

## MANNING AND TRAINING

*The imprint/The Brancher,  
Carriage, Calling off, Weight*

If you are in a position to get an aviary bred eyass then you will be able to choose the time she is to be hand reared very accurately, with none of the bother of tree climbing and the organisation it involves. For the purpose of differentiating between the sexual and food imprint and, on the other hand, the eyass who is taken and allowed to develop unattended until hard penned, we will call the latter the brancher. After all, she will be the same in terms of wildness, except you will not have run the obvious risks involved in taking a brancher in the wild. As I have said previously, if your timing is not accurate and the birds make any attempt to fly, damage could be done. You could wind up with several young hawks scattered in different directions in the undergrowth below and impossible to find. For this reason I would never attempt to take a brancher in the wild, and I am sure the Wildlife Ranger would, quite rightly, object.

Whereas the imprints will be flying free about a week after being hard penned, the brancher will take somewhat longer by virtue of her wildness. So why, you may ask, take a brancher at all? Many experienced falconers get very fed up with the bad manners and juvenile antics of the imprint. They prefer the aloofness of the brancher, which rarely screams or mantles unless too low in condition. So the training just takes a short time longer as you have to introduce the young hawk to everything after she is hard penned. She will be very wild at this stage whereas the imprint will be taking everything totally for granted. The brancher, once manned, is quick to accept new and strange situations readily, provided you expose her to as much as possible immediately she is taken up for training. It is a mistake to man a hawk to the falconer and then to introduce her later to other people, dogs etc. Do it all at once and particularly with the dogs. Make a point of bringing your dogs with you into the mews on the very first day and every day afterwards. Also have someone else with you as often as possible and take turns at carriage. As



many changes in situations as possible is by far the best. I usually take a brancher for a day, then give her to Stephen to take home to his house which is a hive of activity. Brothers and young sisters all love to be in contact with the hawk and insist on handling it. Their favourite pastime, when not fishing, is playing pool in the garage and the young brancher is simply set down at the side of the pool table and allowed to watch the game. Next day I take her and the dogs all together for a drive. Using this method, of lots of activity and different people, mans a hawk to the extent that she is completely relaxed within three to four days.

Do not put the brancher out to weather on the bow perch until she has these three or four days to tame and relax, otherwise she will bate a lot and be difficult to approach.

The falconer who mans a hawk alone will find that she will settle for him readily but will refuse to accept new situations and even take a dislike to dogs. Then the problems arise when a group arrive to go hawking together. The shy hawk will take stand in a tree and even refuse to hunt.

In eastern countries falconers never man a hawk alone. An Iranian friend, who is a falconer, has told me of the newly caught sparrowhawk being taken to the local bazaar and walked up and down for several hours each day. The favourite place is where the coppersmiths and metalworkers are as this area is the noisiest and bustling with activity. In short, try not to be nervous about manning. The hawk will bate, but will get over it and will do herself no harm, so resolve to do it all at the same time. It is actually easier in the long term for both your nervous systems.

If it is a brancher to be tamed and you are sure that the eyass is hard penned, the time has come for 'taking up' and manning and training begins. The brancher will by now have lost all her down except perhaps for a tiny white tuft on her head. Otherwise her tail will be fully down



and she can fly about the mews. When you think all is ready you will have to go in and catch her up. To do this, wait until it is dark and then close up the outside weather flap. In this way the inside of the mews will be in total darkness, something you will not get on Summer nights. Then, with an assistant and with the aid of a torch you can slip inside and with no fuss simply pick her up off the perch. Examine her tail feathers to be sure they are not still in the blood. If they are, leave her back on the perch and check again in a week. Do not be tempted to take her up unless you are sure she is hard penned. If she is hard penned then proceed to fix on the anklets, bells, jesses, swivel and leash. She will not have been fed since the previous day and so will be due a meal. Once she is jessed up settle her on the glove and switch on the light. If you have no light inside then simply draw out the leash and settle her back on the perch for the night. Next morning quickly slip into the darkened mews and fit the leash into the swivel, settle her on your glove and have someone raise the weathering flap. She will, of course, bate, but settle her back and show her the meal - and all and sundry as well. By the end of the day she will satisfy her hunger and so progress is made. If you do have artificial lighting inside the mews then the manning can proceed into the small hours if desired. It would be well worth manning your brancher, in particular, indoors at first. As she will be very wild it would be too stressful to take her outdoors too soon. The imprint can be taken outdoors as soon as she is jessed up. But if you intend to fly the brancher at game over your dogs, then man her inside with them for at least three or four days.

The imprint, on the other hand, having being kept in the company of everyone for the last few weeks will need almost no manning as she will be familiar with everything. It is a very good idea to have taken the small trouble to fit anklets and bells on her the day she is placed in the mews for the final week to hard pen. Do not be misled by a cursory



glance at the tail feathers. Check for blood in the shafts right up to the very base of the feathers near the oil gland. In the morning of the day she is to be taken up she will hop readily onto the glove as she will have missed a meal. You are holding a pigeon wing firmly inside the glove and as she starts into it you, or your assistant, can insert the mews jesses into the anklets. Fix the swivel and leash and after tying the leash to the glove tassel, carriage and training at long last begins. Tying the leash to the glove tassel is something I now do out of habit because of mistakes in the past. As soon as I take a hawk on my glove, I always tie the leash with a falconer's knot to the tassel loop as a matter of course. This is a foolproof method and no matter what happens the worst result will be a bate. If, on the other hand, a hawk gets away from the glove and particularly with food, your problems will be compounded by the fact that she will be away with jesses looped together by the swivel and, every bit as lethal, a metre of braided nylon which would hold a spaniel. Picture the rest for yourself - and it has happened. So this is a practice you will either reject or accept, but I feel it is the best of habits to get into.

