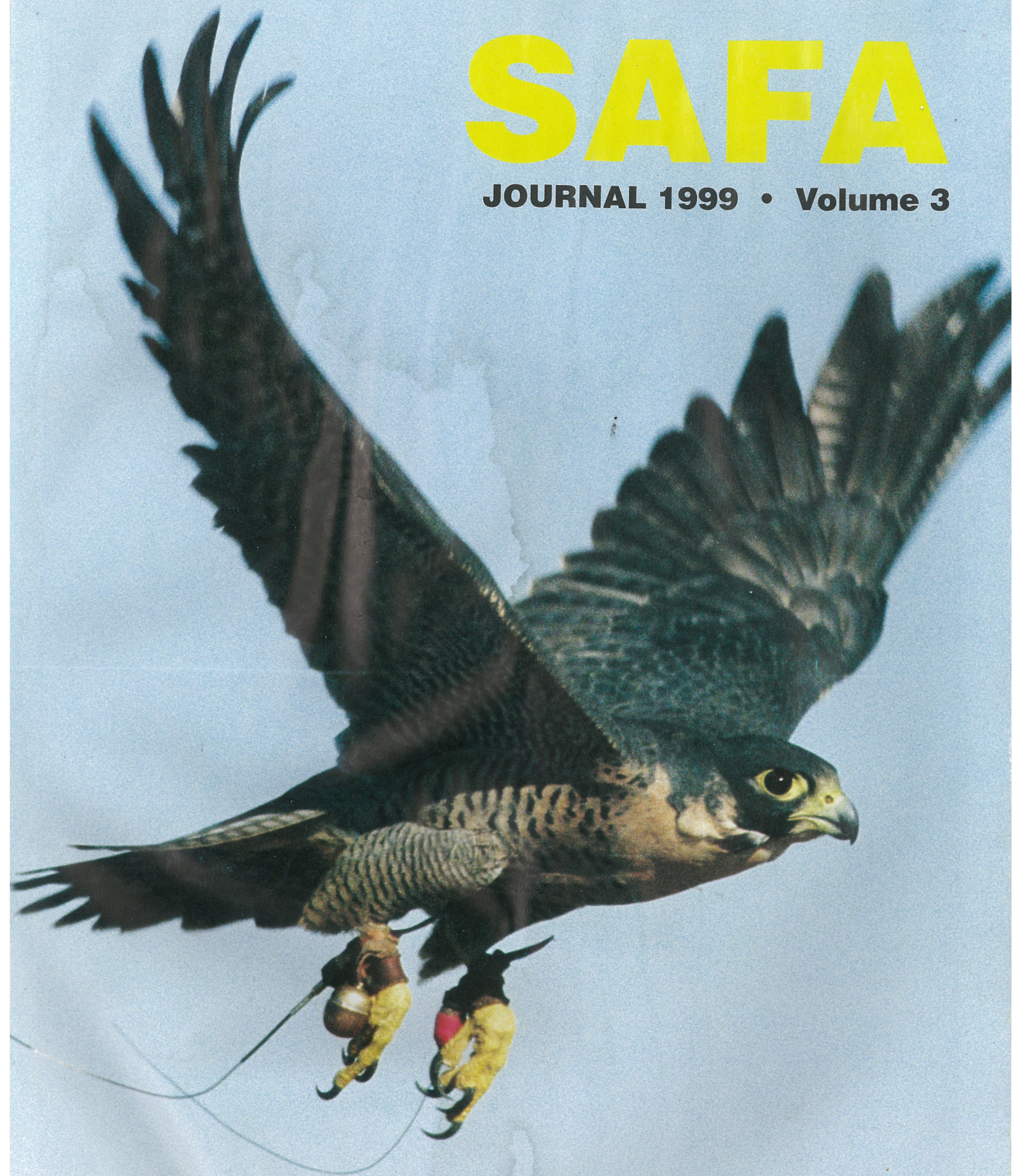


SAFA

JOURNAL 1999 • Volume 3



South African Falconry Association



Turkish Peregrine in Saudi Arabia
Photo by Alan Stephenson

EDITORIAL

This is now the third SAFA journal of which I have had the dubious pleasure of being the editor of the previous edition. This is not because of my masterful editorial talent but merely because there were no other poor souls to offer their services. After many telephone calls for articles to remind those that when we had the last committee meeting there were many loud voices of "Sure I'll write an article for you", I sit in front of the computer frantically trying to make the deadline for the annual SAFA meet. I hope that this edition meets with your approval and you enjoy the pictures.

People often ask me why I practise falconry and I sometimes ask this question myself. Especially when things go wrong, the falcon flies away or the dog bumps the birds. My usual answer to people is so that I can relax. This is about as far from the truth one can possibly get but that is the answer they expect and that is what most falconers tell people who ask. It is definitely not relaxing but an escape from the other world. It is nice to shift your focus from the everyday problems to some new unusual problems! Flying falcons is not only an energetic sport but involves thinking about and planning strategy to ensure a good quality flight. I have seen this often and it has happened to me, once you have a steady, high mounting bird, the little brain starts scheming of an evening about new plans and new hawks and quarry to tackle. Partridge are forgotten and ducks become the in thing and once these are mastered, sandgrouse are the new elusive quarry of the day.

Falconers are usually loners and getting out most afternoons away from people is what it is all about. After spending the whole day working in close proximity with people, a little peace and solitude is what we seek. It is this break in the day that we look forward to. Most field meets are great events to see

old friends and falconers and see their hawks fly but after a week everyone is thankful they can return to their own hawking grounds and their own solitude. Some falconers are different and enjoy the social occasions but mostly these falconers take up golf or direct their energy into some other more sociable sport.

Falconry in South Africa has seen a peak in the quality of traditional gamebird hawking with ducks and gamebirds taken in fine style but I now get the feeling there is still unexplored territory for other styles of falconry. Flights out of the hood are still relatively unexplored in this country and I think the terrain and quarry exist for great opportunities to be had. Flights at quarry on passage have rarely been done except for the tiresome cattle egrets which do not provide a good contest. I must admit European Peregrines seem to be more suitable for this flight but I am sure there is a quarry that is suited to the African Peregrine. Time will tell where the future direction of falconry will take its course. To all the falconers out there good luck and enjoy the sport.

Alan Stephenson



Turkish Peregrine in Saudi Arabia
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Enya - African Peregrine of
Alan Harvey
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REGIONAL REPORTS

TRANSVAAL FALCONRY CLUB, GAUTENG -

TIM WAGNER

The TFC membership is becoming increasingly active with the approach of the cooler weather and the hunting season. The onset of cooler conditions appears to be later than usual on the highveld this year and temperatures in the high twenties and low thirties are still being experienced now in mid May. Most of the intermewed birds have finished their moult and there has been a revival of interest in the good old lanner falcon, with many newer members coming through the ranks and choosing a lanner as their next bird.

Grant Neale has had a good season of mixed emotions with the tragic loss of both his eyass african goshawk and passage lanner earlier this year when his bakkie caught fire. He and his family were on their way back from holiday after hearing their house had been burgled, only to have their nearly new vehicle catch fire. Grant only had time to save his wife, children and pointer pup before the vehicle was engulfed in flames. He then obtained a passage tiercel lanner that started very slowly, not wanting to take pitch, but showing lots of aggression. Once when put up over some doves the tiercel took off after a fulvous duck crossing the veld about 200 meters away, pulled it down and killed it. Not very typical of a lanner! Over the last few weeks the bird has improved drastically and is now taking good pitch and showing lots of promise.

Mark Labuschagne started the season with a bang, losing both of his new birds, a prairie and a hacked female peregrine in the same week. They were never seen again and no signal was obtained although Mark and his apprentice spent most of the next week looking. Even Kobus travelled down to Vereeniging to help look.

Mark subsequently took up his intermewed gyr/per hybrid, Max, and obtained a female peregrine from Clinton Cilliers. Max is flying well and notching up a fair score, while the peregrine which is in her third year and was never flown before is proving to be worth the effort. Tim Wagner started the season with two eyass female peregrines from his breeding project. After struggling for a couple of months to find sufficient gamebirds he passed one on to Francois Breed in the Free State. Both birds are flying well and catching quarry on a regular basis. He has taken up an intermewed tiercel peregrine for some dove hawking.

Rory Mackay is flying his intermewed lanner falcon again this year which is flying high and steady. He is having a problem getting the three important aspects of game hawking (point, pitch and position) together on the same day and on a number of occasions I have seen him with good pitch and position but no point. Jeff Taylor is flying an eyass musket african goshawk and a lanner. The afgos is hunting well but the lanner still has to open the scorebook. Mike Vermeulen was successfully flying a female black sparrowhawk destined for the breeding project. Unfortunately it got sick but am pleased to report it has recovered and I believe Mike has now taken up his intermewed black spar musket. Still waiting impatiently for the end of the moult are Colin Williams and Leo Odendaal, but by the time this is read, Colin's red breasted sparrowhawk and Leo's afgos will have frightened many birds in the neighbourhood. Robbie, our intrepid secretary has decided to head for greener or is it sandier pastures and is leaving for Saudi Arabia on a contract sometime in May or June. He flew a musket black spar and ovambo sparrowhawk briefly at the beginning of the year. Fourie Grobler and Robbie collected

two unrelated ovambos for the breeding project in November last year. Fourie is flying the female and having lots of fun while the male was manned and kept on a perch until ready for the project.

New members' Wayne and Erica Bond have successfully trained and flown their kestrels and Erica have moved on to a passage lanner while Wayne will hopefully trap a lanner soon. Another small female passage lanner was taken by Christo Crywagen and it is progressing well and has opened the scorebook with a swainsons francolin. Rodger Nielson who is moving to the North West Province has taken up his intermewed lanner. Another captive bred afgos was flown by Heinrich Schreuder while Lourens Coetzee unfortunately had his afgos die on him from what appears to be frounce. Gert Lourens also lost a musket gabar goshawk which according to the autopsy was from poison. Paul Strydom flew a kestrel and has moved on to a captive bred lanner from Kobus. Mike Thompson lost his afgos and is most probably going to fly a lanner for the rest of the season.

A number of birds that include black spars, ovambos, afgos, red necked falcon and peregrine have picked up "crop infections" this year. All, except one, an afgos, have recovered even if their condition was misdiagnosed at first. The red necked was diagnosed with frounce and a gram negative bacteria infection and treated for such. The bird came close to death before a second opinion was obtained. A simple scoping of the crop revealed a rampant cappelaria worm infection that responded immediately to treatment with the product Mediworm. The rest all responded to treatment for frounce.

