

MEWS VIEWS

Magazine of the South African Falconry Association
Volume 2, July 2004



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EDITORIAL

Here is the second offering of Mews Views. It contains a mix of serious and humorous articles with some debate, some sound advice from seasoned falconers and a mixture of good stories and anecdotes. Firstly, a heartfelt thank-you to all who contributed, without your efforts there would be no magazine. One of the real pleasures of being editor is that I get to read the stories first. This year's edition contains a number of contributions that I did not expect and had not solicited. Thanks guys, these were a very pleasant surprise and much appreciated. Keep it up and think about next year!

What about next year? We have dipped our toes into the area of debate with the articles on flying hybrids, not without concern. Debate is important and, I believe, necessary. We need to examine what we do and its implications. What are the pros and cons, should we do some things, can we do them better and are there things that we would like to be able to do? Debate can keep our minds active and our sport healthy. Would anyone like to grapple with issues like The Ethics of Hunting, The Merits of a Wild Take Versus Captive Breeding, Can We Run Sky Trials Differently, and are "Falconry Displays" Good or Bad for our Sport? I am sure that most of us who read that list of topics will have some opinions and we wont all agree. Why not put your thoughts on paper for next year.

That being said, the opinions expressed in articles contained in this magazine are not necessarily those of the Editor or of S.A.F.A. I hope that you will enjoy our offering.

Good Hawking

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

Cover Picture: *African Peregrine Falcon* by Roger Neilson.

CONTENTS

Provincial Report	Eastern Cape	4
Provincial Report	Free State	5
Provincial Report	Gauteng	6
Provincial Report	Kwazulu Natal	7
Provincial Report	Limpopo	8
Provincial Report	Western Cape	10
Sky Trial Results		11
Sky Trial Report	<i>Greg Jean Jacques</i>	12
Black Phantom Under Pressure	<i>Greg Jean Jacques</i>	13
A Memorable Flight	<i>Dirk Verwoed</i>	15
The Hybrid Debate	<i>Steven Squires</i>	18
Falconry An Art & Hybrids	<i>R Neilson</i>	22
'Ex' The Gabar Gos	<i>Angus Burns</i>	25
The Peregrine Fund's Raptor Programme	<i>Ron Hartley</i>	28
Use Of Birds Of Prey	<i>Limpopo Falconry Club</i>	31
Captive Breeding	<i>Mike Thompson</i>	34
Hawk Eagles	<i>Dave Fowler</i>	37
Passage Peregrine	<i>A. Muller</i>	39
Gilbert Blaines Lodge	<i>Paul Venter</i>	41
Scottish Grouse Hawking	<i>Adrian Lombard</i>	42
Primitive Falconry	<i>Roger Nielson</i>	45
Falconry & The New Reg	<i>Adrian Lombard</i>	48
Falconry In South Africa	<i>Alan Stephenson</i>	52
Ray Black	<i>Paul Venter</i>	55
A Lanner Called Geoff	<i>Paul Venter</i>	57

PROVINCIAL REPORT – EASTERN CAPE

Alan Harvey

Club Chairman: Alan Harvey
Secretary: Alan Stephenson
Members: Aiden Zimmerman
Arnold Slabbert
Brian Reeves
George Beton
Gareth Coombs
Graham Coutts

Falconry has been slow in the Eastern Cape over the 2003 season with only myself and Brian Reeves actively flying birds.

Brian had a fair season with his passage female lanner taking redwing francolin at the start but had a problem finding enough quarry towards the end. Brian has moulted this bird and will fly her again in 2004.

I flew Shakira (Red Nape Shahin) and Kayla (African Peregrine), and had great sport on duck and partridge. Shakira now in her 3rd season took over 70 duck (yellowbills, redbill teal, shovellers and southern pochard). She also got into the greywing and orange rivers on our trips to the Free State. A noteworthy kill was a male shelduck and a few silly binds to spurwing.

Kayla took 35 duck and 11 partridge. I am hacking two female African Peregrines and will fly one as a summer hawk. I will also fly the old birds again next season. The other members did not fly for a variety of reasons.

PROVINCIAL REPORT – FREE STATE

Steven Squires

The club had nine members who flew hawks last season all with some measure of success. Francois Breedt flew his 8 times intermewed peregrine Penny in fine style and achieved a remarkable score of ducks towards the end of the season. He also flew his 3 times intermewed gyr/prarie hybrid male Zinzan who he reports is getting better each season and produced his best duck hawking ever. His hard-hitting style combined with high intelligence makes for a spectacular and efficient duck hawk. Both birds will be flown in the 2004 season.

