front of the falcon, with full momentum, into the tar road. I was running as fast as possible but could only watch in horror from a distance how a truck converged on the stunned YBD that was being bombed by the frustrated falcon. The truckdriver seemed oblivious of the drama unfolding on the road and drove straight over the duck, flattening it with the wheels. From my viewpoint, a few centimeters on front of the falcon that swung back for another headshot. The falcon landed next to this bloody spread that resembled a feathered, raw meat pizza more than anything else, not knowing what to do next. I literally rolled up the duck, threw it onto the grass a safe distance from the road and allowed the falcon to jump onto it before picking her up. She still looked completely stunned, not comprehending how the duck managed her sudden disappearing / shape-changing act, and me laughing out loud with relief that it wasn't her that had to be rolled up from the tar.

On another occasion Shamal managed to hit a drake YBD into the wide stretch of sticky mud around a rapidly drying pond. He winged over quickly and "engaged in close combat" as the military handbooks would put it. The black, sticky mud suited the injured duck more than the falcon, who reached a point where he jumped away in disgust, semi covered with the stuff. The bleeding duck hobbled the few meters to the water, slowly swam to the middle of the pond, and then keeled over, dead. When Mark and I arrived at the scene, both falcon and GSP where standing at the water's edge, looking expectantly to me to go and retrieve the kill. It was midwinter, with a freezing wind creating the essential ambiance of the moment, and neither me nor the GSP willing to enter the equally freezing water. Shamal started clucking in frustration, supported by Mark : "Jy beter swem boetie...", No ways, I'm too old for that; I picked up the falcon and left the dead duck to the barbel, who had started milling around their feast.

One evening Mark flew his 4 yr old Gyr/Prairie tiercel "Snake" at the dam we call "windpompdammetjie". Paul Strydom was also present and while Mark launched this remarkable falcon we watched the full moon rise over the horizon. Mark was hobbling along, still recovering after his recent knee surgery (fall in aardvark hole during falconry

several years ago) and with his old (10 yrs +) , one-eyed (porcupine quill), three-legged (hit-by-car) English Pointer "JD" , he needed assistance in flushing ducks, general running and recovery of falcon. But nothing gets him down or keeps him from flying his bird, often when the sun had set. Snake climbed into the misty evening breeze, knowing he had only minutes to secure a warm meal. With Mark shouting instructions, we rushed the dam when Snake was high enough and in position. He looked like a swallow, before folding into a vertical dive.

His descent was awesome; "vapour trails at the wingtips " as Paul described it afterwards. Maybe it was the evening breeze, maybe the effect of a red sunset in the West coupled with a yellow moonrise in the East, but somehow Snake misjudged and instead of his usual solid, lethal hit he struck a YBD only a glancing blow, and equally unusually, he followed the duck in pursuit. The seemed to disappear into the embankment of a nearby railway line, but when we arrived at the scene, Snake had his prize by the head in the middle of a hidden culvert under the railway track. By this time it was completely dark and Mark had to augment the moonlight with a flashlight to pick the falcon up after allowing some plucking. It was a special feeling to experience this hunt that would have been described by Frederick II as "Hawking by Moonlight" in his classical treatise.



# Telemetry Attachment: Experiences With The Backpack Harness

by Edmund Oettle

Telemetry is now as much part of falconry as jesses. So the question remains only how best to attach it. Traditionally, the leg or tail have been the debated sites, neither of which are ideal. However, for many years, biologists have been permanently mounting trackers on backpacks of various species including raptors, and this has long been accepted as the only reliable method. Why then have falconers taken so long to realize this?

My guess is that the biologists' transmitters were intended to transmit continuously till the batteries gave in, whereas the falconers' transmitters were much higher output for greater range, but shorter battery life, hence had to be put on for each flight. However, things have changed with the advent of micro magnetic switches, which allows for switching without detachment of the transmitter. Even so, the falconers have been slow to make the connection between switchable transmitters and permanent mounting. Mark Williams in Canada has spent some seasons with a backpack mounted transmitter, and had excellent results. His article may be accessed on the Marshall Telemetry website.

After reading this, I decided to give it a try, but not having the Teflon ribbon that he recommended, I used what I thought was a soft, light, braided nylon instead. It was a complete disaster, the bird hated it and I took it off the next day. It took a few weeks for the Teflon ribbon to arrive from the USA, and with a bit of reluctance decided to try again. Well, the difference was amazing. Complete acceptance by the bird, (gyr/peregrine hybrid, a breed not known for their placid nature), and not one attempt to chew at it was noticed. Next step: see what happens when the transmitter is attached. The same result: Complete acceptance by the bird. So far, so good. What would happen if I left it on permanently? I left the transmitter attached to the bird for the rest of the season (2 months) without any problems. The transmitter often would get covered by the feathers on the back, becoming completely invisible. This has obvious benefits in terms of streamlining and air resistance, and of course encumbrance problems are also avoided. The switching was quite easy and reliable (even though I often had to part the feathers to find it).

While we don't have the extremes of temperatures that the northern hemisphere falconers have, I think that there will be an added benefit in that the transmitter temperature (which influences frequency) is more likely to remain constant with this method. But what about those transmitters that don't have switches? These can just as easily be attached to the backpack as they can to a tail mount. Indeed, I find the bird resents less the fiddling required to attach the transmitter on the back than at the tail base. How often to change the backpack? If done right, it lasts at least a season, probably much longer, as it is protected from sunlight damage by the feathers, and is so light as to be no nuisance at all. The drawback? At the moment, the cost of Teflon ribbon is about R100 for one bird (depending on exchange rate, local duties, and postage). Small price to pay for peace of mind. Bulk purchase would obviously reduce that considerably.

In summary: I will not use the "old" methods of transmitter attachment again, except possibly to attach a second transmitter to the tail (I think a slight modification of the backpack will allow two transmitters to be attached making the tail option unnecessary). Furthermore, I can predict that within 5 years (no, 10 years, falconers don't change easily!) it will be the standard method of attachment, and that transmitters dangling from the leg or neck will become as quaint as brass swivels and screen perches.

## Powerlines and Falconry, Problems and Solutions

by Jon Smalie

The Eskom-Endangered Wildlife Trust Strategic Partnership (a working group of the Endangered Wildlife Trust) was formed in 1996 in order to address the interactions between wildlife and power lines, in particular the interaction of birds with power lines. Whilst the efforts of the partnership have understandably focused on interactions between wild populations of birds and power lines, much of what has been learnt can also be applied to falconry situations.