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The T.F.C. breeding project was rather successful again in producing 12 peregrines and 5 aghoshawks while Mike Thompson produced 2 lanners.

FREE STATE FALCONRY CLUB - FRANCOIS BREEDT

Falconry in the big sky country is in full swing despite the low rainfall in certain parts. Steven Squires from Jacobsdal is flying a twice intermewed African Peregrine tiercel at doves and is having good flying from this little guy. He also took up a captive bred Saker falcon bred by Howard Waller. Apparently this bird is awesome when it comes to pursuit flights.

Leigh Strapp from Bethlehem is flying a Black Sparrowhawk female, unfortunately this bird has a damaged wing so is not able to fly at full speed. Philip Bodenstein from Bloemfontein is flying a captive bred Peregrine falcon. This bird is a real strong flyer and is coming into its own, catching Orange River Francolin from good heights. Louis de Jager from Bloemfontein is flying a super duper Black Spar musket eyass. This guy is catching Redwing and Orange River Francolin, snipe and a whole lot of quarry in real fine style. See article on Meet Joe Black.

As for myself I am still flying my four year old peregrine "Penny" who seems to get better each year. She is still catching ducks and francolin in fine style. I am also flying a first year peregrine female called "Gumpy", which is doing well on francolin and capable of getting to great heights with some awesome stoops. My best to all who pursue this fine art of flying birds of prey and may all your birds fly well.

CAPE FALCONRY CLUB - ADRIAN LOMBARD

Falconry in the Western Cape has been characterised by a preponderance

of short wing fliers. Although a few good falcons were flown, our terrain dictates that most falconers must fly goshawks or sparrowhawks. We have also seen a number of exotics flown which have provided for some interesting and exciting sport.

In all, some twenty five members flew hawks in 1998. Of these, eleven flew African Goshawks. Two of the younger novices, Nic Aitchison and Graham Sleep, did particularly well with their birds. They proved beyond doubt that a youngster with a goshawk on the prowl for opportunities can produce some excellent hunts. On the other end of the scale, Tim Hartley flew twice intermewed "Schardeux", taken over from John Neumann, and hunted her almost exclusively on Cape Francolin. This certainly illustrates the versatility of the African Goshawk. We have placed two pairs in breeding pens with the aim of providing hawks for our members in future years.

Johan Botes flew a Harris Hawk which proved to be the master (or mistress) of the guinea fowl through its interesting hunting method. She would fly upwards, thus keeping the guinea's on the ground, then dive in amongst them, where her strength and agility proved to be their equal. Subsequently we have three other members flying Harris Hawks. I would predict that the female Harris Hawk will prove to be a popular hawk that has the ability to fill the pantry.

Two Black Sparrowhawks were flown to good effect. Regrettably the musket was lost at the end of the season as we hoped to add him to our breeding effort. Two female European Goshawks were flown and these provided some exciting hunting. They showed their versatility in taking quarry ranging from Greywing Francolin to Egyptian Geese. "Puck" the twice intermewed Pale Chanting Goshawk, sadly died early in the season. He had produced some

excellent hunting, taking a respectable number of guinea's and francolin, and has shown the value of these underestimated birds. A word of warning, however, is to be aware of their very vulnerable long legs which are prone to breaking.

Three peregrines were flown, including a captive bred *F.p. peregrinus* tiercel. This bird was bred by Benni van der Merwe and flown by Allan Woodford. He flew and hunted well but refused duck. Two passage peregrines were flown. One was a wild trapped falcon who has performed well but unfortunately became wedded to Cattle Egrets. The other was a tiercel who was brought in with a broken wing. He recovered remarkably well and was flown by Willem Breytenbach, who trained him to the kite. He took some 24 kills before being released at the end of the season. He was recovered nine days later by calling him to the kite and re-released after confirming that he was in good health. A tiercel was also flown for the second year by Julius Koen in the Northern Cape. He had good sport with this bird until lost while hunting, towards the end of the season.

Three lanners were also flown to variable effect. The most notable of these was Heinnie, flown by Thys Walters. Heinnie was given to Thys from the World of Birds with a broken wing which was slightly crooked. Despite this he is able to hunt well and is an excellent display bird. Thys lost him while hunting but some three months later he was recovered by a farmer who caught him in his barn, complete with anklets and transmitter stub. He behaved as if he had never been away and three days later Thys was hunting him again.

Edmund Oettle has been flying his Gyr/Peregrine hybrid, Guinevere, who is an awesome but taxing bird to fly. She gave some stunning flights on duck and guinea fowl and shows an ability to mount to

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Edmund Oettle has been flying his Gyr/Peregrine hybrid, Guinevere, who is an awesome but taxing bird to fly. She gave some stunning flights on duck and guinea fowl and shows an ability to mount to

an effective 600-700 feet very rapidly. Her kills include 3 shelduck although her preference is for Yellow-billed Duck.

We look forward to the development of a larger group of experienced falconers as our club matures. We are fortunate to have an excellent working relationship with our Department of nature Conservation based on a mutually developed falconry policy. This is a situation which we value and vigilantly nurture. We hope to involve members in ongoing bird monitoring and research projects. We are establishing a raptor nest data base for our province and are embarking on a joint project with Cape Nature Conservation and the Raptor Conservation Group to monitor and define normal biomedical values in raptors.

EASTERN CAPE FALCONRY CLUB -

ALAN STEPHENSON

The year started off with a mini meet at Roundhill Nature Reserve over the Easter weekend. Alan Harvey is flying two new captive bred female peregrines. Both birds

were hacked and are now starting to show impressive results on francolin and ducks. Ray Black started the season with a captive bred tiercel peregrine from myself which was unfortunately lost just as he was really getting going. Ray then flew a passage lanner female passed on from Willie Coombs but was hacked back to the wild shortly thereafter. Ray now has a new passage female lanner which he is struggling to get to mount. Gareth Coombs started off on a passage African Goshawk musket which he trapped himself and is really going well. At first he would not chase if the quarry flew up but a short spell on the kite has lifted the horizon somewhat. The little bird is deadly with an avid falconer chasing after him everywhere. Arnold Slabbert started off with an imprinted Black Sparrowhawk female taken as a young downie. Unfortunately the bird was killed by bees while out weathering. Poor Arnold's wife was also hospitalised while trying to rescue the spar but Arnold was more concerned about his feathered bird! Arnold is now flying a passage black spar musket and a passage lanner female and trying

to dent the francolin in Port Elizabeth. He also has a pair of African Goshawks in a pen which should hopefully breed this year. Aidan Zimmerman tried his hand at a passage lanner tiercel which beat him and is now looking for a new bird without that distant look in it's eyes. Brian Reeves is flying his intermewed lanner tiercel after a brief fling with a passage female lanner. The tiercel is going well and frightening the redwings. George Beeton started off late in the season looking for an afgos which he finally trapped - a passage female in his own backyard. As for myself I started the year with bad luck when my old female peregrine passed away in the pen after producing three tiercel chicks. I will miss Kate although the ducks breathed a sigh of relief. I started flying a Gyr/Red Naped Shahin tiercel who started moulting again so had to be put into the pen to continue the moult. Unfortunately his feathers were messed up in quarantine so he is a bit tatty. At present I am flying one of my captive bred peregrine tiercels "Freddy" who is far too relaxed to be a serious, aggressive hunter but easy to live with.

African Peregrine Falcon

BREEDING PROJECT	YEAR	No BRED	BREEDER
The African Peregrine Falcon <i>Falco peregrinus minor</i> breeding project in South Africa first produced progeny in 1992. A total of six breeders have bred African Peregrines to date. These are Tim Wagner and Ian Hoffman (Gauteng), Howard Waller (Free State), Paul Venter (Northern Province), Alan Harvey and Alan Stephenson (Eastern Cape). A total of one hundred and one peregrines have been produced over seven years, 59 in Gauteng, 3 in the Northern Province, 7 in the Free State and 32 in the Eastern Cape. Given in the table below are the statistics;	1992	3	IAN HOFFMAN & TIM WAGNER
	1993	5	IAN HOFFMAN & TIM WAGNER
	1994	5	PAUL VENTER & TIM WAGNER
		2	IAN HOFFMAN & TIM WAGNER
		3	PAUL VENTER
	1995	9	ALAN HARVEY & TIM WAGNER

	3	ALAN HARVEY
1996	11	IAN HOFFMAN & TIM WAGNER
	3	ALAN HARVEY
	3	ALAN STEPHENSON
1997	14	IAN HOFFMAN & TIM WAGNER
	1	HOWARD WALLER
	6	ALAN HARVEY
	3	ALAN STEPHENSON
1998	12	IAN HOFFMAN & TIM WAGNER
	6	HOWARD WALLER
	8	ALAN HARVEY
	3	ALAN STEPHENSON
TOTAL	101	

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE CAPTIVE BREEDING OF RAPTORS

By Tim Wagner

I am often asked questions concerning the captive breeding of raptors and this article hopes to address some of the most commonly asked questions as well as express my ideas and observations. I do not profess to be an expert and readily admit that most of what I know was gleaned from a Peregrine Fund publication- Falcon Propagation edited by Weaver and Cade. I have however been involved with the successful T.F.C. breeding project since 1986 and have some views on adapting facilities to local conditions, species and funding. A number of facilities have been built country wide with the first being that on Ian Hoffman's property in Laezonia in 1989. Subsequent facilities are a big improvement on the original pens, although Ian's pens were designed by a prominent U.K. falconer/breeder as her perfect facility.

A person should first of all decide why they want to get involved with breeding. If you have visions of producing birds to trade with and make money, my advice to you is - immigrate. Move to the Northern hemisphere where there is a market for captive bred birds. Invest a large sum of money in the right breeding stock and find yourself a niche in the middle east market; otherwise forget about it. Ian and I have bred 59 peregrines to date and theoretically we should have a spare R59 000 lying around at local prices or even better at U.K. prices of 500 pounds a peregrine we should be R 295 000 richer. Alan Harvey and Alan Stephenson must also be sitting on a bundle. Seriously, there is no money in the local market. The cost of maintaining a breeding pair and raising eyasses on a good diet is expensive and you will struggle to break even. However, if you wish to produce birds for yourself and a couple of falconry buddies then there is nothing more rewarding. Few things

equal the joy of watching a bird you produced eating up the sky, even if you are not flying it.