The objective then, at this first stage of taking up, is really carriage. You need to train the hawk to stand on the glove and tolerate being carried about whether there is a meal there or not. If this is your first sparrowhawk no doubt you will be as nervous as she is, but try to relax. I promise you all will work out in the end. As you walk along have the dogs run about too and meantime begin to slip the tiring down between your thumb and forefinger of the glove. Take your time and, above all, do not snatch it down. The object is to slip it out of sight without the hawk knowing you are taking it away from her. Take as much time as it requires. If she does see what you are up to she will make a very determined effort to get at it and may wind up getting your bare hand. The real danger is that she will begin to distrust you. All it takes, particularly on this first day out, is once, and the seeds of distrust have



been sown. Why not simply show her a small bechin at the beginning and not use a tiring at all? True, this will entice her onto the glove but it would not be sufficient to keep her occupied for carriage. She will get little, if any, meat from the pigeon wing but the plucking and tearing will exercise her and carriage can be prolonged for as long as you like. Every so often, if you want to occupy her reintroduce the tiring up through the space between your finger and your thumb, but again never let her see you either bring it there or take it away. So hide it completely in your right hand until it is well in the glove. The secret in getting a hawk to come smartly to the fist is to always have her reward, her meal, well down inside the glove held by your thumb. If you are consistent about this the hawk will fly to the glove rather than first having to see a piece of meat. I consider having to wave a whole day-old on a glove at a hawk poor training and lacking finesse, to say the least.

So, by keeping the meat down the hawk knows that it is inside the glove and will then fly to the fist without sight of a meal. Do not show enough of the wing, while she is on your fist, for her to get the bright and perfectly natural idea of getting a couple of talons into it. If this happens and you let her away with it she will, bit by bit, get a firmer grip and she may decide to fly off to the nearest tree for breakfast. Instead, of course, she will wind up hanging upside down off the glove by a securely tied leash refusing to let go of the tiring. It will be quite difficult to get her back on the glove mainly because her feet will be "bound" to her breakfast so she will not have anything free to grip the glove. This is what is known as a row, and there will be more than one or a sparrowhawk is not a sparrowhawk. If this does happen do not try to get the wing away from her, for you will not do that on your own anyway. Besides it is an indignity she must not suffer on her first day. Simply allow her to hang for a second and then place your hand cupped under her breast and lift her back onto the glove which can remain



cupped until she settles and decides to stand and get on with breakfast which you have a very firm grip on. All this sounds terrible, doesn't it? Not to worry. At this stage everything is as new to you as it is to your hawk. It is really worthwhile remembering that sparrowhawks are very good at throwing tantrums and are, in fact, renowned for it. So, do rest assured that anything that happens to you has already happened to me and lots of other falconers and one day you will laugh about it just like we do. Well, so long as she did not get away with the leash!

At some stage in the day, perhaps after an hour of carriage you and the hawk will need a rest. So, you can set her down on the bow perch if she is an imprint. Whether it is a brancher or imprint - but particularly for a brancher - position the bow perch with a wall or hedge behind. This does help the hawk to settle. It prevents people from walking behind her which, nonetheless, should be done after the first few days. The hawk will settle better with the bow perch just out from a wall or fence, as they do not like being out in the centre of a lawn. A hawk will not like being exposed low down only inches from the ground in the open, at least at first. This position is totally against its natural instincts and if you place her like this too soon, she may bate a lot and take a long time to settle. Also I would not recommend putting the brancher down on the bow perch or even taking her outdoors until at least the third day of carriage, as she would be too wild on the first two days. When the time comes do not take the hawk for her first day outdoors if it is windy or inclined to rain; conditions such as these will not help to settle her on the bow perch.

To set the hawk down and to take her up off the bow perch is again a process where good habits should prevail. Some falconers have a very bad habit when taking a hawk up of holding the jesses at the front and almost pulling the hawk forward onto the glove. This is literally forcing the hawk onto the glove. If you use the correct way, the hawk steps back onto the glove herself, it is a reflex action. Stepping back is, in fact, the



only way to set a hawk down or to take her up off any perch either in the mews, on the bow perch, or, in the case of falcons the block, for all it is one and the same. This is particularly so when a hawk might be hooded. To set the hawk down simply lower your glove to bring the hawk's legs, just above the talons, level with the top of the perch which must be behind her legs. Gently press the back of her legs to the padded perch. She will feel the perch slightly higher than she is and will automatically step back onto it. To take her off the perch place your gloved hand behind her legs. Press your forefinger gently to the back of her legs and the instant she feels it she will again step up and back, in the same way she did with the perch. Also do make sure when setting her down she is lifted down to the perch so that her tail is on the far side when she steps back. Also always hold a hawk above a perch when tying or untying a leash. If you hold her level with the perch she will almost certainly bate for it - at exactly the wrong moment. Now, have a break and a well earned cup of tea.

After a period of carriage, place a fresh bath in front of her and an hour or two of weathering will do her and you the world of good, especially if there is plenty of activity. Later, if she has taken a bath and dried herself, her appetite will be sharpened. You can take her up again for a further hour or two of carriage. This time give her the afternoon meal but in such a way that she works for it. Always have her working down into the well between your thumb and base of the fore-finger, talons gripping the glove leather not the meat. You must judge her attitude to you, her keenness to be carried. If she bates away from you while on the bow perch, leave her for a while longer and try again using the pigeon wing as enticement to step forward onto the glove. When doing this, always approach the bow perch at an angle, never straight on. Also approach the hawk with your outstretched glove, showing her the tiring by tilting your fist at the wrist so that she sees the purpose of your



approach. But as this is only the first approach no bad habits will be formed by a quick glimpse of the tiring once or twice. You should also lower yourself so that instead of towering over her you are nearly at her level. In this way she will learn easily and by degrees to jump to the fist within a short time. Try not to walk up directly to a hawk. It is better to walk up to within a few metres, watching the hawk's reaction all the time. If she stiffens up a bate may ensue. You do not want her to bate, so move out at an angle and approach with the glove nearest the hawk. Consider your size looming straight above her; physically and psychologically she is in a position totally unnatural to a hawk. She would much prefer to be looking down on you. A further note of warning, do not approach your hawk with the sun at your back, I guarantee a bate. It is unlikely that you will have any problems at all on the bow perch as far as the imprint is concerned. So, most of the advice on how to approach the bow perch will apply to the more nervous brancher. When the eyass has finished her evening meal, remove the leash, swivel, and jesses - inside the mews. Setting her down on the perch for the night, consider you have had a momentous day.