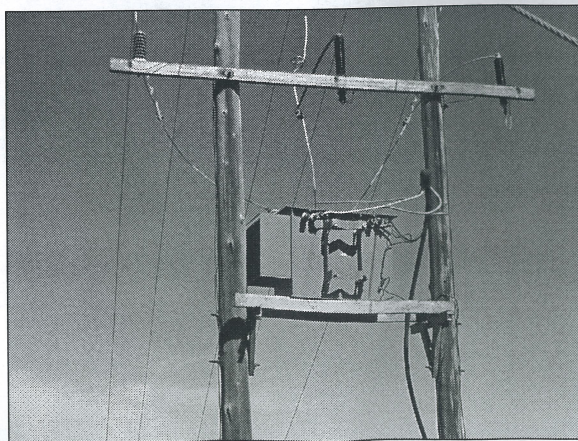
Essentially birds can be killed on power lines through two mechanisms: collisions with the overhead conductors or earth wires; and electrocution on poles or pylons. Collisions occur as a result of the bird not seeing the cable until it is too late to take mid-flight evasive action. The bird is usually killed or injured through its impact with the cable or through falling to the ground after hitting the cable. Although most small and medium raptors are relatively agile fliers and should usually be able to avoid overhead cables, there are still times when they are vulnerable to collision, such as whilst stooping after prey, or in low light conditions.

Electrocution is perhaps the more common of the two causes of death of falconry birds. Electrocution typically occurs when a bird perches on a pylon or pole and bridges the gap between two different phases (conductors or cables), or between one phase and an earth wire or any other earthed hardware. The most important factor determining the danger posed by a particular pole or pylon, is the clearances between phase-phase and phase-earth, relative to the size of the bird. Obviously a bird with a wingspan or a "tip of beak to tip of toe" length that is greater than either of the above clearances on a particular pole, will be at risk whilst perched on the pole. Radio transmitter aerials or any similar attachments on the bird could also affect the birds' effective dimensions.

To their credit, Eskom have committed seriously to addressing sites where birds are killed on existing lines. New lines are also now built in a bird friendly manner as far as possible. However, there are still many unsafe structures in the landscape. There are numerous pole designs used by both Eskom, and by municipal electrical suppliers. Often in urban or semi urban areas, power line infrastructure is built, owned and maintained by the local municipality, and not Eskom as is generally assumed.

Arguably the most dangerous structure is pictured in the photograph. This is the transformer. These structures serve to transform power from 11kV or 22kV to smaller voltages for use by a customer. They are commonly situated at houses, sheds, irrigation pumps etc. Perhaps one of the most common and dangerous sites for transformers (in terms of birds) is at dams and rivers. As the photograph shows, the jumper cables from the top of the pole to the transformer box are not insulated on the older structures. A bird sitting on the transformer box can easily touch two of these cables as they are only about 30-40cm apart. To minimise the threats posed by power lines to the birds that you are flying, look critically at the pole structures in the area that you operate, and work out whether your bird is large enough to bridge any of the gaps discussed above. If it is, you probably need to look for alternative, safer areas to fly the bird.

The Eskom EWT Strategic Partnership can be contacted on 0860 111 535



## Falconry status in Brazil

### ESTIMATED FALCONERS

Brazilian Falconry still stands on an embryological stage, with a known history of twenty-five years. The ABFPAR was founded in 1997, by three friends: Leo Fukui (President), Jorge Lisboa (Secretary) and Guilherme Quieroz (Treasurer). Our office is established in Niterói, City in Rio de Janeiro. Our Association lives only with the member's annuity. Since the beginning, we have annual meetings and our Bulletin is published twice a year. One of our proposes is to rehabilitate injured raptors brought to us by citizens, Municipal and Military Police, and Fire Departments, with Falconry practices. We also attaint to Zoological Foundations and Rehabilitation Centers.

ABFPAR will accept anyone that likes raptors and is willing to learn more about Falconry and raptor's conservation. We have around 40 members (number that oscillates every year) spread through some States of Brazil and Argentina, Portugal and Holland. Some of our members are veterinarians, biologists, agronomists, zootechnics, engineers (professionals, students and researchers). 25% of them actively are flying raptors for rehabilitation proposes.

Our Association is divided into Director's Board: President, Secretary, Treasurer, Scientific Director, Technical Director and Marketing Director; Consultants Board; Honor Members Board; and Members Board divided into professional and student members.

The National Falconry School is located in Uberlândia City (Minas Gerais State Central-East). Our Treasurer Ronivon da Silva is one of the owners, and responsible for teaching Falconry with Aplomado Falcons (*Falco femoralis*) and an imprinted female White Tailed Hawk (*Buteo albicaudatus*). All of our raptors are closed ringed. Besides being a Falconry School, ENFALCO is legalized as a Breeding Center for Aplomado Falcons in his State Environment Department. Last August two couples of Aplomado's started demonstrating incubating behaviors. On August the first Aplomados eggs started hatching. Two days later, all six eggs were hatched. This was the first breeding attempt in Brazil, each one laid three eggs, a 100% of success by a Brazilian Falconer.

Brazil has two kinds of centers: breeding and conservation (rehabilitation) centers. Each one with it's own legislation. For a citizen to keep a wildlife animal, he must get a special license at the State Environment Department, after demonstrating that he has the knowledge, ability and infra-structure to keep a wildlife animal. The same license also permits his transportation inside the State. To travel out of the State with a raptor, the holder also must get permission from the Environment Department of the visiting State.

After a reunion in 2002 between the Federal Environment Ministry, representatives from some Environment Conservationists Associations (Anti-Falconry Groups) and ABFPAR, the first Brazilian Falconry Normative started to be study by our Federal Environment Departments. Today it's in phase of conclusion and approval. This normative will establish the practices of Falconry for rehabilitation and to control airport's wildlife in an attempt to avoid more airplane-birds crashing accidents.

Even with the final approval, each State Environment Department has the autonomy to agree with the practices of Falconry. Unfortunately, some Environment Departments, for example São Paulo, don't agree that Falconry can be used to rehabilitate injured raptors, on the other hand, this autonomy helped us to prove to some Departments the benefits that Falconry brings to injure raptors, resulting in partnerships with their rehabilitation centers. Brazil has 88 species of raptors, and 16 of them can be used for Falconry. Those raptors are listed overleaf:

Species	Handling Degree	Abundance
<i>Rupornis magnirostris</i>	1	Common
<i>Falco femoralis</i>	1	Common
<b><i>Falco sparverius</i></b>	1	Common
<i>Buteo albicaudatus</i>	1	Common
<i>Spizaetus ornatus</i>	3	Uncommon
<i>Spizaetus tyrannus</i>	3	Uncommon
<i>Spizaetus melanoleucus</i>	3	Uncommon
<i>Geranoaetus melanoleucus</i>	3	Uncommon
<i>Harpia harpyja</i>	3	Uncommon
<i>Buteo brachyurus</i>	2	Uncommon
<i>Parabuteo unicinctus</i>	2	Uncommon
<i>Falco rufigularis</i>	2	Uncommon
<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	3(?)	Uncommon
<i>Accipiter bicolor</i>	3	Uncommon
<i>Accipiter erythronemius</i>	3	Uncommon
<i>Micrastur semitorquatus</i>	3	Uncommon

This Falconry Normative will also establish the degrees of falconers:

1st Degree - Apprentices Falconer: to obtain this degree the person has to make a one year trainee period assisting a Senior or Master falconer. After that, the falconer can handle common species of first degree difficulty, and the year after he will learn to train 2nd degree difficulty species.