The next consideration is whether you breed from 'natural pairs' i.e. birds that court, copulate, incubate and raise the young themselves or imprints. Most of the captive bred birds in SA have come from 'natural pairs' with Howard Waller being the only one involved to any great degree with imprints. Unless you have a job that allows you an inordinate amount of time at home during the breeding season or way to specifically produce hybrids I suggest you stick to 'natural pairs'. Imprints require a large amount of attention and courting at various times of the day to produce semen and eggs for you. You will also have to artificially inseminate the female numerous times before and during egg laying. This problem is compounded if the female does not voluntarily accept insemination and has to be caught up for the process, often in the middle of the night. Natural pairs do this all themselves, provided they are compatible, have the right facilities and are on a good diet. Hybrids can be produced from these 'natural pairs' especially with pairs where the male does not copulate but participates in all other aspects of the breeding cycle.

The most asked question is 'What size should the breeding chamber be?'. I have heard and read of birds breeding in pens as small as 2.4x1.8x1.8m (LxBxH) and as large as disused aircraft hangers. A lot of breeders take pride in how small a pen they have produced birds in but I feel there are a number of aspects to consider when designing a breeding chamber with regards to size. Firstly the birds are going to spend at least the next couple of years in there and they should have some flight space. Secondly, it should allow the male some space to manoeuvre to avoid a demanding or aggressive female. Thirdly, if the pair is successful there is going to be a time when the pen must accommodate 3 or 4 eyasses as well. When the eyasses get big, they literally mug the adults, especially the male at feeding times and he should be able to get away once he has delivered their food. The Peregrine Fund believes that the optimum size for longwings is 6x3m with a height of 4-5m and this caters for all of the above. Our small peregrine and lanners will easily breed in a smaller pen but I do not believe it should be smaller than 5x3x3m. The 5x3x3m pen should be optimum for the small shortwings although we have bred them in 3x3x2m pens. It would also appear that a pen can be too big; Ian's pens are 10x5x5m and he has experienced a relatively low rate of successful pairs. It would appear that these pens are large enough for the birds to live separate lives, with very little forced interaction. At first we assumed that the birds were just not compatible but when two pairs were moved to smaller 6x3.5x3m pens at my facility they bred the same year.

The materials used to construct the pens are normally dictated by budget. If you are serious about breeding and intend doing it at the same facility for a number of years I

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equal the joy of watching a bird you produced eating up the sky, even if you are not flying it.

The next consideration is whether you breed from 'natural pairs' i.e. birds that court, copulate, incubate and raise their young themselves or imprints. Most of the captive bred birds in SA have come from 'natural pairs' with Howard Waller being the only one involved to any great degree with imprints. Unless you have a job that allows you an inordinate amount of time at home during the breeding season or want to specifically produce hybrids I suggest you stick to 'natural pairs'. Imprints require a large amount of attention and courting at various times of the day to produce semen and eggs for you. You will also have to artificially inseminate the female numerous times before and during egg laying. This problem is compounded if the female does not voluntarily accept insemination and has to be caught up for the process, often in the middle of the night. Natural pairs do this all themselves, provided they are compatible, have the right facilities and are on a good diet. Hybrids can be produced from these 'natural pairs' especially with pairs where the male does not copulate but participates in all other aspects of the breeding cycle.

The most asked question is 'What size should the breeding chamber be?'. I have heard and read of birds breeding in pens as small as 2.4x1.8x1.8m (LxBxH) and as large as disused aircraft hangers. A lot of breeders take pride in how small a pen they have produced birds in but I feel there a number of aspects to consider when designing a breeding chamber with regards to size. Firstly the birds are going to spend at least the next couple of years in there and they should have some flight space. Secondly, it should allow the male some space to manoeuvre to avoid a demanding or aggressive female. Thirdly, if the pair is successful there is going to be a time when the pen must accommodate 3 or 4 eyasses as well. When the eyasses get big, they literally mug the adults, especially the male at feeding times and he should be able to get away once he has delivered their food. The Peregrine Fund believes that the optimum size for longwings is 6x3m with a height of 4-5m and this caters for all of the above. Our small peregrine and lanners will easily breed in a smaller pen but I do not believe it should be smaller than 5x3x3m. The 5x3x3m pen should be optimum for the small shortwings although we have bred them in 3x3x2m pens. It would also appear that a pen can be too big; Ian's pens are 10x5x5m and he has experienced a relatively low rate of successful pairs. It would appear that these pens are large enough for the birds to live separate lives, with very little forced interaction. At first we assumed that the birds were just not compatible but when two pairs were moved to smaller 6x3.5x3m pens at my facility they bred the same year.

The materials used to construct the pens are normally dictated by budget. If you are serious about breeding and intend doing it at the same facility for a number of years I

suggest you consider building permanent pens from brick and mortar. With a little bit of imagination you can build pens that can be converted to stables or servants quarters should you want to sell and relocate at a later stage. Although your initial outlay will be more than building from other materials the cost of maintenance over a number of years will even things out. A number of ingenious falconers have built very serviceable pens from welded mesh clad with shade cloth or the nylon sheeting used in the construction of conveyer belts. These "soft sided" pens would appear very suitable for the highly strung shortwings which tend to crash around the pens at every excuse. Unfortunately building American style pens with wood in SA is as expensive as brick while protecting it from the elements and white ants is a nightmare.

When designing your pen I would suggest the following, much of which has come about by trial and error-

- Give the longwings a view out of the pens, not only do I feel it is cruel to deny them this but birds that see the normal daily activity around them are more relaxed in the pens and appear to recover quicker from an intrusion into the pen when they see you leave the area.
- The opening should be about 1.5x .7m in size and placed in the top third of the pen. This allows anyone approaching the pen to disappear from view of the birds before getting close enough to stress them. Naturally this opening should be barred but my birds very seldom crash into it. I built my pens facing east simply because it would appear that the wild Transvaal peregrines had a preference for east and south-east facing eyries. This allows direct morning sunlight to fall through the windows on the breeding ledges for about an hour during the breeding cycle. This gives the incubating female and chicks direct sunlight (source of Vit D) as well as helping to dry up the dampness from the mutes around the scrape.

Make the breeding ledge bigger than necessary. The size of a normal door (2x .8m) is about right . Not only is the ledge a place for breeding it also serves as an important place for courtship by the adults and a playground for the eyasses. If the ledge is too small the eyasses will resort to playing more on the floor amongst the mutes and discarded food, an excellent place to pick up disease. The recommended filling for the ledge is pea gravel which is almost unobtainable in S.A. Small smooth pebbles can be collected from fast flowing streams. I have mixed this with some sieved washed 'ou-klip' and feel it makes a softer substrate for the birds to incubate on. This may be beneficial and save eggs from getting damaged when the birds leave the scrape in a hurry to defend the pen against an intrusion by you at feeding time or a passing crow or raptor. Do not use fine sand or gravel as this adheres to the food and causes problems in the young eyasses digestive tract often resulting in death.

Careful thought must be given to the construction of perches

and their placement. No matter how big your pen is, birds with heavy wing loading are going to experience problems with slowing down to land. The continual bumping of the bottom of the foot on landing is going to lead to bruising and eventual problems such as bumblefoot. It is imperative that the perches are not rigid but have some give. Branch perches can be suspended on nylon rope while ledges should be attached with flat bar in a manner that allows some bounce. Needless to say as much should be covered with astro turf or coir matting as possible. Astro-turf is preferred as coir mat tends to rot quickly in our hot damp summers. Perches should be staggered around the pen to allow the birds to use them as steps to gain height from the ground to the ledge and the vertical differences in height should not be too great. Perch arrangements that work fine during the non breeding season may be too steep for a female just prior to laying or a bird trying to get food to the ledge. The female gains a lot of weight just prior to laying and you don't want her crashing to the floor and struggling to make it back to the ledge. You also don't want an adult missing the next perch and landing on the floor with food which will become contaminated and then fed to your precious eyasses. Avoid vertical structures in the pen such as pipework supports to ledges or perches especially at floor level as much as possible. Birds crashing around to avoid capture can strike their wings on these structures causing lameness of the wing and subsequent immobility. There should be at least 1m headroom above all the perches and ledges to allow sufficient space for copulation.

A major problem in the existing pens is the ventilation and drainage. Most of the pens have a third to half of the roof covered with corrugated iron sheeting and the remainder enclosed with mesh. This design allows the rain in, which may be as much as 40-80mm in a single thunderstorm. If the drainage is non-existent or bad the floor becomes a mud pool. To make matters worse the temperatures are normally in the mid 30's at this time of year. This heat and the excess moisture creates an extremely hot and humid environment in the pens- the type of conditions that microbiologists take a lot of trouble creating to culture their agar plates. This facilitates rampant bacteria and fungal growth; something you should avoid at all costs. Sufficient air vents should be placed about 15 cm above the floor level. When the air in the pen then heats up, the walls of the pen will act like a chimney and draw fresh air in at the bottom while the hot moist air will be expelled out the roof. This will dry out the floor much quicker and reduce the inside temperature substantially.

Careful consideration should be given to acquiring birds for your project. It never ceases to amaze that people go to the effort of building facilities and are prepared to maintain birds for breeding but acquire birds that are essentially unsuitable or at best marginal breeders. While nobody can guarantee success, in most instances careful selection of breeding stock can greatly increase your chances. Certain factors, such as the age a bird is taken, the way it was raised

and its subsequent handling etc. greatly influence its potential as a breeder, so do not grab the first birds you are offered just to get birds in the pen. We are now fortunate that there are a lot of captive bred birds around and in my opinion it is the shortest route to success. With the larger longwings it would appear that if the bird was parent raised to 55 days in captivity and then flown for falconry it has excellent potential as a breeder. A significant number of current breeding tiercels that copulate come from this background. The next most suitable group are chicks removed from the wild as large chicks and raised in a group and then flown for falconry. While there is a element of risk in loosing them, the original wild stock for the peregrine project both in the Transvaal and Eastern Cape was handled in this manner. Younger chicks (downies) can also be used but great care must be taken to avoid imprinting and they are best left to the more experienced breeder. While there are always exceptions to the rule, I recommend that when trying to breed Black Sparrowhawks, Peregrines and Lanners you avoid birds obtained as passages, haggards or birds removed as small chicks and raised in isolation. On the other hand the smaller raptors appear relatively easy to breed and it is well documented that kestrels will breed when obtained as adults from the wild. African Goshawks have bred when obtained in first year plumage from rehabilitation centres after being used for falconry while Red-necked falcons obtained as haggards and passages have proved easy to breed. Waiting a little longer to obtain suitable birds is far better than wasting years with unsuitable birds.