Angelo Grobler spent his falconry season working for a falcon breeder in the U.S.A. There he experienced the finer art of insemination, (I presume of the falcons ed note) and learned to make hoods of world-class quality. He will be flying two peregrine falcons for the 2004 season.

Leigh Strapp did not hunt during the 3002 season due to other commitments, but has obtained a black sparrowhawk for the 2004 season.

Tim MacPherson has progressed to B grade status, and had a very successful season with his lanner falcon at francolin. He has also achieved great success with a female black sparrowhawk and will fly two imprint black spars this year.

Karel de Jager flew his African goshawk successfully in the 2003 season and has progressed to B grade status. He will be flying a Black sparrowhawk as well as his African goshawk for the 2004 season.

Adolf Krogman joined our club in 2003 but did not fly a hawk. He will start with a rock kestrel in 2004.

Anton Muller proved that a Passage Peregrine can be flown to a very high standard without losing it. His bird was trapped outside Bloemfontein and introduced to ducks early on. She flew these with great zest for the rest of the season and took a fine score. Anton will fly her for the 2004 season after which he plans to release her.

Frans Marx joined our club in 2003 and successfully graded with his rock kestrel. He will fly an African Goshawk for the 2004 season.

Steven Squires flew a cast of Peregrine Tiercels at doves with limited success. A great deal of experimental falconry was carried out and much was learned. Both birds are flying again in 2004 and early hunts have proved remarkably successful. One of the birds, Norbet, is flying like dynamite, and his goofball friend Mervyn is also flying much better than last season.

PROVINCIAL REPORT – GAUTENG

Tim Wagner

Breeding

Again, another successful breeding season for peregrines with 12 birds being fledged by Tim Wagner. These birds were dispensed to falconers countrywide. Two pairs of peregrines with Grant Neale laid infertile eggs. Hopefully they will be more successful this next season or we may inseminate with Prairie Falcon or Gyr semen.

Four black Sparrowhawks were produced, three by Mike Thompson and one by Tim Wagner.

Falconry

A large interest in Black Sparrowhawks was shown this year with Greg and Rory Jean-Jacques, Herholdt Gauche, Paul Strydom, Heinrich Schreuder and Grant Neale getting new birds. Ray Thompson also has a female Black Spar, which is flying well and racking up a good score. This bird is quite capable of catching Orange River Francolin, on a first phase slip, in the air.

Colin Williams is flying his intermewed Af Gos again, who is as effective as always. Leon Haveman, Pieter Rabie and Eelco Meyjes are also flying Af gosses and from what I hear Leon is having great fun with the plovers and mynahs. Leo Odendaal has taken up his intermewed Ovambo Sparrowhawk.

Ronnie Watt lost his peregrine last year but got it back after it had been passed around for a while, eventually landing up at the Dullstroom Bird of Prey Center. This only shows how important it is to put a tag with all your contact details on your bird. This bird would have been returned immediately it was recovered, to its rightful owner, if it had these contact details on. This is not the first time where someone has gone to a lot of trouble to track down the right person on recovering a lost bird. The less time a bird spends in incompetent hands the better for the bird.

Mark Labuschagne has his Hybrid Gyr/prairie on ducks and has passed his peregrine on to Paul Venter in the Limpopo Province. Tim Wagner is flying an intermewed Peregrine and a Gyr/Peregrine Tiercel. The peregrine is taking Francolin on a regular basis while the hybrid has just been taken up but should be ready by the SAFA meet. Gary Warren has two peregrine tiercels on the wing and they are catching Francolin on almost every outing. Dirk Verwoerd will have taken up his hybrid and peregrine by now.

PROVINCIAL REPORT – KWAZULU NATAL

Angus Burns

During 2003, we lost and gained members and as a result our membership now stands at roughly 45. Out of this number there are about 15 members actively flying hawks with 10 or so who are putting in an above average effort.

At present, the club is running smoothly under the able leadership of the Chairman Blake Osborne. The committee for 2003/2004 consists of Blake Osborne (Chair), Angus Burns (Secretary), Bruce Padbury, Ben Hoffman, Kevin Hutton, John Korsten, Charles Woods and John Bamber.