2nd Degree - Junior Falconer: Who already have two years of experience with a 1st and 2nd degree training difficulty raptors.

3rd Degree - Senior Falconer: Who has at least four years of experience with 1st and 2nd degree training difficulty raptors, and had demonstrated enough ability to handle 3rd degree raptors;

4th Degree - Master Falconer: Who has at least seven years of experience on Falconry capable of handling and training 4th degree raptors (rare species). He can also participate of re-introduction programs.

We have Laws about capturing, keeping, using and studying wildlife. To preserve the remaining natural habitats, the Brazilian Government has been creating several Federal and State Conservation Units to protect our remaining bio-diversity from man itself, where any kind of hunting, chasing and catching is illegal, and depending on the Environment status, any man's activity.

Even representing one of the biggest tropical weather bio-diversity, we have several of wildlife species in danger of extinction and in phase of extinction. Because of that, several committees were created by our Federal Environment Department to elaborate conservation protocols for some of our most endangered ones, for example the Spixii Protocol, the Hyacinth Macaw Protocol and the Marine Turtles Project - TAMAR. Bird's researchers have demonstrated that some of our raptors are locally endangered because of illegal deforestation, intentional burns, illegal gold mining, and enlargement of our cities, and even with three raptors species endangered of extinction, we still don't have a raptor committee.

In general terms, we can say that the Brazilian Association of Falconers has constructed along these years a good relationship with some Associations and State Departments related to environment issues. Know that our Association is one of the newest members of IAF, the kind support of IAF, CIC, NAFA and the South African Falconry Association will help us to discuss the future of Falconry as a sustainable hunting sport with our Environment Departments.

Marc Petroff  
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 Brazilian Association of Falconers and Preservation of Birds of Prey - ABFPAR  
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# The Hunting and Care of Shortwings in South Africa

by Greg Jean Jacques

The subject is vast and cannot all be covered in a couple of pages of a magazine article. I hasten to add that I do not consider myself an expert on the subject of Shortwings and I would say there are very few so called experts in the world. Particularly in South Africa because of the myriad of facets to all aspects of training, hunting, general management and captive breeding of the diverse Shortwings we have in South Africa.

What I have endeavoured to do is cover relevant topics and revisit what most of us already know but tend to forget. The format is meant to be thought provoking and lead to discussion and /or debate amongst the various club members who fly Shortwings.

What does the keeping and hunting of a Shortwing mean to the individual?

Here are some thoughts:

Solitude - Getting in touch with nature and the outdoors. The enjoyment of the hunt, getting out and walking, the exercise and de-stressing. Enjoying good dog work, the scenery and the winter sunsets.

Engineering exciting slips and quality flights. Pursuit of difficult and evasive quarry. Chasing flat out, to the limit of its captive capabilities, putting on the turbo and really shunting. Giving some spectacular aerial maneuvers. Keeping and maintaining the hawk in fine condition body, feathers and psychologically.

The understanding of the various Shortwing personality traits, some pleasant, others not so.

The aim for Austringers should be to really enjoy their Shortwings around the home, in the mews and in the veld. Try to derive full benefit of their capabilities. I would encourage Austringers to try new techniques, different training methods and new equipment. The sport needs innovative ideas and above all, get out there and hunt your bird hard. In doing so, seeing them do some exciting and spectacular stuff from both the small and large Shortwings.

Definitely, one of the keys to keeping Shortwings and getting enjoyment from them is to understand them. Why it behaves and reacts in a certain way or to a particular situation.

Their temperaments differ greatly depending on the subspecies, or at which age they are taken, how they are raised and how they are trained. Before taking a bird, Austringers must decide on which type of bird they wish to fly, whether an imprint, large Eyas or a Soar Hawk. The Austringer is best advised to follow the tried and tested route as far as various birds, raising and training techniques are concerned.

Once you have your bird, you need to understand why it behaves and reacts in a certain way or to a particular situation or when it is in a certain physical condition. A Shortwing particularly, has moods, likes and dislikes as well as quirks and idiosyncrasies. Always remember it is a finely tuned and complex living creature and consequently, you need to be consciously aware of the hawk's behavioural traits. This comes over time with proper observations and handling the hawk in different situations. You need to tap into its psyche, so to speak.

Question your own approach: Why does the hawk get uptight and bait?  
What needs to be avoided or removed?  
Behaviour on the way to the veld

Behaviour in the veld

What positive aspects, things the bird enjoys?  
What are you really enjoying and work on that?

Things to be aware of:

Perch placement (is the hawk sitting comfortably, no baiting)  
Vehicles, Mowers, Wheel barrows, Hose pipes and sprinklers  
Strange dogs and people  
Don't take things for granted  
Field meets (strange environment and lots of different activity)  
Birds' safety (PARAMOUNT)

## GENERAL HEALTH

Diet. There are various theories some proven some not. Certainly, I would advocate that there is no substitute for the real thing. Good quality food must go a long way to covering off the daily nutritional requirements of a hawk as far as the ingestion, digestion and absorption of vitamins and minerals which are essential to the hawk's entire metabolism and general well being.

All vitamins are essential, acting as catalysts for their metabolism and general body functions. They are also catalysts for converting food into energy and healthy body tissue i.e. body mass, muscle and a strong skeletal structure.

I think it is important to note that wild hawks suffer from deficiencies by living off a specific diet. The same certainly applies to captive hawks. It is important to feed a varied and quality diet and in so doing, avoid what is termed a Micro Nutritional Deficiency which can have a bearing on a hawk's demeanour, well being or flying capabilities and ability to recover quickly after exertion, while at the same time ward off disease and infections.

Vitamin deficiencies or Latent Hypovitaminosis have a major bearing on hawks' general health.

Vitamins B & C are directly involved in the conversion of food into energy and body tissue.

Vitamin B complex directly involved in the digestion process.

Vitamin A deficiency: It must be noted, plays a major role in hawk ailments and disease and susceptibility to infection.

While caring for your Shortwing, Austringers need to be more alert to their condition and needs. Sudden stress for instance, a hawk fresh out of the moult and just taken up, or a strange dog or cat arrives on the scene.