There is also a marked tendency to put birds that do not make satisfactory falconry birds into breeding pens, mainly because we have no other use for them. Birds that are more prepared to perch than fly, do not excite us when they fly or are not aggressive enough for the quarry we want to hunt. While I am sure many will argue it is more the fault of the falconer than the bird, we must acknowledge that individual birds in a species, differ, as in all other living things. Some have a natural propensity to mount while others are aggressive and tenacious. We all long to own a bird with all the desired traits. So why do we then place birds with none of these traits in pens to breed?? Surely, as we select dogs with desired traits such as a good nose, stamina, style and bird sense to produce puppies that will hopefully inherit these traits we should be doing the same with our birds. No pigeon fancier tries to breed a winner from birds that do not feature in a race. We should make available our best falconry birds for breeding, if only for one or two seasons, to perpetuate their desired attributes.

While breeders who have produced many birds will tell you that all they feed is day old chicks, I can only wonder how much better they could of done had they fed a better diet.

Often, birds raised on inferior diets only display evidence of this once they have left the breeder. Birds imported into SA from such breeders have shown signs of inferior feathers

or split their beaks when fed natural food such as doves. It is a well known fact that diet plays a large role in the reproduction of a species, not only the bringing on of the breeding cycle but also the successful conclusion of the process. Birds on diets that are lacking in nutrition, vitamins and trace elements etc. often produce fertile eggs that break due to weak shells or have the chicks die before, during, or just after pipping. This can be largely avoided with a diet tailored to the species you are trying to breed. There is no single perfect diet and a diet that lanners would thrive on could be the death of the small shortwings. The obvious perfect diet would be the one the birds would eat in the wild but there is an element of risk. There is a possibility of bringing in disease or of poisoning your birds. In Zimbabwe there was an incident of a breeding pair of peregrines dying after been fed a fresh road kill later presumed poisoned. An option would be to trap birds such as finches and doves and dose them for the obvious problems such as frounce, coccidiosis and parasites. Sickly birds will die from the stress of capture or should be killed. I vary this diet with quail and pigeon. The quail and doves receive vitamin and trace element supplements as well as a varied diet including mixed bird seeds and greens. Prior to the onset of the breeding season I increase the amount of supplements to the quail and doves, especially Vit E. While whole prey items are often considered a nutritionally complete diet for raptors if these prey items are fed on an unsupplemented or nutritionally unsound diet it will result in deficiencies in the breeding raptors. In an investigation into Vit.E deficiency at the World centre for Birds of Prey(Boise) it was found that wild peregrines on migration had significantly higher plasma Vit E levels than captive breeding birds fed on unsupplemented quail in that project. This investigation was started after hatchability of eggs had fallen from 80% to 59% in 1986 and a Vit E deficiency was suspected as an underlying cause of late embryonic mortalities. Vit E was added to the diet by injecting the food item with 44 IU of Vit.E just prior to feeding and later by supplementing the quail food. This resulted in higher levels of plasma Vit. E in the captive birds and an increased hatchability of 73% in 1987 and 83% in 1988. Improved coloration and libido was also observed in the adults while chicks were considerably more active and food begging started within 1-2 hours of hatching as opposed to 6-12 hours in previous years. In our small backyard breeding operation it is relatively easy to feed a nutritionally sound diet and it will go a long way to ensuring a successful breeding season.

There is no secret recipe to success with regards to the breeding of raptors but dedication and attention to detail will increase your chances. As for luck, the more dedicated a breeder the luckier he gets!

Influence of diet on plasma vitamin E in captive Peregrine falcons - Dierenfield, Sandford and Scatterfield (J.WILDL. MANAGE. 53(1): 160-164)

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BLACK EAGLE

By THYS WALTERS

During my falconry I had this dream of hunting a big tough bird as an Egyptian Goose with a trained raptor. For this reason I decided to buy a Gyr/Saker hybrid falcon from British Columbia which would be big enough to handle a goose. Unfortunately the quarantine station killed this beautiful bird because they did not freeze the food as I asked them to and caused the bird to die from stomach bacteria.

My second option was to consider the use of an eagle. Because they are big, powerful birds a number of people advised me not to get involved with them. That still would have been the case if I did not have the opportunity to train a Bald Eagle for a movie in British Columbia while visiting fellow falconers.

After discussing the eagle proposal with Nature Conservation and the Cape Falconry Club I had the go-ahead to take a chick from the wild. There were a number of options to consider which made me feel like a child in a candy store. The first one that came to mind was an African Hawk Eagle that is not a big bird but does not occur in the Cape Province creating problems with paperwork. The Martial Eagle is a big eagle that lays only one egg and does not occur in large numbers while the Crowned Eagle is found along the East Coast. These hunt like big goshawks, which would result in straight flights.

The last option was the relatively common Black Eagle with a usual clutch of two eggs of which only one chick survives. These birds are very closely related to the Golden Eagle and with luck can be persuaded to hunt and stoop down like a big falcon at E. This would be difficult and a challenging operation as 95% of their natural prey is the dassie (Rock Hyrax).

My aim was to get a chick during the breeding season of this year and to keep the margin of error as small as possible. I therefore had to study four nests to have enough backup should something go wrong. This was hard work, not only time consuming and expensive, but also life threatening at times.

Two of these nests were along the West Coast, situated in quarry excavations which seemed to be quite small



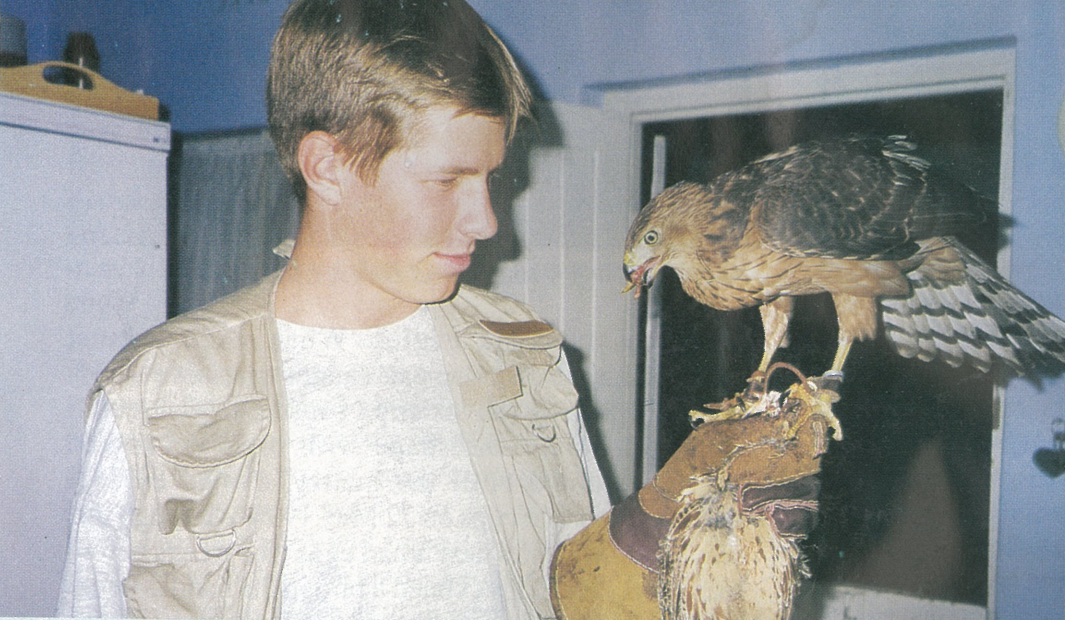
Thys Walters and Black Eagle MIC

cliffs for such big eagles. What made it most extraordinary is that one pair caught tortoises (+60% of prey). During the six trips I made to each nest I could see them take shape with more sticks and greenery added until the quarry, owned by Piet Prinsloo, had two eggs on 22 May 1998. Although this was a controversial nest it had eggs two weeks before the others did, so I reckoned a bird in the hand is better than two in the bush.

Piet was generous enough to give me permission to take a chick but before I did so, added that I should also 'phone Koos De Goede - a fanatical character who works for Escom and the Raptor Conservation Group by monitoring nests on pylons. During the 45 days that I had to wait for the chicks to hatch, I also studied two other nests, one at Porterville and the other at De Doorns.

Just before the crucial day I 'phoned Mr De Goede to ask him what I thought was a simple question, to save one chick out of "his" nest and use it for falconry purposes. He informed me firstly that it was too early in the year for them to have chicks, meaning that he did not even study the nest that year. Secondly he told me he would have shot me if he found me on the nest, and went on of accusing people of robbing chicks and eggs for exportation. I faxed him my eagle proposal





after which he would speak to Gerhard Verdoorn, also from the Raptor Conservation Group and then get back to me.

No one got back to me except our club secretary, Adrian Lombard, who phoned me the next day. He told me I may not take a chick from that nest or any other nest because my permit had been revoked. Adrian was very helpful and understanding. He decided to discuss the matter with Nature Conservation and try and resolve the problem.

I was very relieved when he phoned back the next day to let me know I may still take a chick but only if it was from another nest. The breeding pair at the Porterville mountains had two old nesting sites, which I found earlier that year. I went back to see if there was any activity on them, but instead found a new nesting site on the same cliff.

I wanted so badly to know what it contained, that I lost perspective and decided to climb. Only when I reached the nest and found the green cup empty with only a half-eaten dassie on the side did I realise what I was doing. There I was, hanging by my fingertips with a thirty meter drop below me. This nest was more intensively than the others with eight trips being made to the site. I was relieved to find the first egg laid on 31 May 1998.

My fourth nest site was on a farm in the De Doorns district. This site was very impressive with vertical cliffs in a U-shape. On my third trip I saw a chick a few days old lying beside an unhatched egg. This created problems because the Porterville chicks should also hatch soon. I therefore had to go to Porterville the next day to see if both chicks had hatched. To my surprise the one egg had a small hole in it and the chick was chirping inside. Because I still had a few days left before the second chick hatches I decided to play safe and rather take the second chick from the De Doorns nest.