The committee organized a Club Hunting weekend at Newcastle during May 2003 and also held our AGM earlier that year (in April). Both were very well supported which is an encouraging sign. Only 3 members from the NFC attended the 2003 SAFA meeting at Aliwal North. The club has undertaken to ensure a better turnout from KZN at the 2004 SAFA meeting and we should see a number of members attending with their hawks.

We have successfully produced two "Hawk Talk" magazines for 2003 and the first one for 2004 is already in the pipeline.

Our relationship with eKZN Wildlife (the KZN Provincial Conservation Authority) grows stronger every year and we are proud to be assisting this organization with the inclusion of our nesting sites on their "Sensitive Sites" GIS system. This will hopefully provide adequate protection against destruction of our Raptor habitats and nesting sites.

We have assisted our local raptor rehabilitation centers by taking on rehab hawks, training them and hunting them. Eventually, these hawks are used for breeding or hacked back.

Herewith a brief list of what some of the members have recently flown or are presently flying:

Black Sparrowhawks – Bruce Padbury, Angus Burns, Andy Gerrard, Matthew Lamb,
John Bamber, Greg Mcbey, Kyle Solms, Darryl Twiddy

Lanners – Charles Woods, Kevin Hutton, Greg Mcbey

Red Breasted Sparrowhawks – Alan Howell, Grey Mcbey, Kyle Solms

African Goshawks – Bruce Padbury, Charles Woods

Peregrines & Hybrids – John Bamber, Greg Mcbey

African Hawk Eagles – Blake Osborne, Darryl Twiddy

Kevin Hutton and Angus Burns will be flying Gabar Goshawks later this season. Bruce Padbury and John Bamber will both be taking Red Breasted Sparrowhawks later this year.

A few new members have recently applied for African Goshawks and they should be acquiring their first hawks shortly. For the year ahead we look forward to regular club hunting trips, interaction with falconers and lots of great flying!

PROVINCIAL REPORT – LIMPOPO

Trevor Oertel

After more than two years of negotiating with the Limpopo Provinces Conservation Authorities, the Limpopo Falconer's Club (formerly the Northern Province Falconry Club) was finally granted permits for a wild take of hawks.

Various hurdles had to be overcome with the largest being a jaundiced view on falconers by the official placed in charge of the Limpopo falconry portfolio. It was stated on a few occasions if it were up to him falconry would be banned. This view we hope is slowly changing, fortunately we have the support of his superiors.

A paper on the justification/sustainable utilization of birds of prey for falconry was submitted to the department and even with a lot of opposition from our departmental detractor (he felt the data was outdated) was approved by management.

The first permits issued were for Black Sparrowhawks, unfortunately by the time the permits were issued all the young had fledged from the monitored nest sites and members hoping for an eyas will have to try their luck this coming breeding season.

Permits for Ovambo Sparrowhawks and African Goshawks have now been issued, and we await a few Lanner and one Peregrine Falcon trapping permits.

The Limpopo Falconers Club's first AGM was held at WildThingZ Animal Park Polokwane (Pietersburg) in May 2003. The LFC presently consists of 20 members who have very patiently sat by waiting to legally fly hawks. Paul Venter resigned as President of the NPFC/LFC (he's had enough of politicking and wants to fly hawks). A big "thank you" was extended to Oom Paul for all his hard work in keeping falconry on the map in the Limpopo Province. Paul has been elected as the first Honourary Member of the LFC. Denis Leisegang was elected as the incoming president. Denis is flying a captive bred Peregrine Falcon from Paul's breeding project.

Richard Harper – Ronald trapped a recently fledged Musket Black Sparrowhawk. As I write this "Viper" is sitting on 22 kills made up of 9 different species. Last year Richard very successfully trained and flew a Spar, "Jade" from the Bird of Prey Centre. They ended the season on 73 kills consisting of 30 Swainson's, 40 Helmeted Guineafowl, 1 Burchell's Coucal, 1 Hottentot Teal and a Grass Owl (released unharmed).

The vast majority of these were 1st Phased, and without the help of a dog. "Jade" for whatever reason felt it was bad enough putting up with Richard, and his dog "Sky" was the last straw and she was having none of it. "Jade" has been placed in a breeding project at the S.A. National Bird of Prey Centre.