You can go through the same procedure for the next three or four days just to be sure the hawk is settling well. If you can get her jumping to the fist for tit bits increase the distance to a leash length. All through these carriage and feeding exercises blow your whistle or use a voice signal, particularly each time food is given. You will have been doing this with the imprint at meal times. The major advantage of the whistle is you can call your hawk out of very dense bushes even though she cannot see you. As soon as the young hawk is jumping a leash length instantly to the fist begin the creance. Do take note of how quickly she comes from the bow perch. If, for example, she has to be cajoled, reduce her feed if it is late afternoon and observe her humour the next day. Also you can replace the very rich pigeon with beef and so control her condition more easily.



For example, if you fed her a full crop on the day before and she is hesitant to jump a leash length instantly, then give her less that afternoon. The next day she will certainly be quicker. If she does come instantly reward her with half a dozen mouthfuls and proceed straight away with the creance. Tie the end of the creance with a falconer's knot to the swivel, then draw out the leash after undoing the free end from the glove tassel. Lay out the creance on a well mown lawn which, incidently, is by far the best place as there are no possible snags which will catch the line. Of course, in the heart-pounding excitement of the moment you have not forgotten to tie the other end of the creance to your empty hawking bag. I do not like to use a peg pushed into the ground because if the hawk overshoots she will be brought to a very abrupt stop by the peg. The hawking bag will drag and at least cushion her coming to a stop. Place the hawk on a post or fence and be very sure the looped jesses cannot become snagged on anything. A sudden stop, at this stage, can unnerve a sparrowhawk and set her back, doing little for her self confidence. Now walk away about ten feet or less and half turn raising your glove with a hidden reward. You should really be standing with your back almost to the hawk and looking at her over your left shoulder, glove outstretched. Whistle her up and if she comes instantly simply reward her with several bechins of pigeon breast or beef. Increase the distance now to fifteen feet and again whistle her up. If she is instantly on the wing she should be rewarded with a full meal on this occasion, giving as much as she will eat. On the other hand, if she does not come instantly check the time and, if possible, try her again an hour or even two later. Also check that she has cast as this will always sharpen a hawk's appetite. Never call off a hawk with your gloved fist in front of your face. If the hawk is at all hesitant this will intimidate her and is all that is required to prevent her coming. If she is over keen it could be dangerous.



The creance line should never be heavy, in fact, use light fly fishing line or braided sea fishing line. Remember it is not distance that matters as much as how quickly she comes, and it should be instantly, this is what counts. I remember folding up with laughter when I asked a, shall we say, slightly timid falconer how was his hawk coming and he replied "Great, she's coming forty metres on the creance!" That poor little hawk was more than keen when she would carry all that weight of line that distance for a tit bit. The creance can be overused, and I do not see that it has any further value if the hawk comes to the glove from fifteen feet as soon as the glove is raised. If you achieve this in one or two days she can simply miss a feed and be flown free the next morning. All during these exercises weigh the hawk just before flying and take note of her weight so that you can relate it to her behaviour each time. After each calling off session use the evening meal as a reward and an opportunity for extra carriage before she is put in the mews loose for the night.

As a rough guide for weight and reduction during training, suppose you have an eyass weighing nine ounces on the day she is taken up. She will be responding and flying free then at eight and a half or even eight and three quarter ounces. During the calling-off on the creance she might come instantly but overshoot and fly past your fist. Another trick the high sparrowhawk loves to indulge in is to skim the glove in the hope of snatching something and taking it to the nearest tree. This possibility is clearly another very good reason for never showing food on the glove at all. However, if she does overshoot or skim the glove the cause may not be her weight at all. You may have increased the distance too quickly. So when you pace away, check you have not doubled the distance. As well as checking there are no snags on the ground try to ensure that there is little else, like a clump of trees, close by to tempt the young hawk to fly on past you. Instead of dropping her weight, put her down to weather on the bow perch for a couple of hours and try again. My real point here is



that dropping a hawk's weight should be the last thing one should do. All other possibilities should first be considered.

Any hesitation or overshooting could be for lack of manning, or carriage, or calling her too great a distance too soon, or you may be calling her too soon after her last meal. Hawks are flown twenty four hours after the last meal. All healthy hawks are fed once a day, either morning or afternoon, and will not be keen until that same time the following day. Every hour after that will increase her keenness provided she has cast. Without dropping weight try feeding the eyass, for example, in the a.m. at 9 o'clock. Try her on the creance the following day at 10 a.m. This can make a big difference. If, for example, you want to fly a hawk on Saturday at around midday, if her last meal was on Friday morning at 9 a.m. she will be three hours overdue and ravenous. Only when this kind of possibility is tried should a weight reduction be resorted to. Be careful and always err on the plus side. A hawk can slip into low condition very quickly if the 8 ounce mark is reached. If, for example, a hawk is 8 ounces and fed a full crop of pigeon then she is 8 ounces on the way up. However, if she is 8 ounces and fed half a crop of day-olds and it is a very cold night, she is 8 ounces on the way down, so take care. This is very important to realise as in late August and early September the nights are closing in and sudden frost would plunge a young hawk at 8 ounces down to danger level. Hawks do not vary one to another very much in weight or size and I would never allow her weight to drop below eight and a quarter ounces, under any circumstances, regardless of how small a specimen I might think her to be. Besides, with the imprint you will be working with her around nine ounces and using timing to get responses rather than weight reduction, and you have then got a good half ounce to come and go on if necessary, and be perfectly safe.