This sounds like a simple operation, but firstly it was a mission just to get there and secondly I did not have the equipment or the know how to climb a cliff like that. The evening was spent with a telephone glued to my ear trying either to borrow equipment or hire a rock-climber. A few hours later I was lucky enough to find a willing climber. He only had one question: "Where would the parent eagles be while I take their chick?" I told him not to worry.

Early the next morning we set out on the long awaited trip, hoping to be successful at the second nest. When

we reached the top of the mountain and looked into the nest my expectations fell as I looked at the oval, white form still lying beside the chick. This was bad news, I thought as I watched the climber abseil down to the massive nest. I gave him instructions to look for a hole or crack in the shell and then to gently pick it up and listen for a sign of life. "Nothing" he replied, so I sent down a bag fastened to a line for him to put it into. I gently pulled it up and put the egg close to my ear, only to hear the faint sound of liquid. I felt empty, especially when he told me how the chick pecked at his hand as he reached for the egg.

After waiting four long days we went back to the Porterville nest in hope that my luck would change. Although I had hopes with me it was still an unprofessional and risky climb. My perseverance finally paid off when I found two chirping chicks in the nest. My hand was shaking uncontrollably as I reached out to take the small, helpless, ball of fluff and put it in my rucksack. All the way down the mountain I walked with knees of rubber not to upset the precious passenger. After a month of feeding "Mic" as he was named, the best food possible, he was growing like a plant in a hothouse.

As expected of me to go back there and make the dreadful climb again to the nest to find out if the second chick was alive and well. This trip was made less enthusiastically because I had to do it by myself and no prize awaited me.

When I finally reached the nest I was horrified to find the nesting cup empty and the chick lying at the rim of the nest into some bushes. As quickly as possible I undid the lifeline around my waist and crept on top of the nest to where the chick was. I gently pulled him out not knowing if he was alive, and got the fright of my life when I saw injuries on his head. It took me a while to settle down and realise that blood sucking flies, of which I killed two on his head, caused injuries on top of and around his ears. The only way he could escape them was to crawl from the nest and put his head into the bushes. This tactic was limited because he also had scabs on the side of his body and eight ticks on his feet, which I removed and killed.

A woman named "Mo" living on the farm used a telescope to monitor the growth of the chick. She continuously informed me of the progress "Lucy" made until she was just as magnificent as her parents and left the nest. Mic on the other hand is flying well and still enjoys the comforts of home.

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HAWKING AT THE BROOK

by Rory MacKay

I went out on Saturday morning at 7am to go and fly the falcon. The dog and I wander around the veld for an hour and find no birds (partridge) so at 8am I toss the Falcon, as she gets off the fist a Black korhaan gets up 20m away and she bails off and chases it, they fly for about 200m and the korhaan puts in, the Lanner follows it into the grass. I am charging off towards them to see what's happening and before I am half way there she gets up and starts mounting, gets up to a nice pitch of about 100m.

I take a very strong Racing pigeon to throw for her. I toss the pigeon and down she stoops, the pigeon evades and she gives it a tap, the pigeon puts on the turbo and starts climbing, out flying her, but not to be out done she puts in an enormous tail-chase all around me and in an ever widening spiral. I lose visual when they are over a ridge +4km away. I wait and swing the lure and then swing some more. I get out the telemetry and start tracking. I walk up over the ridge and down the other side into a small valley where I get good signal.

I won't bore you with the details (they include 2 hrs of tracking in the valley, losing my dog, being bitten on the bum by a dog, a woman brandishing a .38 at me, luckily I told her I was Robbie Robinson from Wits doing some wildlife tracking) at 11.30am I have a signal from every direction with the gain fully down, but I still can't see her, so I swing the lure. A small flash in the corner of my eye and down she comes. I pick her up and give her half a dove breast and wing. The dog is found and we start walking back to the car. Over the ridge and down the other side at roughly 12h00 the dog gets a point on the way back to the car. Should I? Shouldn't I?

The Falcon leaves the fist and starts to mount and reaches a reasonable pitch, I go to flush NOTHING. The Falcon keeps mounting! I am running around thinking about strange Greek words namely

HUBRIS. The dog, bless him, is far more stable and works up the scent and bang on point again! By this time the falcon (Did I mention it is quite a hot day) has hit a big time thermal and is going up on an elevator and has gone out of sight I can't see her! I take out the telemetry get signal straight up, and think well what can I do? I go to flush, 3 partridge get up, 2 break down the valley towards a small stream and the other one for a bunch of trees. I choose to follow the two with my eyes and shouting "Hoy, Hoy, Hoy," my shouting tails off, nothing is happening.

The partridge are going off to the stream - all is well with them. Then I see this brick stooping at them, unfortunately just as they are making it to some reeds. It was too far for me to see clearly what happened but it appeared as if she tried to bind to the bird and they flew into the dry reeds. She threw up to her normal pitch as the dog and I are running to get there to try and get them up for her to have another go. We spend a few minutes looking and she starts mounting again as we are trying to find the birds. Again going out of sight. Now as I sit here I know I should have waited a while for the scent to settle a bit and then tried to find them again, but there I am no pigeon to get her down. I am not sure if the dog will find the scent, having never put her up in a thermal before, I'm swinging the lure but she is just not responding. Well I couldn't see her anyway. So pop quiz, what do you do? Well I know that about a kilometer down the stream there are plovers at a small dam. I run down there hoping that the bird is at least above me and try to keep the plover in the air by throwing stones and shouting hoy ECT. The dog is looking at me in amazement as if to say if the boss see's you chasing birds you are in deep trouble. Next thing she appears from nowhere and has a go at the plovers, misses, takes a slow wide turn and comes in to me swinging the lure. Well that was it for me, I fed her up and took the rest of the day off.

MEET JOE BLACK

by Louis A de Jager

In South Africa the word black spar is normally associated with a panga, aggressive man hating beast. Luckily they are super effective hunters and awesome in action. Whenever someone hears about your involvement with a black spar, the common reaction is usually; Is it making you old?

Luckily I was spared, touch wood. One needs a lot of patience raising a sparrow hawk chick.

Joe was taken from the nest at approximately 13 days old and was one of three hatchlings, two muskats and a female. Joe was raised according to Mike McDermott's recipe. The task of sociable imprinting a single chick without causing full imprint behaviour, was difficult, because only one chick was taken. A mirror was used for the self image of the baby hawk.



Louis de Jager's black Sparrowhawk - Joe

He was housed in a basket and was a keen observer of the world around him. He always saw humans and associated them with food, although never fed by hand. When it was feeding time, he was taken out of the box and placed on the bed. The food was placed in the box and Joe returned a few minutes later next to the plate of cut up do e. He flew with enormous speed.

Monitoring each stage he was going through, he changed from a helpless ball of down to a serious killer. When he stood up for the first time, he experienced problems with balancing, but later on he became a keen walker. At the following stage, he moved from his box to my bed and the box was only used for travelling. He grew strong and started flapping his wings in an aerobic manner. He started footing the towels and "killing" them. During that stage, baggy finches were produced, which he killed, long before being hard-penned.

When Joe became a brancher, he was trained twice a day with a lure dragged from cover to cover. Only one opportunity was given to hunt. If unsuccessful, he would go hungry. During these lessons he learned to give one hundred percent and the only way of eating was to kill. He was never robbed of the kill in the early stages but later on when steady was encouraged to make repeated kills.

As a brancher he gave the occasional call for food when he saw me. This developed into a constant screaming in my presence. Luckily this screaming disappeared when he started hunting seriously. What a blessing!

Building confidence and finding the perfect flying weight are the two most crucial ingredients of a successful training program. Entering Joe on clapper larks and fiscal shrikes proved to be easy kills, yet taught him a great deal. It is important not to break the hawk's confidence by starting on difficult quarry. No single step must be missed in training a hawk, start small and gradually move up.

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sight. Sometimes Joe would just decide to fool around. He would make a few circuits, park in a tree and then come down to the lure when he felt like it. The lure was then not garnished, for he did not deserve a reward. This happened whenever he was over-weight. In the Summer months, he was flown between 510 and 520 grams, for a keen hawk with enough energy. In April the weight was raised to 520 to 530 grams because of the colder weather.

Joe always pursued orange river francolin, but never taking them, until one day (for no apparent reason), he threw himself into a hen in an aerial bind. The next day he took a pullet orange river francolin. After that he was flown on guinea fowl pullets only for the adult birds to turn around and give him a good hiding. Later on he caught another pullet but aborted when he saw the approaching adults.

Driving to the veld one day, we saw a covey of orange river francolin next to the road. Joe was slipped and caught one. From that day on everything fell into place. To date he has taken seven orange river francolin and one red wing francolin all in first phase plus many small birds.

On the 19th April 1999 he took he took two orange river francolin cock birds in a matter of twenty minutes, handling them with ease.

Joe now lives in a free mew, but has no problem tied to a bow perch or even the occasional screen perch. After travelling for several hours from Bloemfontein to Dullstroom, he was in perfect condition and took a redwing francolin in the afternoon. On another occasion he stunned the audience by putting in a snipe after only a few meters of flight. The snipe splashed into the water, followed by Joe in hot pursuit. He caught the snipe under the water but for some reason he flew up and left the snipe behind. This all being recorded on video tape!

There is a thin line between a frightened hawk and a tame hawk. Without mishandling the bird, it is important to form a partnership where you take leadership and create ideal opportunities for your hawk to hunt.

It is funny how life always has a way of turning out for the best, whenever you are crying in your Wheatbix - Joe has taught me this.

OBITUARY

by Roger Neilson

It is my sad duty to inform the South African falconry fraternity of the passing away of one of our more flamboyant characters. I refer of course to the recently deceased Pope-Paul Van Der Smith (or as he was known before he changed his name by deed poll in 1991, Sod Murphy). We mourn not only a man who gave a lot of himself to falconry - falconry would not be the same without taking Sod's Law or Murphy's Principles into account - but also the tragic nature of his demise.

I think it only fitting to recount on the pages of this journal some of poor Sod's - or I should say poor Pope-Paul's - triumphs and tragedies: the things that shaped the man's character, destiny and ultimately led to his untimely death.

Sod was born of devout Irish Catholic parents in Liverpool, England in 1938 (which made him a contemporary of Jack Stuhler, who was born around the same time in Johannesburg, South Africa). The very next Sunday his parents took him to the priest to be christened, having decided that the lad should be named Sean Hennessy Murphy after his paternal grandfather. But here he made his first of many marks on the pages of history. His Dad had been celebrating rather heavily with his mates and when asked by Father O'Donovan "And how shall ye be namin' the choild?" Shamus Murphy said: "Oh-Sod! Whatsit Mary?" Father O'Donovan solemnly intoned: "In the name of the Father, the Sone and the Holy Spirit I name thee O Sod Whatsit Mary Murphy". Shamus and Mary just had to make the best of it after it was put like than and shortened the lad's name to "Sod" which at least sounded down-to-earth.