Two youngsters Ruan Botha from Polokwane and Rickus van der Skyf from Mokapane (Potgietersrus) have both had some success with a rehab African Goshawk Musket and a Goshawk from the Bird of Prey Centre. David Botes has also been flying a captive African Goshawk with various degrees of success.

As one of our former politicians stated a few years ago "Africa's not for sissies!" I have no doubt, as a Club there will be many hurdles to overcome in the next few years. At present I believe the next great hurdle as a club, is to expose our membership to mainstream South African falconry. For various reasons members have been isolated in the Far North. I'm hoping to have a good turn out of Limpopo Falconers Club members at this years and future SAFA meets, as I know they can only benefit from this exposure.



Hawk Eagle on Scrub Hare

PROVINCIAL REPORT - WESTERN CAPE

Hank Chalmers

The Cape Falconry Club has just celebrated its eleventh year of legal falconry. The Club has 60 members, with about twenty of them active. A majority of the members fly short-wings, such as African Goshawks, Red-breasted Sparrowhawks and Black Sparrowhawks because of the thick cover and available quarry. Our game birds consist of the Cape Francolin - which is nearly always found in thick reeds and swampy areas; Greywing Francolin - which is very hard to find and our saving grace, Guinea fowl. There are probably more Guinea fowl in the south western Cape area than anywhere else, having flocks of fifty to one hundred and fifty birds at any one time. Some die-hard members in the club do fly long-wings and enjoy the frustration of hunting a falcon in thick cover, losing all pitch and characteristic stoop. There are the odd falconers, like Edmond Oettle, who live out in the open areas such as Wellington, where some fine duck hawking can be had. Edmond flies a Gyr/Peregrine named Guinevere, which I have personally seen strike three duck on a single flight, only to take the third for its prize.

The club had its 2003 meet in Picketberg, which proved - in true falconry style - to be a good party followed by some serious hunting. Francois Breedt and Anton Muller honored us by attending the meet and bringing along a Gyr/Prairie Falcon and a passage Peregrine Falcon. For those of us who didn't get lost searching for the hunting party, it was truly incredible to watch those birds fly and help reduce the duck population. Thanks guys, hope to see you next year. Our annual Dung Trophy award went to Kevin Hearshaw for a dazzling performance of standing under a telephone pole, begging his Lanner to return after it had bagged itself a large rat. The bird has consequently been returned to the wild to help out with rodent eradication. The meet also had its tragedies, as Suzette's Harris Hawk landed on a substation and was badly electrocuted, dying some hours later.

Once a year we have what we call the 'Afgos Meet', which is designed with the juniors in mind. Only C Grade birds are permitted and the senior members are there to assist in bringing new ideas and experience to the table. An award is given to the most 'switched-on' and presentable bird. The 2004 floating trophy went to Jannes Kruger and Charlie, his musket Afgos, who has been largely responsible for the decline of the Cisticola population in the Stellenbosch area. We were joined by Ron Hartley and Rudy Geisswein, who have both moved to the Cape and now 'belong to us'. The Afgos Meet is followed by our AGM, which went off without a hitch, having few problems to sort out. Our main drive for 2005 will be nest data collecting, which is very important when it comes to sustainable use of wild take.

In conclusion, we are geared for another good hunting season. Having moulted out our weapons, dusted off the muts and of course - an integral part of falconry - done the wife pampering thing, it's now time to do what we enjoy most about life: get muddy, dirty and chase things! (N.B. feathered things-Our wives may read this! Editor.)

Good hawking!