The hawk's body releases anti stress hormones. The energy requirements for this hormone to be released rises right up, so there are sudden big demands on the hawk's system. Depending on the hawk's physical condition, (ability to cope or its inability to cope) the system may simply shut down and the hawk expires.

We hear about it all too often, so again, I say, be aware of stressful situations and their pending dangers and take the necessary precautions.

Another point worth noting on diet and food quality which we overlook from time to time. Make sure the food is always clean and fresh, the entrails, stomachs, livers and crops carefully removed.

Hawk food should be defrosted overnight in the fridge, never allow flies to settle on the food. You never know where they have been and with fly blown food, you run the risk of salmonella or other harmful organisms.

Make sure hawking bags or jacket pouches and gauntlets are scrubbed clean and disinfected periodically. It may be a good idea to keep hawk food in plastic bags in your hawking bags so it does not come into contact with potentially harmful or old and decaying food matter.

Fits in Shortwings can be attributed to either, poor diet, vitamin and mineral deficiency or a low physical condition (underfed or undernourished).

From a modern falconry view point, general management and health perspective there should be no excuse for a hawk to have a fit and die from any of the above. Should this be the case it is simply bad management and a lack of care for the hawk.

Another cause of fits is low blood sugar levels and here again we have stories of hawks taken up out of the moult and immediately having their food intake cut to facilitate reducing their weight down to flying weight. The hawk at the same time is releasing stress hormones using up energy and its blood sugar plummets (Hypoglycemia) because of low food intake and exertion from baiting.

If one sees a hawk under similar circumstances looking a bit out of sorts after exertion, it must be fed immediately to help restore its blood sugar levels and in essence save its life.

Hawks are particularly susceptible to contracting Aspergillosis at this time and in this state or condition. One needs to guard against this by keeping food intake up and stress to a minimum. Aspergillosis is sighted as being opportunistic and manifests itself in hawks suffering from stress or those in low condition. It is also recognized that long standing deficiencies of vitamins A and B1 are involved in the predisposition of Aspergillosis.

Let us take a small Shortwing that is flying well but has a latent deficiency. Perhaps its ability to recover and fly again may be slow. This is often perceived as a hawk having an off day. To top this any physiological stress or cutting of its weight slightly to improve the quality of flights will make it vulnerable to disease.

On the other hand, a hawk that performs consistently well and chases hard and fast and can keep it up slip after slip, is in my opinion, in tip top condition and in fine fettle and what a pleasure it is to behold and witness in action.

## CONDITIONING

One of the keys to successful Shortwing management and hunting is to attempt to keep your hawk as heavy or as high as possible within its flying weight or flight weight band. They can be increased or decreased within the band. Best performances are usually achieved on the rising side of the band. I think it is important to stress and understand that the higher a small Shortwing is, the stronger it will fly and the more persistent it will be. In prime condition they are also more resistant to disease and infections.

I find the more pectoral muscle they have the better their metabolism and the more they can eat without putting on weight and the harder they fly and hunt, showing stamina on the long haul flights. Conditioning is vital.

On the opposite side of this scale, if a hawk is slightly on the low side before going hunting, it can be fed a few choice tit bits to get its digestive process and metabolism going and at the same time restore and maintain adequate sugar levels. The hawk should perform to par. Make sure it is well fed after serious exertion or stress.

Small Shortwings consume an average of 25% of their body weight daily. The smaller the body mass and the colder the temperatures, the more food they need to consume. Be aware of their food requirements during cold snaps and the dead of winter, particularly if they are housed outside at night and sleep close to the ground and temperatures are below freezing.

Large Shortwings like a Black Spa female consume approximately 16% of their body weight on a daily basis. I think it is important to treat each hawk separately. Weight, metabolism, tameness, trust and conditioning are all part of the Shortwing maintenance equation. Therefore it is imperative not only to improve the diets of our hawks, but their general well being, which will certainly enhance their performance and life expectancy.

## MOULTING

Mews and environment to be completely free from disturbances and stress for the hawk. This goes a long way in ensuring a rapid and clean moult, with the hawk coming out crisp and clean, with no fright traces or blemishes and every feather it is place. There is nothing smarter than a freshly moulted Shortwing. Mews need to be kept clean to keep bacteria levels down. Water baths should be flushed and cleaned at least twice a week particularly in summer.

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## PERSONAL SATISFACTION

Austringers' enjoyment of the sport and sense of satisfaction depends largely on how he perceives the sport and the challenges it has to offer him in achieving goals over time. When the challenge, what ever it is, and the enjoyment cease, your desire to partake and be active will die as well. I am of the opinion that when one sees a perfectly turned out Shortwing, really impress in the hunting situation and at full tilt after quarry, this is a direct reflection of the Austringers dedication and aspiration for the sport. Shortwings can really impress at times and it is these memorable occasions that must be re-engineered and repeated regularly. One should cast a critical eye here and really try to improve the quality of the flights when ever possible.

The complaint that one hears regularly in all the clubs, coming from members, particularly new members, is that they are not invited to join hunting parties and complaints that the "Club" does not do enough to encourage its new members and get them up to speed.

This is a very real complaint! Let us look at the definition of a "Club":

"..an association of persons united by a common interest (Falconry/Hawking) meeting periodically for shared activity or socially.."

"..all having something in common and sharing this common interest with one another.."

I say to older members, be aware of this and try to encourage new comers to tag along to see and learn. You will quickly see how keen they are by the times they take up on your offer. To the new comers, my experience is that you must initiate inviting yourself. The more enthusiasm and commitment you show the more the dedicated Austringers and Falconers will assist you and get you on board.

Young Austringers, my advice to you is to get out with guys that can motivate you to do better. Use good hawks as your yardstick for standards. Look at what the other guys are achieving and aim to build on their success or standards. Talk and share ideas, learn different techniques, be observant about their falconry equipment and new innovations, mews facilities and general hygiene and care of their hawks.

When out hunting with experienced Austringers take note of what is around you. Guys that hunt often, know where to find quarry. There are subtle nuances you can pick up, little tricks of the trade. Ask questions as to why things are done in a certain way. It is up to you to work on picking up these things and learning and enjoying the sport. After all it is your Club, so it is up to you what you make of it or contribute to it.

Please remember this.

The basic groundwork, daily routines and disciplines you establish and apply to your Shortwing will stand you in very good stead for when you embark on flying a more expansive Longwing.

Training and hunting should be orientated to encouraging and realizing the best field performance of which the hawk is physically capable of in a captive hunting scenario.

In closing, one must remember that only a true Austringer will give so much for so little in return.

I wish everyone good action packed hawking and treat your hawks with care, empathy and understanding.