Sod was, not entirely by his own choice, a lonely child and spent long hours in the woods observing nature. On the few times he tried to socialize, he took a lot of "flak" from the urchins in his neighbourhood on account of his name. And because things just always seemed to go wrong where he was to be found. He gave up on socializing and philosophised about the unfairness of life and the beauties of nature, which is how he became interested in falconry.

Sod joined the prestigious "British Falconer's Club" in 1957. After a series of spectacular mishaps, culminating in his arriving late for a field meet on Salisbury Plain aboard a Centurion tank - on which he had hitched a ride when his Mini Moke had got stuck in the mud, the B.F.C committee asked Sod to tender his resignation. The Secretary was at pains to explain that this had nothing to do with the fact that HRH Prince Phillip's Saker - which had been presented to him by King Faisal of Saudi Arabia - had been run over by the tank as it (the Saker) bravely stood its ground over a rook it had just caught. It was just that Sod's "flamboyant" "style" of falconry was, perhaps, more

sued to the Colonies and that the Committee felt sure that if Sod emigrated to Australia - where falconry was in its infancy - he could make a name for himself and make a meaningful contribution to that land. [Which just goes to show how "Poms" fear the Aussies: anything to make life more difficult Down Under!]

Sod was an entomologist by trade and acquired a post with the University of Melbourne to study ways and means of eradicating Australia's fly population and it was his brilliant idea to import dung beetles from Africa to cut the flies out of their share of the dung lying about in Australia. Unfortunately, Sod seriously underestimated the amount of dung one encounters in Australia and the project was a flop. However, he did organise the large "expat." community in Melbourne into a Super Falconry Club. This angered the native Australians who organised themselves into an Extra Super Anti-Falconry League and had falconry banned all over Australia. It was about this time - the late 1970's - that Sod codified "Murphy's Laws", the first of which states as its first principle "If a thing can go wrong, it will go wrong."

Sod left Aussie in disgrace with the falconry fraternity but as the darling of the greenies. He was, however, still burning with suppressed falconry zeal. "Perhaps if I could get hold of Gyr Falcons in Alaska and present a big white Gyr female to His Royal Highness the tank/Saker incident on Salisbury Plain would be forgiven, and I could join the B.F.C." he mused. "I do miss those cucumber sandwiches and flat Tetley's Ale we used to have on those cool, grey, rainy days down in Somerset! I miss those gum boots, tweed caps, umbrellas and MacKintoshes that are so charmingly traditional and British" he wailed. "Where else in the world can you witness the touching spectacle of falconers protecting their Harris Hawks from the elements with umbrellas when out on a bit of hawkking in Hyde Park, I ask you"? He cried to no-one in particular. The more poor Sod thought about it the more he realised that falconry in the British Isles is unique because of the points above mentioned and that he yearned to be a part of it again. With all this in mind, he applied for a post with a prestigious American University to study mosquitoes in the high Alaskan Arctic. The white Gyr Falcon, HRH Prince Phillip's eternal gratitude and forgiveness by the British falconry establishment were almost within Sod's grasp.

We said "almost" for a good reason. Sod did manage to trap a beautiful white Gyr Falcon in between being bitten by mosquitoes, but before he could get it back to the UK he was persuaded to make a falconry video of the Gyr hunting ptarmigan in deep snow drifts in between howling blizzards. Perhaps some of you have seen the video? - unusual falconry conditions to say the least. Everything went OK until the Gyr killed the ptarmigan, then Murphy's Law kicked in and a Golden Eagle arrived on the scene and killed the Gyr, Sod blundered into a hole in the ice, narrowly escaping drowning thanks to the film crew and suffered testicular frostbite. All this because Sod had forgotten the Second Principle, namely, "If a thing goes wrong once it will keep on going wrong".

After this Sod was a changed man. No longer did he yearn for the exciting things in life like cucumber sandwiches, flat Tetley's Ale or strolling in the rain with a Harris Hawk. Instead he wanted to feel warm and decided that Africa was the continent for him. South Africa in the early 1990's was an exciting place to be. It was crammed with disgruntled ex-Rhodesians who thought they were doing something positive when they "gapped it" from Zimbabwe in the 1980's but who were beginning to realize that they had jumped from the frying pan into the caldera of an active volcano. A lot of the "Whenwe's" as the local South Africans called them, professed to know a lot about falconry and were at pains to tell their South African hosts things like: "When we were in Rhodesia we used to fly them at snipe/red-billed teal/yellow-billed/black duck, spurwing geese/striches etc. This brassed the South African falconers off thoroughly and they became quite paranoid about the "Zimbabweanisation of South African Falconry". It was into this cultural maelstrom that Sod Murphy was thrust when he stepped off the plane at Johannesburg's Airport. Sod realized immediately that if he wanted to get anywhere with falconry in South Africa he would have to completely dissociate himself from the "Whenwe's", which with his name, quaint accent and cultured manners he was in grave danger of being mistaken for. He wouldn't do to be recognised as a "Pom" as both the Zimbabweans and South Africans would immediately join forces against a "roomish" "Pom" falconer, instinctively recognising the tendency such persons have to wear cut-away vests and favour any bird, no matter how small that was BIG. In order to succeed in South Africa he would have to change his name to something typically South African! He decided on Pope-Paul Van Der Smith. Pope-Paul (or to give this universal South African first name its proper Afrikaans pronunciation of Poul) because every second South African male was a regular Pope-Paul (and a hell of a lot more than 1 in every 2 falconers!) And Van Der Smith because this seemed like a good all-purpose surname for a Pope-Paul. After changing his name, I am pleased to say that Pope-Paul found himself well received by his peers of the T.F.C.

As I have indicated, P.P. (As he liked to be called) was an instant success with the T.F.C. He could talk knowledgeably about falconry, drive around in a 4 X 4 King Cab - when not driving in a Mercedes Benz - with a "Sorry still running in" sticker on the back window, generally flash his wealth around and do all the things that made South African falconers glad to be his buddy without his having to actually fly a hawk. [Editor's Note: This last is the only known way of evading the consequences of Murphy's Laws as applied to falconry].

P.P. also managed to attract an adoring crowd of teenage apprentice falconers that would hang on his every word, 'phone him up at all hours of the night and day asking his advice on how to find their lost Greater Kestrels and take turns manning and training his Black Sparrowhawk for him. To put it plainly, Murphy had found his "place in the sun" and was basking in it. It is at times like these that Murphy's Laws strike hard, and they did. On a certain Sunday morning a group of P.P.'s apprentice falconers arrived at his house in Bryanston and said: "Boss, we have found a nest of a Milky Eagle Owl in a hollow poplar tree. We thought you might want to photograph it with your new Hasselblad if you have worked out how to load it yet. We can put a ring on the chick and it can be a huge public relations exercise in which you can look especially good". This sounded alright to P.P./Murphy as, since the Alaskan video fiasco he had been seeking ways to polish his battered self esteem. His entourage piled into his King Cab and proceeded to the poplar plantation where the Milky Eagle Owl had its nest. It was quite an excursion, and P.P. actually got to put his King Cab into 4-wheel drive over the last 100 metres or so.

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Now P.P.'s apprentices were an organised band of youngsters. They had climbing ropes, a grappling hook, harness, slings, carabiners and a red crash helmet/hard hat arrangement that protected one's head in the event of a fall, but made one rather anonymous on film. They shinned up the tree in no time and popped a ring on the chick whilst Mommy owl flew off and sat in a nearby tree. P.P. took out his movie camera (film giving so much better definition than video, you know) and filmed his boys doing their thing. Then it was time for P.P. to add the cherry on the top of this particular fruit cake by climbing the tree and taking "stills" with his Hasselblad of the chick and have his own picture taken with the movie camera whilst doing so. The lads harnessed him up and buckled the carabiner and P.P. to the climbing rope. They did everything by the book except that the Boss-man didn't want to wear the red crash helmet as it would confuse his viewers of his submission to the wildlife programme "70/30". P.P. climbed the tree with his lads taking in the slack rope - rather like abseiling in reverse - and winding the slack around a belaying post, which in this case was another poplar tree. P.P. reached the nest cavity without mishap and pushed himself out and away from the tree trunk with his legs to allow for the minimum focal distance with the Hasselblad - relying entirely on the rope which was slung over a stout branch above the nest cavity and its being correctly belayed way down on "terra firma". Whilst P.P. was snapping pics of the cute, fluffy chick the "appie" with the movie camera was zoomed in on him, all eyes were on him or concentrating on the belaying rope or whatever else they were supposed to be doing. At this point the forgotten role player in the story - mommy Milky Eagle Owl - decided it was time that "The Law" should be invoked. She sallied out from the willow tree and whacked P.P. a terrific shot on the side of his bare head as she flew past in a style that was rather like a peregrine whacking a duck in "slow-mo" (removing a sizeable piece of scalp at the same time). P.P. fell out of the tree like a shot crow and was left dangling unconscious at the end of the rope from whence he was lowered to the ground. The whole episode meanwhile had been recorded for posterity by the "appie" with the camera. If this film footage still exists - which I doubt - somebody could earn many dollars by sending it to "America's Funniest Home Movies"!

Being knocked on the head by an owl and left dangling unconscious at the end of a rope in front of half-a-dozen groupies had a profound effect on P.P.. Gone was the brashness that had been his hallmark. The house in Bryanston, the King Cab and the Mercedes Benz were sold, and P.P. moved to Pretoria and drove around unobtrusively in a "Volksie" Golf. The Black Spar female was given to the most promising "appie" and in line with his new, unobtrusive image, P.P. took up an eyas Ovambo Sparrowhawk. He left his 'phone off the hook, no longer wanting to be 'phoned up at night by novice falconers who had spotted feather lice on their kestrel and wanted advice on how to deal with the crisis. Instead he threw himself into training the Ovambo. Here at last was a bird that he could click with. Sod was well aware of the Second Principle ("If a thing goes wrong once it will keep on going wrong"), but hoped that he could minimize the damage by flying a small, unobtrusive bird like the "grey ghost of the Highveld", which to give P.P. full credit, he trained well and was beginning to clock up an impressive score of small to middle-sized quarry. The more experience P.P. gained with the 'Grey Ghost' the more he came to admire the small, dodgy prey like Orange Throated Longclaws, Spike Heeled Lark and that ultimate 'artful dodger', the Ant-eating Chat who would, when bested in the air, dive headlong down Aardvark burrows, rat holes or any other hole that happened to be handy. "Guineafowl or francolin" scoffed P.P.: "who needs those clumsy, flying, cart-horses when you can fly Long Claws, Spike-heeled larks and Ant-eating chats with the fastest Accipiter in creation?"