Always use the scales with the technique of 'feel' as well. Rarely will the experienced falconer weigh a hawk and leave it at that. Always feel her breast, both sides of her keel, either when putting her on the scales or taking her off. One good thing about this habit is that you very quickly develop the ability to guess the hawk's weight. The scales will simply confirm what you already know. I have mentioned that there is little variation in size between one hawk and another, but still there can be. Also size equality would only apply to two hawks, especially eyasses, of exactly the same age. A passager, and more especially a haggard, will have developed more and so weight will be relative to muscle development. Therefore 8 3/4 ounces for one hawk, even an eyass, is not necessarily the optimum flying weight for another. By always using feel along with the scales you cannot make a mistake and misjudge her condition. I am of the opinion that provided the falconer knows how to feel his hawk and regularly does so then little can go wrong. Always weigh the hawk when she is empty, twenty four hours after her last meal and when she has cast. Allow about a 1/4 ounce for swivel, leash and bells and the rest is her net weight. Anklets and jesses, if the leather is light enough, hardly count. As to the best kind of scales; what I use for all my falcons and hawks is the old fashioned balance scales with Imperial weights in brass. These brass weight sets still come in ounces so I have stuck to ounces throughout this book. A quarter ounce is the lowest in the set and is sufficiently small enough. It is unnecessary to work to smaller amounts anyway. I would not recommend the plastic kitchen scales with the revolving pointer. They are inconsistent and when the hawk makes even the slightest move the pointer wobbles all over the place. Electronic scales with a digital readout are good also. Whatever type you use, fix a soft pad of fabric onto a perch which should be fitted on the scales. This makes it much easier to set the hawk down and leaves her with a steady grip which will help prevent her shifting around. You want weighing your hawk to be an easy, relaxed and, above all, accurate procedure, not a battle.



During the calling-off on the creance you may find that the young hawk, particularly the imprint, will come before you are at your distance or have even raised your glove. If that happens, immediately dispense with the creance, increase the distance and fly her free- and congratulate yourself. I would check her weight and if, for example, she is eight and three quarters then increase her weight to nine ounces. Try again the next day first on the creance and then, if you get an instant response, fly her free. I would suggest that once you set the hawk down on the post or fence and begin to walk off be ready and watch over your shoulder. If the hawk makes any sign of coming, be ready to raise your glove to receive her. I have often experienced just that - not being quite ready or even expecting it to happen at all. The hawk has whizzed past my head then turned in mid-flight and banged into the glove. Watch her weight at this point. If she is eight and a half ounces, I would increase her to 8 and three quarter ounces. If she is nine ounces and doing this you have an exceptional hawk as she will probably hunt and still come back to the glove if she misses. As you and the hawk make progress together increase her weight gradually so that her coming to the fist is at the highest possible weight. Aim for this both in training and hunting. Do not be tempted to overdo the calling off exercises. The whole point in training a hawk to the fist is that it should be something she relishes. If she is called off too often for a small reward she will, and be sure of this, lose her enthusiasm. Hawks are intelligent and will become bored very easily. So I would never under any circumstances call her off more than twice. It is such a thrill for the beginner you can get carried away very easily. Do not be tempted, especially if there are people around and you are pressurised to impress. Twice is enough allowing her a full meal as reward on the second call off. Your hawk will be the better at coming in the field, when it is necessary, because of it.



So by late September, at least, you will need to deliberately increase your hawk's flying weight by as much as possible. In the warmer weather of August she does not need a reserve of fat to the same extent. So do not continue into the Autumn at the Summer weight. Play very safe and do not wait until a hard night's frost teaches a dire lesson. Also notwithstanding a hawk's weight and condition, she should never be weathered in the blazing sun or left unprotected to sit out a torrential downpour. In short, I would never weather my hawks in the open unless I can supervise them.

I will end this chapter with some advice on dogs, or rather a hawk's attitude to them. As I have already mentioned, it is vital to introduce the dogs at the very beginning of training, preferably on the first day. This is all the more so in the case of the brancher. It is, in fact, with the brancher that trouble in this area will manifest itself if it is going to happen at all. Funnily enough I remember an imprint female eyass who caused endless trouble also. But instead of her being intimidated by the dogs it was the other way around. I will never forget the fear she instilled in Sam, the red setter. She gave him a terrible time for if she became frustrated by failure she would have a go at the dog instead. If your brancher, having accepted you, stiffens up and will not accept the dogs then you must solve the problem quickly. Do not assume that given time she will come to tolerate them as you must be sure she is totally steady in this regard. If not I would not dare hunt her with any dogs as once she is free what little tolerance there may be will become considerably less. A hawk such as this will take full advantage of her new found position in a tree and will refuse the fist and the lure. So she must be very relaxed with the dogs and, more's the point, you must be very sure that she is. This is vital if you want a game-hawk.

When training a brancher I always use the following system and it works very well. On the first day of taking up I show her the dogs and



proceed as normal. Sometimes the brancher will take all in her stride. More often than not, however, she will be far less tolerant of the dogs than she will of the falconer. The best way to make her steady is to put the bow perch down on the floor and let the dogs romp about. Feed her there when she is hungry but never leave her with her food and the dogs unsupervised. If you can trust your dogs then you can leave them with her even at night. Do this and within a few days she will have learned that she has nothing to fear from them. However, a brancher will continue to be a bit wary of the dogs for a while.