# I Knew Rudi De Wet

by Roger Neilson

In October 1956, when I was 15 years old, I found and took an Eyas Greater Kestrel. She became very tame, followed me around like a dog and, except when on the fist (or shoulder or head) lived in a state of permanent hack. I had long Dutch jesses on her, by which I could hold her on the fist, but all attempts to tie her down with a leash were fiascos as I was blissfully unaware of the role played by a swivel.

During my December 1956 school holidays, I wandered into a gun shop in downtown Johannesburg, by the name of Rosettenskin and Folke, with the kestrel and asked a distinguished-looking gentleman, behind the counter, for a packet of "Marksman" No. 1 air-rifle pellets. Mr Leo Rosettenstein (the gentleman behind the counter) gave me Rudi de Wet's telephone number and I phoned Rudi from a "tickey box" that evening. With generosity that was typical, Rudi met me the following day and drove me to a leather goods shop and advised me to buy Rempie thongs for leashes, dog-leash swivels, a piece of calf skin for jesses, and then drove me home where we jessed and leashed the kestrel. I remember thinking that "real falconry" must be quite expensive, as I didn't get much change out of 10 shillings!

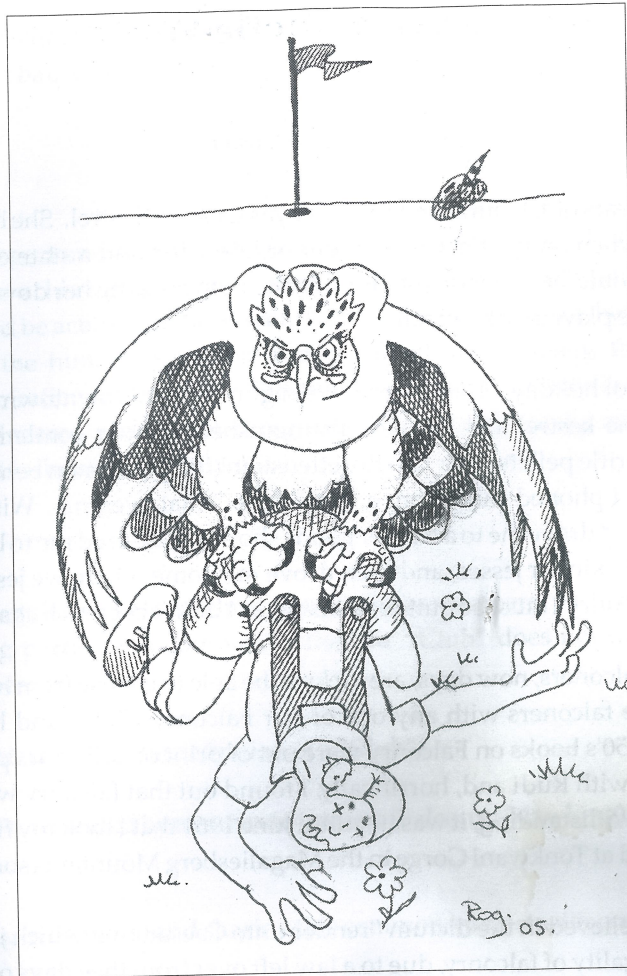
I often think that South African falconers, now days, are lucky to be able to choose from half-a-dozen falconry manuals, on being inducted as apprentice falconers with any one of our Falconry Clubs, and having the right to fly hawks, legally, for falconry. Back in the 50's books on Falconry were out of print or collectors pieces. The nearest thing to an apprenticeship was to tag along with Rudi and, horrifically, I found out that falconry was illegal in the Transvaal and Free State. "Tagging along" notwithstanding, it was not until June 1961 that I took my first head of wild quarry, with a haggard Lannerette that I trapped at Tonkwani Gorge in the Magaliesberg Mountains some 4 ½ years later.

Rudi, as a practicing Christian, believed in the dictum "render unto Caesar, that which is Caesar's", i.e. he had respect for the law. In the case of the illegality of falconry, due to a law left over from the days of the Boer republics, that was designed to stop the "Uitlanders" from enjoying cock-fighting and dog-fighting on the Sabbath, he believed that in this case, Caesar was an ass, and that he could do a lot of good by converting teenagers to falconry.

Rudi's big loves were our 3 large eagles, The Black Eagle, the Martial Eagle and the Crowned Hawk-Eagle. He persisted with these difficult and downright dangerous creatures for many years. Back in 1956, Rudi had a huge female Crowned Eagle (*Stephanoaetus coronatus*) who rejoiced in the name of "Stephie". Stephie tipped the scales at 15 pounds plus and was very beautiful in a deadly way. Rudi's wife made Stephie a dummy Guinea fowl out of navy blue dress material with white polka dots. The dummy fowl was placed on skids and pulled along the ground with a long leash for Stephie to catch. Early one Sunday morning, (before church) Rudi was out with Stephie and "the fowl" on the Maraisburg golf course. He had thrown her off to take stand in a huge Gum Tree and did his thing with the Guinea fowl lure. Stephanie peeled out of the tree, whacked the lure, and mantled menacingly over it. Two young German lads, clad in 'Lederhosen', white stockings and green hats, vaguely reminiscent of Robin Hood, were out on the golf course for an early morning walk.

At the sight of Stephanie zooming out of her tree and whacking the guinea-fowl lure, they came running across the green to where Rudi was standing with a still unsecured Stephanie. Stephanie did not like strangers. Rudi tried to warn them but he did not speak German and their English was halting. Stephanie left her lure and went straight for the foremost lad, who, realizing that he had made a serious tactical error, turned tail to flee. Fifteen pounds of Stephanie accelerated to near 40 M.P.H., stuck the young man on his leather-clad posterior and sent him sprawling. Every time he tried to gain his feet, Stephanie beat him down onto all fours with powerful blows of her wings. According to Rudi, he made quite a lot of progress down the fairway with Stephanie riding him, until, eventually; he collapsed under a triumphant Crowned Eagle. He didn't move or say a word after that as Rudi had one hell of a job removing Stephanie from his backside. Apart from grazed knees and elbows, he was unhurt, having been saved serious damage by his 'Lederhosen'. He left white, shaken and speechless, Rudi never saw him again. One young fellow Rudi was unable to convert to falconry. I guess it changes things a bit if you are the quarry.

See overleaf



"Stephie"  
See Page 53



Bobwhite Quail



Coopers Hawk



Coopers Hawk

# The Bobwhite and the Cooper's Hawk

## A southern legacy

*Ian Tchagra Little*

One crisp, early morning in the open park-like pine forests of the southern United States. Half an hour before the subtropical sun begins to warm the forest floor, the first stirrings of life can be heard as the Rufous-sided Towhees have an in-depth 'discussion' in the form of loud penetrating whistles. This, many think, is the sign for the creatures of the forest to begin their preparations for the daily battle for survival. It took a while to get over my innate hatred of pine trees. However seeing native species operating in what is to them native forest helped me temper my prejudices.