One afternoon P.P. was out with the "Grey Ghost" on a farm north of Pretoria where there were a lot of his three favourite prey species. The spar was fit and keen and very close to notching up her 100th kill. Quite close to the farmer's house an Ant-eating chat got up and with adrenaline pumping into his veins P.P. flung the "Ghost" off in hot pursuit. Now the farm house and outbuildings of this particular farm were of the rustic sort that one still occasionally comes across on the edge of the bushveld. The outbuildings were especially rustic, having narrowly escaped destruction at the hands of the British in 1901, and it was towards these that the Ant-eating chat turned for safe haven when it perceived that it was about to become "Kill Number 99". Twisting and banking with the spar slightly below and inexorably closing the gap, it entered the open door of the long-drop toilet and plunged down the shaft. The spar - who was only about 40 cm behind it at this stage - also shot down the shaft of the long-drop. "Oh SHIT" aptly and accurately observed P.P. in an anguished shriek.

The farmer was summoned and this fellow, after he had recovered from his initial shock, produced a powerful torch, several farm workers and a length of rope usually used for lassoing bulls and such like. P.P. offered each of the farm workers the equivalent of about a month's pay to venture down the long drop and retrieve the Ovambo for him. One fellow agreed but changed his mind after studying the 'lay of the land' through the hole in the pine toilet seat with the farmer's torch. Finally P.P. realized that there was no other course of action but to be lowered into the long drop himself if he wanted his spar back. After much suffering and indescribable hardship P.P. did retrieve his spar. He realized around about this time that changing his name to Pope-Paul Van Der Smith hadn't really helped all that much and that he was probably no worse off being called Sod Murphy!

P.P. cleaned and disinfected the spar and himself very thoroughly many, many times, and didn't venture out of his house in Pretoria for a long while. So long in fact that his buddies in the T.F.C. became worried about him. Tim Wagner eventually went around to P.P.'s house and pounded on the door. "P.P. old buddy" he shouted through the keyhole, "I know you're in there, so why don't you open the door?" "Go away" replied P.P., "I don't want to see anybody." Tim Wagner is a very personable and persuasive sort of fellow and after about 40 minutes of dialogue through the keyhole, P.P. opened the door. Tim sat P.P. down at the kitchen table and gave him a dose of Wagnerian logic.

"So what if you nearly drowned down a long drop, at least you were man enough to do what a man's gotta do!" propended Tim. "Hell's teeth" he went on, "I reckon you need a medal for doing what you did. Now snap out of this mood you've descended into - er maybe 'descended' isn't quite the right way to put it to you just now - snap out of this morbid frame of mind and come around to my house tomorrow evening for a braai. I'm having some of the lads around to meet a famous American Scientist or falconer, and we your buddies want you to meet this guy." P.P. was touched but said: "Tim, there's more to it than the long drop..." Tim cut him short. "OK, there was being whacked on the head by the owl. So what? If you're a falconer these things happen. You take Roger Neilson for example. The

poor schwab was seriously attacked by one of his hawk eagles, but did he cry about it? Hell no! He went out and made a name for himself flying Little Sparrowhawks! You, P.P. must snap out of it. I tell you what: I'll give you one of my captive bred African Peregrines. Peregrines don't attack you and they don't fly down long drop toilets. Peregrines are sweet tempered aristocrats and just don't do things like that! There now, blow your nose, wipe those tears, come to the braai tomorrow, meet the VIP and Uncle Tim will give you a female Peregrine!"

P.P. Van Der Smith had been on the point of confessing to Tim about his past. The series of tragic accidents and the fact that he was a 'Pom' falconer in disguise. He now thought better of it; being invited to a braai at Tim's house was a rare honour (never afforded to the likes of 'Poms' and 'Whenwe's') and being given one of Tim's famous peregrines was equally rare and honourable. Being invited to a braai, being allowed to meet a travelling falconry VIP AND being presented with one of Tim's peregrines all on the same day was unheard of in the annals of South African falconry! And none of this would happen if it was known that Sod Murphy was to be the recipient.

Next evening at 6 p.m., P.P. Van Der Smith duly parked the "Volksie" Golf in between the fleet of assorted 4 wheel drive vehicles gathered in front of Tim's house. The smell of braaiing boerewors assailed his nostrils and made his mouth water. P.P. made his way to the front lawn where the meat was braaiing and the lads were quaffing down Castle Beer by the can full. Pointer dogs ran about excitedly urinating on the wheels of the motor vehicles, children were chasing each other around the swimming pool; it was a picture of a South African falconry get-together on a lovely summers evening. Tim Wagner appeared from behind a bottle of Windhoek Lager and said: "Hi there P.P. old buddy, glad you could make it! Now I want you to meet Dr Tom Sade who is over here from Cornell University." P.P.'s heart skipped a beat or three. Cornell was the university he was employed by when he studied mosquitoes in the High Arctic. Tom Sade knew all about the Golden Eagle eating the white Gyr Falcon and the case of testicular frostbite. He felt trapped as he looked into the steel grey eyes of Dr Thomas Sade (a distant relative of the infamous Marquis of the same name) and heard him pronounce, in his clipped and cultured New England accent: "What the Hell! You ain't no gen - oo - wine Soth African; you ain't Pope-Paul Van Der Smith! You are that Limey falconer Sod Murphy that ran over Prince Phillip's Saker with a tank and you got falconry banned in Australia 'way back". There was a hushed silence in which you could hear a pin drop (actually several beer cans were dropped!), the pointers stopped urinating and the kids stopped running in dizzy circles around the pool, sensing that something dreadful was happening. The silence was broken by Tim Wagner who said: "P.P. tell me it's not true; tell me you're not a Pom!" (Tim could have forgiven P.P. if he had only run over HRH's Saker or only had falconry banned in Australia, but the other allegation was more serious. Tim quite rightly believed that Aussies don't deserve falconry in the first place, and in the second, a Saker is not much good to anyone anyway.). P.P. then did the only honourable thing he could do. Looking Tim Wagner in the eye he said: "It's true, Tim. I AM Sod Murphy and as Dr Same has put it, I am a Limey falconer. As to the other stories circulating, I am NOT responsible for quite every disaster that has ever befallen falconers." "And now gentlemen, I think it would be best if I left you to your braai. Oh yes, Tim, under the circumstance I realise that it would be impossible for me to accept the peregrine you offered me" he added wistfully. Sod Murphy turned on his heel with all the dignity he could still muster and left the shocked T.F.C. members and the smirking American scientist to their beer, boerewors and buttered buns.

Sod gave up all pretenses of being Pope-Paul Van Der Smith after this cruel exposure. He wasn't surprised a few days later to receive a letter from the T.F.C. Secretary, Robbie Robinson, telling him that the Committee had decided to revoke his 'A' and 'B' Grading and that if he wished to continue falconry he would have to hand his Ovambo to Robbie's breeding project and train either a Greater Kestrel or an African Goshawk. Also, if he was interested in an "Af Gos" someone had parked one on Robbie's lawn and Sod could have the sod. Robbie - who is known for being one of the more humane members of the T.F.C. committee - added a little off-the-record advice (on a separate, unsigned sheet of paper) to the effect that if Sod would seek psychiatric help for his Rambo fetish, there was nothing to stop him from regaining his 'B' Grade and ultimately 'A' Grading if he trained the appropriate hawks and demonstrated his and their competence before the grading committee. Robbie went on to say that he had seen a lot of Pommie falconers turn "Rambo" when they went abroad and the condition was far from incurable, given the amazing strides made by modern drugs and psychiatry. He ended off by wishing Sod the best of British luck and a speedy recovery.

Sod liked what he saw when he picked the African Goshawk musket up from the bow perch under the Karee trees on Robbie's lawn. The bird had nice proportions and an engaging character for a shortwing. "Well, well, things could be a lot worse, and you look as though you will murder Indian Mynas on my local golf course" Sod confided to the African Goshawk as he drove home to Pretoria. Murder the Indian Mynas is exactly what the "Af Gos" did, so much so that when the surviving mynas in Sod's neighbourhood saw a red "Volksie" Golf approach they beat it for the safety of the nearest leafy tree. Sod had to range further and further with each sortie to find untraumatized mynas, and it was this quest for new hunting grounds that led to his untimely death.

One Saturday afternoon Sod and Af Gos were cruising about looking for mynas to murder when they spied several adjoining grassy sports fields. On closer inspection he ascertained that two indigenous soccer clubs were playing a game of football on one of the field and were being observed by three hundred or so fans whilst so engaged. The other fields were not in use, and on one of these eight or ten mynas were strutting around cheekily far from cover as though they didn't have a care in the world. The temptation was too much for Sod. He pulled up with a screech of brakes, Af Gos on his left hand, engaged second gear and cruised slowly up to the edge of the field and steered so as to angle his "Volksie" for a slip out of the driver's window. The goshawk musket slipped out of the window and skimmed over the mowed lawn like a miniature cruise missile straight at a quartet of mynas which now scattered frantically at the approach of the hawk. The musket homed in on one myna and stayed with it as he began a desperate figure-of-eight type of flight around the vehicle and was caught virtually at Sod Murphy's feet. Sod knelt down over the hawk and kill and tried to prize the musket loose from his kill and give him a dove carcass by way of exchange and did not notice two men approaching him purposefully across the football field until they were a little less than 20 metres away.

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"Excuse me, gentlemen," he sang out good naturedly; "please don't frighten my hawk; he has just caught a bird." The younger of the two was about 19 years of age and tall while the older man was much shorter.

"Why you not ask permission for football club like proper gentlemen do?" shouted the older man as they broke into a run to cut Sod off from his means of escape.

"Gentlemen" said Sod, I am a consultant for the mine that these football fields belong to and I did ask the Mine Manager if"

"The Manager does not own: you must ask the workers who are the true owners" said the young man with feeling. "If you think I'm violent and unduly antagonistic towards you, you would be perfectly correct in that assumption" intoned the younger man in crisp, icy English that would have made the Church of England parson who had taught him his elocution glow with almost paternal pride.