I have noticed that when the hawk is feeding, a dog foolish and curious enough to come too close will get a very sharp peck on the nose. This will not happen on day one but once the hawk learns that there is nothing to fear she will establish her position quickly. It really does not take much longer than about two or three days and by then she will be a lot steadier. Actually the dogs will do a considerable amount of manning for you. Because they will almost always be on the move the hawk will become blase about quick, sudden movements. This is part of the process of manning anyway. If you are at all unsure of what your dogs might do unsupervised then simply put a weldmesh partition between them and the hawk. However, it is better if they can come close so that she can really know her own mettle with them and thereby establish the pecking order. It will be necessary to weather her on the bow perch outdoors with the dogs close by for a few days. All too often one can be fooled into assuming that because a hawk is very quick to the fist indoors that she will be the same outside. This is always far from reality until she has had outdoor manning as well. You will find that the brancher, for example, will appear to be very tolerant both of you and the dogs indoors. However, take that same hawk outdoors and she will behave like a wild hawk. If you were to fly her free at this stage you would almost certainly lose her. Make very sure that she will come to the fist outdoors in the presence of



the dogs and do not fly her free until she will. Another point to remember is this; if you call her to the fist from a position on the floor of the mews for example, or outdoors, she will come, if at all tense with the dogs, very quickly. You may be misled into thinking she is perfectly manned. This is probably not the case at all, she is simply more than keen to gain a higher place away from the source of the annoyance. Therefore, make a particular point of calling the hawk down to your fist from a higher point both indoors and especially outdoors, with the dogs sitting by your side. At the early stages for example, place her on a fence and call her off on the creance with a dog, or the dogs, at your feet. Remember that when out hunting and she is flying free, your hawk will have many higher places to perch. If at all nervous she will take stand despite her hunger. In this respect it is a very good idea to call her down as I've just described and allow her to have all the meat to herself on the ground. At the same time you can walk around her and keep a watchful eye on the dogs as well. Pick her up when she is halfway through her meal and let her finish it on the fist. All this involves a lot of hard work on the part of the falconer. It is so much easier to man a hawk without the added bother of keeping dogs under control. Before ever introducing dogs to a hawk you therefore must have them well trained in obedience in the first place. A brancher must be manned to such a degree whereby you are absolutely certain that nothing upsets her coming instantly to the fist. The lure will be a very good back up if she is a little slow at the beginning. All the constant manning and hard work involved in training the brancher is eliminated when one chooses an imprint. So for your first hawk and especially if you want a game-hawk, I would strongly recommend that you imprint. Leave the more difficult brancher to a later stage in your career.

*opposite: Weathering outdoors with the dogs*







## ENTERING FLYING FREE QUARRY

*Finding When You Slip*

As soon as the eyass is flying free, coming to the fist instantly out of trees, she is ready for entering. The time between flying free on the first day and entering should be as short as possible, one or two more days at most. To prolong her entering is unnecessary and counter-productive. A hawk should be entered to quarry to get a kill sooner rather than later, as later it becomes difficult to prevent her becoming fist bound. This habit is difficult to cure unless you increase her weight a lot and then you run the risk of her ignoring you altogether. If she does become fist bound you will know it as all her attention and grip will constantly be directed at the glove. An early chase and kill, on the other hand, will result in the eyass relishing her reward for coming quickly to the fist and then she will look for a chase, perhaps even crouching and lightly gripping the glove in anticipation.

An interesting point to remember about sparrowhawks is that they are more inclined towards cover for their normal day to day activities. Of course, you will see a sparrowhawk on the soar in warm weather to cool off or out in open fields. But most of the time this hawk will prefer the secrecy of at least the edge of a wood or run of hedges to hunt along, unlike kestrels or most other falcons who need open spaces in which to hunt. This is a point to remember in her training as there are times when a sparrowhawk, in the early stages, may bate towards trees or a hedgerow when being carried in the open. Also you may slip your hawk assuming she will give chase in the open only to find her ignoring the slip altogether as she turns and makes for the nearest trees, five or six hundred metres away. To get the hawk used to open spaces carry her out in the open during meal times. Also call her out of trees, increasing the distance each day. If you can call your hawk out of trees into open hillside at sixty to seventy metres, that is good. You may, on the other hand, discover that, whereas the hawk will come to the glove instantly at ten metres, she refuses altogether once you walk out double that or more.



## FLYING FREE

If this happens try one little trick which I discovered. Rather than pander to her whims, and come in closer, do the reverse. Call her once and if she refuses turn your back on her and walk away, but holding out your fist at the same time. There is a very good possibility she will bolt out and follow to the fist simply because she thinks you are going away and she will never see her meal again. This is a further application of the simple rule of not reducing weight until everything else has been tried.

Of course, you will always replace the hawk's mews jesses with the slitless flying jesses. Never fly a hawk with slit jesses. It only takes a short twig or thorn to catch the slit and a hawk could be left trapped in a hawthorn bush which is impossible to climb. I need hardly mention the fate of a hawk if lost with its mews jesses still in place.



## ENTERING THE HAWK TO QUARRY

*Finding Game, The Slip*

And the sooner the better! On day two or three, at latest, of her flying free she must be entered i.e. she chases and kills. Done, as I say, at the early stages it puts a young hawk on the road to maturity and independence, better fitted for survival in the wild should she be in that position. It would be disastrous for a young hawk, not having chased and caught her own quarry, to be faced with survival in the wild. Within a very short period, some two months in fact, after a hawk is hard penned and makes its first flight, weather and time become crucial factors for survival. By the middle of September, gone are the almost endless warm summer days and short nights. The long daylight hours for endless practice in hunting now give way to longer, colder nights and hunger if a shorter day's foray has, for some reason, been unsuccessful. In the wild, perhaps as late as September, a share in a parent kill might be tolerated but not for long as the act of survival becomes the primary instinct and even pairs begin the annual separation for the lonely, uncompromising Winter ahead. A young eyass in August, fist bound with no parental kills to share in if lost to the falconer could perish for lack of that essential attribute, self reliance, which is only achieved through quick reflexes, fitness and courage. The essential psychological change which a chase and kill makes to such a young hawk is never forgotten and establishes a sense of alertness and confidence which is very obvious. The day she catches and kills her first quarry is not just momentous for the falconer. Any falconer will tell you the change which comes over a hawk is incredible. She becomes better and better and so, above all, the falconer must ensure by every means available that the momentum is kept going so as not to discourage her. It is by this means that a sparrowhawk will realize her own courage and have confidence in herself. Never be tempted to take her quarry away from her in those early formative stages, but rather feed her up on each kill allowing all the time she wants to plume and gorge. Anything other than this approach will reverse all the ground gained and, have no doubts about this, will discourage your



hawk. She may come to your fist instantly if hungry, but will no longer respect you in the field. She will probably stand on the glove and look totally uninterested in the chase and it will be your fault and yours alone, if she has been deprived of the logical consequence of her efforts and skill. Remember the pluming and eating of the kill is the final climax in the whole process of a hawk's "raison d'être" and to rob her of that part is to discourage her completely.