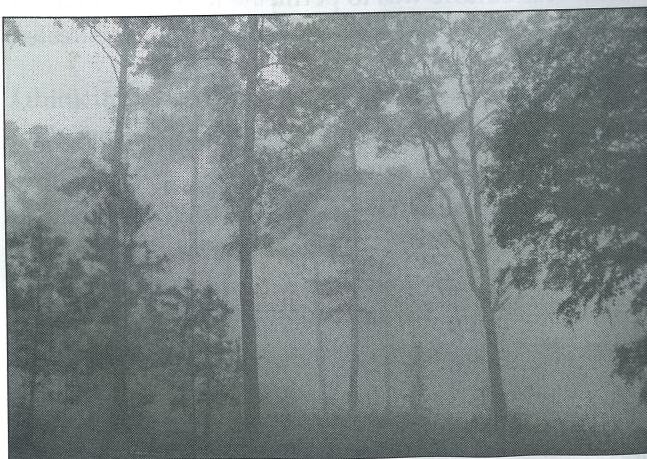
With the break of day and the rising of the thick mist erupts the loud and proud koi-lee calls of the Bobwhite Quail. These quails are well known to the locals and are revered as gamebirds; for centuries they have been hunted with guns and pointing dogs. This bird is, perhaps ironically, the main reason that the Red Hills region of northern Florida and southern Georgia has survived in a relatively pristine condition. But people are not the only animals interested in these bite-sized gamebirds of the under-storey vegetation. Way up in the sparse canopy of the towering Longleaf Pines sits a predator as silent and elusive as any imaginable. In the early morning light it takes to the wing and soars silently, just above the canopy, some 20 metres above the forest floor. In size, the Cooper's Hawk is slightly larger than an African Goshawk, yet in nature it is renowned as being as foul tempered and highly strung as our notorious Black Sparrowhawk. The long, thin toes reflect this raptor's avian specialisation; it feeds almost entirely on small birds caught on the wing.

The hawk flies rapidly over the canopy, watching the forest under-storey for signs of panic in small birds - inevitably this is exactly what happens. On the occasion I saw this unfold, however, I was the reason for the panic rather than the hawk. Driving along the narrow winding paths through Tall Timbers Research Station in the early morning, one frequently turns a corner to be greeted with a flurry of wings as a covey of quail flushes and dashes for thick cover.

It was on one of these occasions that I saw a Cooper's Hawk capitalize on my disturbance. Having seen the hawk ten minutes earlier, I was following it from below and, as the quail took to the air, so the hawk folded her wings and plummeted through the canopy to casually scoop up a bobwhite in her long, elegant talons. The movement was so smooth and calculated that in retrospect I have to wonder who was following whom.

On many other occasions I was blessed with further sightings of this majestic predator, however no sighting would match the lightning fast attack witnessed initially. On one occasion I even caught a glimpse of something much zippier and was chuffed to get a good look at a little Sharp-shinned Hawk, the identical yet much tinier cousin of the coopers.

Cooper's Hawks and Bobwhite Quail however, are not the only special creatures to inhabit these woods. There is also the massive Pileated Woodpeckers and its diminutive relative, the little Nuthatches. Along with many weird and wonderful reptiles, plants and insects, it is truly the antithesis of what I expected to find in the United States of America.



## To Persecute Or Not To Persecute

by Trevor Oettel

"For two million years we were hunters; for ten thousand years we were farmers; for the last one hundred years we have been trying to deny it all, except for the fervent moments when we try to recapture it all, or do both at once".  
Stephen Budiansky "The Covenant of the Wild. Why Animals chose domestication"

Having been involved in falconry for over thirty years, I have witnessed a fair amount of things over the years. It struck me the other day how the lives of falconers are so entwined with the birds of prey we love so much, and how this has been the rhythm of life over the centuries.

The origins of falconry have been debated for hundreds of years and I can quite comfortably say that it all started as a means of placing extra protein on the table. With improved agriculture and the domestication of various animals many people found that the time spent hawking could not be justified by the amount of food placed in the larder. Hunting became a leisure activity and not a means of survival. With the advent of the shotgun, falconry as a means of supplementing the protein requirements lost even more popularity and entered the realm of being a recreational sport, usually associated with the aristocrats and became known as the "sport of kings". The nobility were the only ones who had the luxury of leisure time.

Throughout this time birds of prey were revered and admired, and so too were the men and woman who trained our ancestors' hawks of choice. Birds of prey were protected and anyone caught harming them or their nest sites were severely punished, often with their lives. Trained raptors were often given special mention because of their individual feats of merit. Like sport star of today, many trained hawks earned their place in the halls of fame and legend. Again, to interfere with another man's hawk was often punishable by death; I think sometimes death was a forgone certainty. Ever wondered where the expression "a pound of flesh" comes from? In a nutshell if you lived in medieval England and were foolish enough to (or falsely accused of) steal someone's hawk the compassionate Brits, unlike some of their European counterparts, did not put one to death. They had a far more humane solution to discourage anyone from stealing a hawk. The offending party was staked down and was subjected to having a hawk (often the bird one stole) eat a "pound of flesh" off ones chest. Depending on the species of bird this could take a few days. Not having modern day antibiotics, one's fate was pretty much sealed. (Now I know why there are no Van Der Merwe's in the UK; they died out by natural selection, as they had a fetish for stealing Merlins.)

The royal falconers had a special place within court, and, like the birds they flew, were often revered. If the falconer had out done himself during the days hawking, he would be honoured by his royal master by receiving a royal standing ovation and a place of honour in the banquet hall that evening.

As the art of "wing-shooting" gained in popularity, birds of prey lost their status and were seen as a threat to the sportsmen and farmers. Raptors were shot on sight, trapped and had their nests, eggs and chicks destroyed. They became common vermin, and often bounties were placed on them. This culture was to permeate to other species of wildlife as well, from other predators to herbivores when they were perceived to be a threat to sport, domesticated animal health or agricultural interests.

With the urbanisation of mankind in the 20th Century wildlife started to take on a whole new identity and a new species was born: the "animal lover" better known as "bunny huggers". A group of people so detached from nature and the circle of life, yet hell-bent on imposing their rainbow tinted clouded view on their fellow man. Wildlife took on a new significance and was placed on a pedestal to be saved at all costs. Many species, because of emotions they can solicit from the public, became "charismatic mega-fauna". Certain species were excluded because of the collective agreement they were pest species i.e. rats and certain insects etc. However to appease our urban conscience we strive to find more humane methods of killing these pests with "environmentally friendly poisons" and traps. All true animal lovers and conservationists were suddenly branded as exploiters of wildlife, and were seen as lower than Shark excrement. Falconers, who for centuries were revered, over-night became public enemy number one and are seen by some as one of the greatest threats to the future survival of raptors.