"Oh boy" thought Sod, I am going to have to do some smooth blarneying to get out of this in one piece. About this time the African Goshawk decided that a distant clump of gums trees was a safer place to be than at Sod's feet and bated off. Sod let him go and wished that he too had wings.

"No" countered the older one, who saw his authority being eroded by the young 'comrade'; "you ask for Football Committee"

"You fool", retorted the younger man. "The Football Committee ARE workers!"

Sod made use of this slight distraction to get his butt a bit closer to the open door of his car.

The young man whirled around and hissed: "And where does the running dog think he is going? I am not finished with you; you must be made to pay for your selfishness in front of the people who you have insulted!"

Again Sod caught a mental glimpse of a white-haired, bespectacled Church of England priest nodding approval and beaming with pride whilst muttering "What great spirit the lad has! He will go far in politics will young Ezekiel"

"Gentlemen" said Sod gravely, "I wish to remove the offending vehicle from your soccer field to the public road over there, and having done that I will apologise for not having asked the football club for permission."

The crowd, which a minute or two earlier had been watching a football match began to swarm out of the viewing stand to where the scene of action was developing. "Yes, that good thing" said the older man. "You move car, say solly, you go!"

"Oh no, I want the Boer to pay!" said the Young Comrade, and then turning to the rapidly swelling crowd shouted: "Amandla!" "Awethu!" came the roaring reply. "Bulala lo M'buna" screeched Ezekiel (or Habakuk or IZIAH or whatever his "Christian" name was). "Gentlemen, I am NOT a Boer, I am an English ... well Irish actually, but I was born in England", said Sod diplomatically. "I hope that makes a difference." "Oh yes it does" said young Ezekiel. "Bulala lo Yengisi" he bayed to the crowd, which immediately changed the chant enthusiastically to "Bulala lo Yengisi". Women began to ululate and the crowd began to rock rhythmically back and forth whilst a look of eternal bliss shone from somewhere deep in Ezekiel's soul.

Sod, who knew a thing or two about mob psychology, realized that his life wasn't worth a fig just then and made a headlong dive for the open door of his car just as the first traditional weapon was slung at his head. The door slammed shut behind him and the motor took at the first turn of the key. [Thank Providence that the car was not an up market, up-to-date South African version with fifteen different anti-theft devices.]. Amidst the kicks, blows and curses raining down on the "Volksie", Sod charged through the mass of humanity that encircled the scene of the myna bird kill of a few forgotten moments earlier. Sod made it through to the asphalt road and sped away with crashing gears and seething thoughts.

After the main rush of adrenaline had subsided (i.e. when his heart had stopped thudding in his ears) Sod felt an icy calm settle over his being. He saw objectively that his African Goshawk had to be retrieved, but to venture back onto the E.R.P.M. Sports Ground without a sidearm would be a recipe for disaster. So, with this in mind, Sod unlocked his gun safe, withdrew his British South Africa Police .38 Special revolver, and because he was in a mild state of shock (and, of course, Sod Murphy) promptly dropped it on the floor. A shot rang out and the bullet caught poor Sod between the eyes, scattering his brains against the ceiling. All of which only goes to prove the adage: 'Life's a bitch and then you die!'

FOOTNOTE

There were three winners in this saga. Poor Sod, despite his terrible mortal life, remains in spirit amongst falconers throughout the world - you had better believe it! The African Goshawk musket took up residence in the Boksburg suburb of Plantation and feasted royally on sparrows, doves and the occasional Indian Myna. Ezekiel returned to his 'alma mater', St Cuthbert's Mission in the Transkei, hijacked the Mission's minibus and shot his English teacher using the traditional AK 47 while the old gentleman was vainly scrambling forward to hand Ezekiel the trophy he had won for a debate on "The futility of violence in achieving an African Renaissance" during his last year at the school.

SOME NOTES ON THE TAITA FALCON

FALCO FASCIINUCHA

By RAY BLACK

The Taita falcon is often described as one of the rarest falcons in the world. Tremendous strides in our knowledge of this falcon have been made in the last twenty years. Researchers have recorded it breeding in Uganda, Zambia, Malawi, Zimbabwe and for the first time in South Africa in October 1990. Tim Wagner our Chairman, being very instrumental in its discovery there. Zimbabwe has seventeen known breeding sites, the most by far of any territory. This seems to indicate that country has the most optimum habitat/nesting sites, but it also has the most active field research programme as well, thanks to certain falconers there.

What of the taita under falconry and captive breeding conditions? Falconers are avid readers of all literature pertaining to falcons, so many of you are aware of recent achievements by Jim Weaver of the 'Peregrine Fund' in the captive breeding of taita's. A fair number have been bred by this unit during the last few years. In 1998 alone they bred five Taita eyasses to the fledging stage. Ron Hartley, Research Co-ordinator and Breeding Project supervisor of the ZIMBABWE FALCONER'S CLUB organised the original Taita pairs for the Peregrine Fund during the 80's. Ron has done extensive and meaningful research on the ecology of the Taita in that country, but he has also succeeded in breeding two eyasses this 1998 season. He has taken up a tiercel from this progeny and is currently flying it this season. We can therefore look forward to hearing of this in the future.

Against this background it seemed to me that it might be unnecessary to put down my experiences with a haggard tiercel that I rehabilitated, trained and then released during 1975 in Zimbabwe. In the end I decided that insufficient though they might be, these experiences written down, encourage others to complete the 'picture' of this fascinating little falcon.

This haggard Tiercel had been picked up next to the road a few kilometers from Umtari in Zimbabwe in April 1975. I received him two days later via Dr D Walker, a falconer friend. The tiercel was still in a stunned state and had to be force fed for a few days and even after that it was two weeks before he could fly at all. Clearly he had hit some obstacle, probably overhead wires. Apart from concussion there were no broken bones so presumably extensive bruising caused the inability to fly for the first two weeks.

First impressions were of a brightly coloured miniature peregrine. I could not believe my eyes as to how stocky his build was nor how short the tail. This together with his very serious demeanour always tempted one to laugh at him although his obvious abilities soon made you take him seriously. The feet were robust and nicely shaped, but not quite as large in proportion to its size as an African Peregrine, a similar comparison could be made on the beak size. His weight was 207 gms when I received him. After he had made a full recovery he flew strongly at 217 gms. The plumage was of the peregrine type, i.e. hard metallic primaries, etc. His disposition was fearless and very like a passage African Peregrine tiercel, but easier to man. The tiercel once he had recovered his flight powers mounted naturally and quickly in tight circles above me going higher every session in anticipation of being served with bagged laughing doves. Incidentally this seemed to be the exact equivalent of serving an African peregrine tiercel with domestic pigeons. They are probably quite easily lost being small, unobtrusive and almost any small bird a temptation. I did find though that I had quite a lot of control over the flight with this falcon which could be seen against the sky and was circling over you patiently waiting to be served.

The tiercel being a haggard was a stylist and good footer, sometimes striking and sometimes binding to the dove. He was made to the hood with ease.

The final three weeks of his sojourn with me culminated in his climbing immediately on release to a _ 150 foot pitch (he was still getting higher every day) where he would 'wait-on' for a minute or two waiting for his dove. By this stage he had clearly demonstrated his full recovery and I did not feel I could justify keeping a haggard of so rare a falcon any longer. Next day, mid afternoon I released him with a medium crop. He climbed up into the sky and briefly waited on thinking maybe there would be more and then continued upward and away. I felt I had a rare privilege with this fascinating little falcon. It is difficult not to get excited anticipating this falcon's debut into modern falconry. From my own point of view I would jump at the chance of flying another one of these par-excellence small game falcons as I think would any falconer.

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Against this background it seemed to me that it might be unnecessary to put down my experiences with a haggard tiercel that I rehabilitated, trained and then released during 1975 in Zimbabwe. In the end I decided that insufficient though they might be, these experiences written down, encourage others to complete the 'picture' of this fascinating little falcon.

This haggard Tiercel had been picked up next to the road a few kilometers from Umtari in Zimbabwe in April 1975. I received him two days later via Dr D Walker, a falconer friend. The tiercel was still in a stunned state and had to be force fed for a few days and even after that it was two weeks before he could fly at all. Clearly he had hit some obstacle, probably overhead wires. Apart from concussion there were no broken bones so presumably extensive bruising caused the inability to fly for the first two weeks.

First impressions were of a brightly coloured miniature peregrine. I could not believe my eyes as to how stocky his build was nor how short the tail. This together with his very serious demeanour always tempted one to laugh at him although his obvious abilities soon made you take him seriously. The feet were robust and nicely shaped, but not quite as large in proportion to its size as an African Peregrine, a similar comparison could be made on the beak size. His weight was 207 gms when I received him. After he had made a full recovery he flew strongly at 217 gms. The plumage was of the peregrine type, i.e. hard metallic primaries, etc. His disposition was fearless and very like a passage African Peregrine tiercel, but easier to man. The tiercel once he had recovered his flight powers mounted naturally and quickly in tight circles above me going higher every session in anticipation of being served with bagged laughing doves. Incidentally this seemed to be the exact equivalent of serving an African peregrine tiercel with domestic pigeons. They are probably quite easily lost being small, unobtrusive and almost any small bird a temptation. I did find though that I had quite a lot of control over the flight with this falcon which could be seen against the sky and was circling over you patiently waiting to be served.

The tiercel being a haggard was a stylist and good footer, sometimes striking and sometimes binding to the dove. He was made to the hood with ease.

The final three weeks of his sojourn with me culminated in his climbing immediately on release to a _ 150 foot pitch (he was still getting higher every day) where he would 'wait-on' for a minute or two waiting for his dove. By this stage he had clearly demonstrated his full recovery and I did not feel I could justify keeping a haggard of so rare a falcon any longer. Next day, mid afternoon I released him with a medium crop. He climbed up into the sky and briefly waited on thinking maybe there would be more and then continued upward and away. I felt I had a rare privilege with this fascinating little falcon. It is difficult not to get excited anticipating this falcon's debut into modern falconry. From my own point of view I would jump at the chance of flying another one of these par-excellence small game falcons as I think would any falconer.

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Taita Falcon
Photo by Ray Black

FALCONS IN SAUDI ARABIA

Photo's by Alan Stephenson