Actually finding game can be a disheartening business for both hawk and falconer if a field of beaters is not available. When a beginner I used to beat hedgerows with my beating stick while walking along, hawk on fist, hour after hour. We were frustrated time and time again as the hedgerow emptied of quarry out the opposite side or further along. Hunting hedgerows requires a good deal of organising and lots of co-operative beaters. For a successful chase quarry must be flushed in front of the hawk on her side of the hedge. If something is flushed and it puts in further along it should be marked. Then, making sure the hawk is in a good position, reflush the quarry. Let us suppose you are out with several friends who will beat for you. It is best to organise beforehand and have someone with experience take charge. Even with the best organisation in the world hawking involves much shouting and yelling and general excitement which, I might add, is half the fun. Now, you take yourself off down to the nearest gap in the hedgerow or, better still, to where it stops altogether so that the quarry is driven along the hedges and out into the open for a slip. Have a good look at the landscape and choose broken hedges or, even better, clumps of gorse with, say, twenty or more metres between one spot of cover to the next. In this way it is easier to mark quarry and get into an advantageous position before the reflush.

You may want to enter your hawk to larger quarry such as jackdaws or rooks. In this instance use the hedge as a screen, stealth of



approach being the technique. Once you get a close slip and early success a sparrowhawk will take rooks at twenty or even thirty metres without hesitation.

Once a hawk has been entered she goes on from good to better. But let the beginner know that if she is not making an effort to chase it is, as I have said previously, because she is losing heart and needs a kill. This is very difficult to organise when beating a hedgerow solo. If you are alone it is better to cast your hawk into a tree and walk along beating. A hawk, if keen, will follow from tree to tree and she has got the advantage of a commanding view of both sides of the hedge and naturally a far greater chance of success.

### *The Slip*

A word or two about slipping the hawk will not go astray as sometimes the beginner can do more harm than good if a little over anxious. By far the greatest fear the beginner has is 'will she ever come back?' Coupled with this is also the inordinate imaginary distance the hawk may fly. Added to this fear of losing her is the fact that the high Summer foliage makes sight of her difficult at the best of times. Provided she is not overweight and, more particularly, is well manned and has had an opportunity to bathe, if she does rake off it will not be far. If she came instantly on the creance the day before and she is due a meal then you are not going to lose her.

However, it is precisely this fear which can cause problems at the early stages in slipping, so beware of your possible faults and so avoid a very discouraged hawk hanging upside down because you are still holding her field jesses. It is paramount that once you start hunting you release your grip on her jesses. Also hold the hawk high, well over head height. It is easier for her to gain on quarry if she is higher and can see