Things were to change and Falconers by the nature of their sport, patiently and persistently have weathered the "anti movement", and today once again are internationally recognised for the role they do and can play in the conservation of birds of prey. Through the hard work of many international falconers, falconry is now recognised by various international bodies and agreements. Sadly the same status has not yet been afforded to the local South African falconer, but in the words of Bob Dylan 'the times they are a changing'.

Often a jaundiced view of falconers is portrayed to the public to further a "conservationists" view and standing within conservation circles. A few years ago Ron Hartley tackled Johaan Van Jaarsveld at the launch of ARIC (African Raptor Information Centre) the forerunner of the Raptor Conservation Group (now called Bird of Prey Working Group) of the Endangered Wildlife Trust. Van Jaarsveld publicly bashed falconers as one of the main threats to raptor conservation. Ron wanted to know from him "what about habitat destruction and pesticides, the real main threats?" Johaan felt that this was not what the public wanted to hear.

Prof. Gerhard Verdoorn, for many years was on a crusade against S.A. falconers. However, in line with the respect for falconers by his international audiences, he publicly praised the work of the ZFC (Ron Hartley) and Jemina Parry-Jones. In 1996/7 he stated inter alia in a Sunday Independent newspaper article that "falconers are an abhorrent species, and Mossat (the Israel Secret Service) should be put onto falconers".. I'm pleased to see from Verdoorn's first (that I know of) newspaper article since his appointment as the new Director of Birdlife SA, that his view of S.A. falconers is changing.

The South African raptor world is often steeped in intrigue and rumour mongering amongst the various role-players. Not so long ago I was approached by a provincial conservation department on an ongoing rumour that Tim Wagner was not having the claimed success with breeding Peregrine Falcons, but was stealing them from the wild and funneling them through his breeding project. I'm pleased to say I was able to put this malicious rumour to rest, and in fact turned the cards on the originators of this filth. Having a relatively small raptor community within the country, this slanderous gossip- mongering has a tendency to spread like wildfire both within the conservation circles as well as with the public.

At the recent Taita Falcon Workshop held in Hoedspruit, falconers were once again attacked because of the perception that 1) Taitas are highly sought after within the falconry community as falconry birds and 2) that falconers are falling over themselves to hybridise Taita Falcons. A story was related to the delegates of how falconers were hanging out of a helicopter trying to "steal" Taita Falcon chicks. I'm pleased to say that the person was suitably embarrassed when Dr. Andrew Jenkins came to the defence of falconers and also pointed out to him that this was absolute nonsense as it was he (Andrew) conducting research on Taita and Peregrine Falcons in the area. I would hate to know how many people have been told this "fact" of falconers over the years.

I'm pleased to say that a wind of change is sweeping through our conservation community, and the role that falconers have to play in the conservation of our raptors is finally been recognised by our fellow conservationists. Many have criticized the role that our Bird of Prey Centres have to play and some very harsh words have been levelled against these institutions. The truth of it all is that these centres are often the forerunners in changing the public perception of falconry and the role that falconers play in conservation. Please don't get me wrong I'm not saying these centres are falconry centres, but they are run by falconers and falconry principles are used.

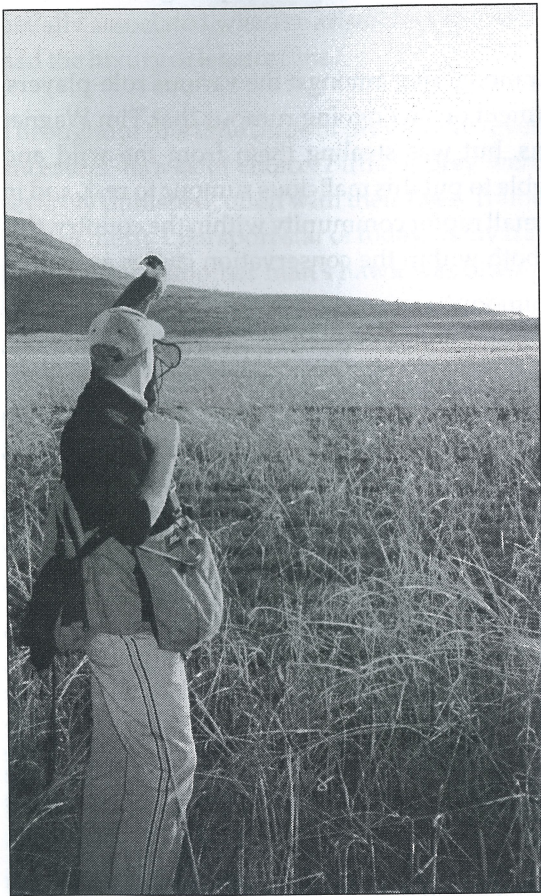
I think the various provincial falconry clubs committees should be thanked for all their hard work in building bridges with their respective provincial conservation bodies. The role that falconry can play in the conservation of South Africa's raptors was acknowledged and appreciated by the various Conservation Departments at last year's Gariep "Future of Raptor Conservation in Southern Africa" workshop. This was again evident at the 1st AGM of the Bird of Prey Working Group of the EWT held in the Johannesburg area in March this year.

Our very own Adrian Lombard has made some unbelievable inroads into the world of detractors of falconry, and I believe we all owe Adrian our sincere gratitude. SAFA as well as a few other falconry friendly organizations are now part of the EWT's Bird of Prey Working Group. At this year's AGM, Adrian and I, were pleasantly surprised when one of last year's workshop "anti-falconry" delegates, after a year has become pro falconry and, in fact, now owns and has read a few falconry books.

Falconers will be represented on all regional Bird of Prey Working Group committees. Unfortunately we do not have a SAFA representative on the "Advisory Board" of the Bird of Prey Working Group. I'm pleased to say that we do have a falconer on this board in the form of Ben Hoffman, however. Congratulations to Ben on his appointment and I'm sure Ben will look after our interests.

As these wind of change move through the conservation world within South Africa, I believe we should maintain the momentum and, as falconers, became more actively involved in mainstream conservation. Join your local bird club or wildlife society and contribute as an active conservationist. Our critics are finally being silenced, and, as raptors have regained their place in society, so to have the South African falconers.

BE PROUD



*Austringers and Falconers*

*Tweespruit 2004*

## Rudi De Wet

Rudi started falconry at the age of 17 in 1945. I remember meeting Rudi when I was in standard 8, in 1956, and he became my mentor.

Whilst studying Chinese to be able to spread the gospel in China he read up on Chinese falconry methods and this was enough to cultivate his passion for birds of prey until his death. He was a master in manning a raptors and understood their thinking. Rudi trained eagles, falcons and shortwings during many years of practicing the old art.

He never went to China but completed his studies in Johannesburg to become a Reverend in the Baptist Church. Whilst serving God for 20 years, Rudi also spent three years as a preacher at St Helena Island. Rudi also had a passion for sailing. He designed several sailing boats and sailed one of them around the Island.

His paintings adorn many a falconer's home. He and his lovely wife Frieda lived for many years by selling their paintings at exhibitions all over RSA.

Rudi was a man with great vision and many passions. He also practiced homeopathy and I often made use of his little pills for a sick hawk or for myself. Classical music played by Rudi on his violin was music from heaven. He could also play the trumpet like a master.

With his great charm and sense of humor, Rudi could keep the attention of many a listener.

Rudi sadly passed away on 29 December 2004 and will be remembered and missed by all his friends, falconers and family.

*Paul Venter*



*Early morning success - Francois Breedts' Zin Zan*

## Ron Hartley: Southern Africa's Falconry Ambassador

There cannot be a single person, with an interest in raptors in Southern Africa, who has not been shocked and saddened by the tragic death of Ron Hartley. The loss of his vibrant personality has left a hole in the lives of all privileged to call themselves his friend. Ron was a man who lived and breathed falconry. His enormous enthusiasm and energy allowed him to cross the divides between falconers, ornithologists and conservators, bringing together the whole raptorophile community and leaving a legacy of unity that we currently enjoy in Southern Africa.

Ron was born in Livingston, Northern Rhodesia in 1950 and was brought up in small mining towns around Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). His mother was killed in a motor accident, which left Ron and his sister in a situation where they often had to fend for themselves at a very early age. When Ron started senior school he went to Plumtree, which is a boarding school in the south west of Zimbabwe. He excelled academically and was a natural sportsman. Ironically, Plumtree was a major sporting rival of Falcon College where Ron later spent much of his teaching career. It was at Plumtree that Ron started falconry. This, as many of us did in that era, by finding a bird in the bush and trying to train it according to information that he may have heard or read, with very little guidance. His father tried to discourage this "fad" by releasing the initial birds that were brought home in the holidays. He failed to damp Ron's enthusiasm and had to accept his son's passion.

Ron completed senior school and went to Pietermaritzberg University in Natal on a teaching grant. On attaining his B.A. Ron came to the University of Rhodesia to complete his teaching diploma. I clearly remember the day, arriving as a freshman in a university residence seething with the political turmoil of Rhodesia in the 1970s, and finding an eagle perched in the courtyard. I went in search of its owner and so met Ron.

Our common enthusiasm made us firm friends from then on. Ron had found the eagle in its nest, while he was working in the bush on a vacation job. It appeared to be truly stupid, in the way some eyas eagles are, and we decided to put it out to hack in the university grounds. It promptly flew away. We spent the next few days searching for the wretched bird. We were delighted to receive a phone-call to tell us that there was an eagle in a tree near the Law Faculty library, so shot down there, armed with a Balchatri and mouse. Sure enough, there was an eagle, but not the one we had lost. An immature female African Hawk-Eagle, complete with traditional jesses, came down to our trap and mantled aggressively over the mouse, waiting to be picked up. Despite our searching, we never found the previous owner, and this bird became Oswa, a legend in her time, and Ron's introduction to the Zimbabwean falconry community. Oswa stayed with Ron for a further 8 years, taking an impressive score of night-lamped hares and giving immense fun to the many people who accompanied Ron on his "Bunny Hunts". Oswa was finally killed by a Civet Cat and was replaced by Cilla, who has been Ron's hunting companion for the past 22 years and is still going strong.

Ron progressed to flying Black Sparrowhawks and flew a series of exceptional muskets; I recall Penga (Shona for mad) Maverick and Bentley. All his birds hunted with enthusiasm, were remarkably steady, made to the hood, and renowned for their "kamikaze" tactics on quarry. The awesome reputation enjoyed by Black Spars, internationally, is due in large part to Ron's achievements with these birds.

He took up a teaching post at Umtali Boys' High School, in Zimbabwe's eastern districts in 1973. During the years of the Bush War, Ron played his part. He later moved to Falcon College in the Matebeleland province of Zimbabwe in 1983 where he was to stay until 2004 when he moved to South Africa. His teaching career progressed and he was made House Master of Chubb House at Falcon College. He married Deirdre in 1983 and they were blessed with a daughter, Emma born in 1991.

With time, his falconry developed; a brief interlude with Lanners preceded a succession of stunning peregrines, flown singly and in casts. He was the President of the Zimbabwe Falconry Club from 1984 to 1998. Ron was a perfectionist with meticulous attention to detail. He had the innate ability to interpret and interact with his birds. This is the recipe for success in falconry, when coupled with absolute dedication.

He was an outstanding teacher. He loved literature and could share and transmit this to others. I recall, as a student, sitting spell-bound, while Ron read the story of the great hunt from Tolstoy's "War and Peace", and being stimulated to go on and read the rest of the book. He started the Falconry Club at Falcon College that has won acclaim around the world. This allowed boys, who had demonstrated a real enthusiasm for the sport, to learn the ropes under a true master of the art. Ron loved this interaction. He was a strict taskmaster who did not settle for "second best" but maintained the enthusiasm of his pupils. As a result some excellent falconers were produced who continue to practice his art.

Ron's enthusiasm and love for raptors extended beyond hunting with them. He continued the raptor observations started at Falcon College by Peter Steyn, and became involved field research with broad interests. His involvement with the Taita Falcons, in association with the Peregrine Fund, made him the acknowledged expert on this species. More recently he extended his research efforts to Crowned Eagles. He has left an impressive list of over 100 publications. Under his leadership, the Zimbabwean falconers became involved in a number of raptor research and conservation projects. He continued this research work, in association with the Peregrine Fund, on relocating to South Africa and his involvement was eagerly sought in local issues.

Ron leaves his wife and daughter, his sister, and innumerable friends. We, who are left, struggle to understand our loss. Peter Steyn aptly quoted John Donne's famous sermon, at Ron's memorial service:

.....any mans death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind;  
And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls;  
It tolls for thee.

Ron's death has diminished us all. He has left shoes that are too big to wear, but his work and efforts must continue.

*Adrian Lombard*



*Ron with a cast of peregrine tiercels - Tweespruit 2004*



*Ron Hartley and Falcon College schoolboys - A successful "bunny" hunt (see page 60)*



*Black Sparrowhawk on Crested Francolin - Painting by Rudi de Wet (See page 59)*