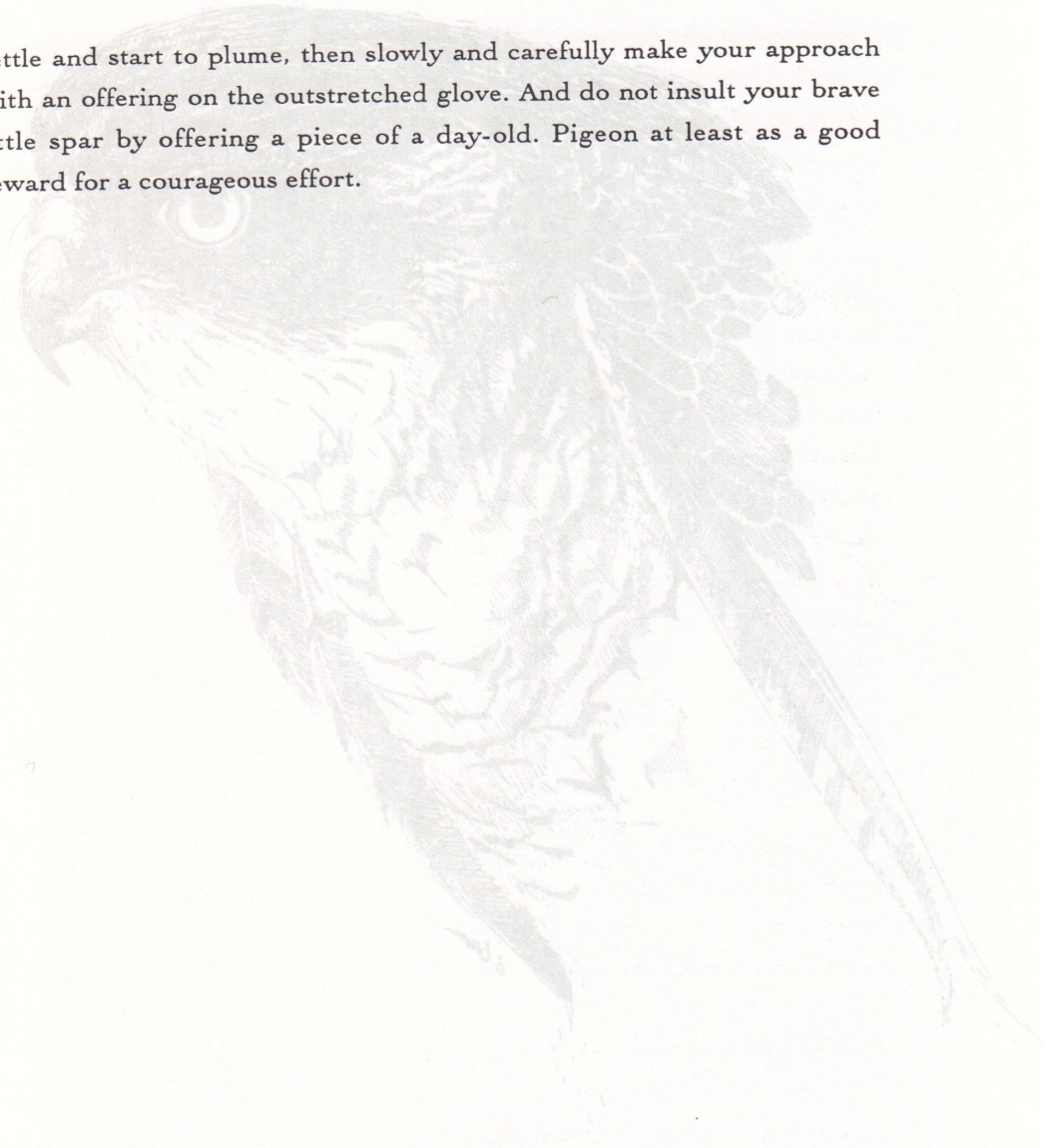


all around as the cover is beaten or worked by the dogs. She is flying free and so must, at all costs, be allowed to go when she pleases, which will be in a split second when the time is right. Never hold the jesses. You can only see ahead whereas a hawk held high can see all around her, an especial advantage if quarry breaks from behind you as is the case often as not. Also you can never, even with experience, become as quick on the reflexes as a sparrowhawk. If your eager but inexperienced young eyass is held to hand by the heels even once in these early stages it will demoralize her; then both of you will be miserable. However, if she goes well and makes a chase it will quicken her blood and yours. Even if she misses you will notice how alert she will have become. If you slip her and she misses and the quarry makes in to cover again, if she is up in a tree do not call her down, but try to reflush the quarry underneath her. Her height, at this stage, will be of great advantage and could result in success. Remember when out hunting with your hawk the objective is success for her and not the rewarding of one's ego amongst friends at the hawk continually being called and coming out of trees. Do what seems best to ensure her catching her quarry and her confidence and respect will be your reward.

In conclusion, a word of advice about making in on the hawk when she does make a kill. In the normal course of events a hawk taken down from a tree with the lure will be a little excited so care should be exercised as you approach her. The situation when she does the real thing however, will, mark my words, be entirely different. She will be in deadly earnest and if it were possible to measure the heartbeat of a hawk on its kill it would be found to be at an incredible rate. It is in this situation that an over excited falconer could actually precipitate disaster. If the hawk has caught something she can carry and you rush in too quickly, that is exactly what she will do—and you have lost a hawk with the makings of a full crop. It is far better, despite all the temptations, to allow the hawk to



settle and start to plume, then slowly and carefully make your approach with an offering on the outstretched glove. And do not insult your brave little spar by offering a piece of a day-old. Pigeon at least as a good reward for a courageous effort.







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## THE LURE

*Carrying, Making In*

There are times when it would seem that everything has been attended to by the falconer and yet your hawk will insist on taking stand high in a tree. Perhaps this will happen when there is a field of friends and other falconers eager for a slip. The dancing of jigs, whistling, calling and even showing food on the glove only add to the indignity of the situation. Before talking about the lure itself and its use, let us first examine why a hawk takes stand and refuses the glove. Firstly, she is not over hungry and in that context I mean she is certainly not starved and, of course, she should not be. So, do not assume that because she takes stand that you need to drop her weight; that is not necessarily the solution. There are many factors to be considered and the possibility of her being overweight is only one of many. She may be looking for a bath despite one having been available during her weathering that morning. Perhaps she was not weathered for an hour or two before the hunt at all. The day may be very hot, too hot for any effort, whereas high up in a tree there is a slight breeze, pleasant and cooling. She may have bolted readily at her quarry several times and failing to kill become discouraged. Also you may have called her distances to the fist too often and she is bored and uninterested. If it is too hot I would sit and talk with friends for an hour and relax. This would do everyone good. It could be overcast and drizzling and she may be a little wet and simply wants to dry off. And then, of course, maybe you have a plane to catch, or your granny is coming to tea, or if it is the President who is coming to dinner at eight, well then she must come down!

The lure will in all probability solve the problem, even if she is far from hungry, as pure greed will take her down. I have actually seen a sparrowhawk make a kill, gorge herself and then come instantly to the lure. Always assume that something like this is going to happen and so always carry the lure in your hawking bag. Also when you make a lure keep a fresh pigeon wing, or better still, a wing from her last kill well tied



to it. A hawk, having all the reasons in the world to refuse the fist, will rarely be uninterested in a lure garnished with the feathers of her last kill. I would always recommend teaching the sparrowhawk the lure as it is an excellent back-up when things go wrong. Do not over use it either or she may develop a habit of ignoring the fist in anticipation of the lure which she will prefer, especially if feathers and the leftover from a recent kill are tied to it. Have two pairs of light cords like shoelaces fixed on both sides and also garnish both sides as you never know which way it will land. Also make sure to fix a swivel to the lure-line, otherwise it will kink. When I have stitched the two pieces of leather three quarters of the way round I stuff a plastic bag inside and complete the stitching to create a soft pad. Some falconers like to weight their lures for fear the hawk might be inclined to carry. Such a lure should never be used in any way except thrown out once on the ground. I would never use anything like metal or stone to weigh a lure as very often the hawk will literally crash into it believing it is actually quarry. Think of the shock to a hawk's legs smashing into a lump of solid stone!

It is well worth considering some points about carrying at this stage. This problem can worry the beginner rather more than it should. You can actually develop a tendency to carry in a hawk by being over attentive to the hawk while she is feeding on the lure. When a hawk makes a kill in the wild she will automatically look for suitable cover. It is totally against her natural instincts to remain in the open. She would almost certainly be mobbed by rooks. So too if the kill is too large for her to carry, initially she will at least mantle it. Both of these reactions are instinctive to prevent her prey being stolen by other predators and even other hawks. In the nest the young hawks will mantle to protect their portion. It is an instinctive reflex as a hawk reared alone will do exactly the same. An imprint will do this even more so than any other type of eyass. Mantling and a desire to carry a kill are tendencies which are part



of a hawk's nature, especially if it feels there is any reason to be concerned that its meal may be taken away. Both these tendencies can be either aggravated or diminished by the way she is handled at the early stages. You will see an example of the carrying instinct when a high-in-weight hawk instead of binding to the raised glove skims it and carries on in the hope of getting into the seclusion of a nearby tree with an imaginary meal. This is one very practical reason why it is better to train and have your hawk fly to the glove with the reward well down and held firmly out of sight. Also she may, when on the lure, mantle and turn her back on you. Some books recommend that the hawk should be approached, even crawled to on one's belly, and offered tit-bits from the hand while she is also enjoying a pluming session on the lure. I prefer to simply throw out the lure and remain nonchalant while the hawk finishes the reward. Then I approach with a very juicy piece of meat, again well hidden in the glove, when I see that she has decided there is nothing of any more interest remaining on the lure. This way she will take what is there and then look for your approach. The other way, approaching her too quickly while she is in the middle of her reward, can cause her to believe you are going to take it away. It is in the first approach that the seed of distrust can be sown, so take your time in approaching and at any signs of mantling leave her. Do not persist.

Do always push the pointed end of the lure stick into the ground automatically once the hawk has come. The reason for this must surely be obvious. Another good reason why I never crawl up to a hawk on the line is that the grass is usually wet rather than dry and, even worse, what, may I ask, do you do if there is a big fresh cow clap between you and her? There is a lot, an awful lot, I would do for my hawk, but I would draw the line right there.

To actually teach the lure all that is required is to garnish it with a good meal or, as mentioned previously, a wing from her last kill. Actually



it is after her first kill and not before that I would teach her the lure, say the day after she is entered. I do this as it means that in the first few days I can concentrate all the young hawk's attention on coming promptly to the raised glove. This gives her no excuses in the beginning to refuse the fist. When you throw out the lure for the first time and she comes promptly, there is always the possibility she may attempt to carry. It is easy to prevent this and, indeed, I would recommend you do take this precaution so as to establish at the very beginning that it is not even an option.

Make a large staple from about 150mm of 3mm metal spiked at both ends. Have your hawk at stand on a post or in a tree nearby. Hold the lure stick in one hand and having passed it through the staple push the staple further into the ground, but just enough to allow the lure line to travel freely through it. Now stand at right angles to the hawk and call her with your voice or whistle. Throw out the lure with the other hand and, at the same time, draw the lure line so that the thrown lure is pulled tight up against the secured staple. With any luck she will dash at the lure instantly but will be unable to carry. If she does not come at first, throw out the lure and twitch it along the ground up to the staple. Do remember that a secured line will only prevent her from carrying on this, her first occasion. What is important to remember is that it will not prevent the desire to carry which can so easily be implanted in her by your overattentiveness. Leave her to enjoy it, keep your distance and keep the dogs, which have been allowed freedom up to this, on hup (sitting) until the hawk is eventually taken to the fist to finish her meal.

If you like and want to teach the lure at an earlier stage even before she is flown free, you can use the same system with a staple and have her jump down off the bow perch.



THE HAGGARD, THE PASSAGER  
AND THE SORE HAWK

Taking a hawk up from the lure should never be a battle but rather she should be enticed off the lure to the greater reward on the glove. There will be times when she may even insist on bringing the lure along on the glove with her. Allow this and, as she become preoccupied with the business of getting to the meat in the glove, she will let go. If, on the other hand, she persists, try letting her down on the ground and by degrees pull a few handfuls of grass and cover the lure until she can no longer see it. Then show the meat on the glove and entice her to let go of the lure. Using grass is, I find, an excellent method of not only getting a hawk away from the lure, it is also an effective method of taking a hawk off a kill if she is to be re flown. In fact, the operative word is taking the hawk off the kill, not taking the kill off the hawk. I remember reading somewhere that Arab falconers cover the kill with sand. Grass which is usually ready to hand, works very well. When the hawk kills the first few times she must not be concerned that you are going to take away the kill. If you do it carefully, as in making-in on the lure, all will go well.

When your eyass is flying free and chasing quarry, perhaps one day you may misjudge her keenness. Use of the lure will be better than sulking home resolving to drop her weight and make her behave. The last thing the falconer should do is to drop a hawk's weight. Every other possibility should be tried before resorting to this drastic measure. Whenever you are going to feed up a hawk on the lure, always make very sure the meat cannot be pulled out of the laces as the consequences are obvious. And finally, when you throw the lure hold the lure stick in your hand until the hawk binds, so that way you can check her softly. If you push the stick into the ground and then she comes she will receive a very sudden check. It is as well also to realise that when a hawk catches the lure, especially in the air (when sometimes as an extreme measure you may throw it up), she will travel a distance. This will even happen if the lure is taken on the ground. She may travel on for a few metres. Rest assured this is not



necessarily carrying, it is purely momentum and a hawk in the wild will take advantage of such momentum to carry on into cover to pluck and eat her kill. Carrying as a bad habit is when a hawk continually attempts to make off with the lure or her kill on your approach. Though easily prevented it can, however, manifest itself for only the slightest reason. If having all things equal your hawk shows that tendency to carry, then have patience. Once established the habit of carrying requires careful making-in with tit-bits to cure the vice. In short, be prepared to crawl in the wet grass ..... or worse!

There will be times when you want to feed your hawk on the lure and leave her to get on with it. She will be on the bow perch and you simply throw the garnished lure down within reach. Do remember to unclip the lure line before doing this as an unattended hawk could very easily become entangled in a slack lure line. However I would always pin it down firmly into the ground with a metal staple. The reason for this is that to simply give her the lure and walk away leaves her in a similar position to that if she were in the wild. Any hawk will, if she feels at all vulnerable, seek to carry her kill to the nearest cover. So unless you are very careful you could actually develop a tendency to carry in an otherwise steady hawk. Do not garnish the lure with a large meal. When she is finished, and you return from whatever called you away, then she should be fed on the glove. My point is simply this, it is the glove that your sparrowhawk should always look to for the real meal: that which really pleases her. If you substitute this with the lure then you will develop an undesirable form of independence in her and she will begin to ignore the glove in anticipation of something thrown out to her.