SKY TRIALS RESULTS

TIME SLOT		JUDGES SCORES			AVE. SCORE
08h00	GERT PRETORIUS – EYAS CAPTIVE BRED PEREGRINE FALCON (ANAK)	80	78	60	72.6
08H15	FRANCOIS BREEDT – GYR/PRAIRIE HYBRID TIERCEL 3 rd YEAR (ZIN ZAN)	45	46	57	49.3
08H30	ALAN HARVEY – CAPTIVE BRED AFRICAN PEREGRINE FALCON (KAYLA)	93	89	87	89.6
08H45	DIRK VERWOED – EYAS CAPTIVE BRED AFRICAN PEREGRINE FALCON (PEZULU)	14	62	51	62.3
09H00	FRANCOIS BREEDT – 8yr OLD CAPTIVE BRED AFRICAN PEREGRINE FALCON (PENNY)	84	85	72	80.3
11H00	GREG McBEY – HAGGARD LANNER FALCON 6yr OLD (WINDSONG)	87	91	72	83.3
14H15	TIM McPHERSON – PASSAGE LANNER FALCON (BIRD)	85	84	75	81.3
14H30	JOHN BAMBER – 1 st YEAR GYR/PEREGRINE HYBRID TIERCEL (THE BEAST)	74	72	59	68.3
14H45	MARK LABUSCHAGNE – 1 st YEAR CAPTIVE BRED AFRICAN PEREGRINE FALCON (ICE)	85	84	65	78.0
15H00	GREG McBEY – 4 th YEAR PASSAGE AFRICAN PEREGRINE FALCON (SKY QUAKE)	46	45	33	41.3
15H15	GRANT NEALE – 2 nd YEAR CAPTIVE BRED AFRICAN PEREGRINE TIERCEL (FLY AWAY PAUL)	37	38	19	31.3
15H30	ALAN HARVEY – 2 ½ YEAR OLD CAPTIVE BRED RED NAPED SHAHEEN (SHAKIRA)	96	92	89	92.3
15H45	TIM WAGNER – PASSAGE AFRICAN PEREGRINE FALCON (SHADOW OF DEATH)	37	36	35	36.0
16H00	ANTON MULLER – PASSAGE PEREGRINE FALCON (AVALON)	68	33	34	45.0
16H15	GARY WARREN – 3 rd YEAR CAPTIVE BRED AFRICAN PEREGREINE TIERCEL (WIZARD)	38	35	35	36.0
16H30	MARK LABUSCHAGNE – 3 rd YEAR GYR/PRAIRIE HYBRID TIERCEL (SHAKE)	87	88	80	85.0
16H45	JOHN BAMBER – 1 YEAR OLD BROOKEI PEREGRINE TIERCEL (SLIM SHADY)	0	0	0	0
17H00	TIM WAGNER – EYAS CAPTIVE BRED AFRICAN PEREGRINE FALCON (SHADOW II)	56	35	39	43.3
17H15	GRANT NEALE – 2 nd YEAR CAPTIVE BRED AFRICAN PEREGRINE TIERCEL (FLY AWAY PETER)	92	95	92	93.0
17H30	GREG McBEY - 6 YEAR OLD IMPRINT AFRICAN PEREGRINE TIERCEL (J.D.)	80	87	83	83.3

- 1st Grant Neale (Fly Away Peter) 2nd year captive bred African Tiercel
 2nd Alan Harvey (Shakira) 2 ½ year old captive bred Red Naped Shaheen
 3rd Alan Harvey (Kayla) captive bred African Peregrine Falcon

Falconer's Choice - Alan Harvey's (Shakira)



SKY TRIALS 2003



Last year's Sky Trial event was held on Friday 11th July 2003 in the district of Aliwal North. We had twelve falconers enter and between them they fielded twenty falcons. The average field for the last eight years has been fifteen falcons. It's really nice to see more falcons and it was again, the regular hard-core falconers that took the trouble to attend the Field meet and put their falcons to the test in the Sky Trial.

We were honoured by having three falconers out from the UK visiting us. Renowned Wildlife artist and falconer, Dave Scott, his friend, fellow falconer Nick Farrant, and Pete Smith who has had tremendous success flying Peregrine/Merlin Hybrids "Perlins" in the UK. These gentlemen have attended various field meets and Sky Trial events in the USA, so we used the opportunity to invite them to judge our Sky Trials and put their various experiences to good use on the day.

It was another fine winter's day under the African sun in the Eastern Cape with the usual vociferous banter and commentary coming from the gallery. For me personally, I thoroughly enjoyed myself as a spectator and being part of the gallery and there seemed to be an endless stream of alcoholic beverages coming from some of the vehicles parked in the veld. In looking at the very mixed bag of averaged results that were posted, they certainly do not reflect the caliber of some of the falcons. It needs to be borne in mind that because of the draw system, some falcons are flown way outside of their normal flying times as well as the fact that a lot of the falcons are Duck Hawks who are conditioned to flying over or close to water. Falcons are creatures of habit or routine and can behave quite differently under a different situation, hence I believe the variances in scores. After all, these are all hunting falcons and not trained specifically for Sky Trials. We again saw how important it is to have extremely strong, seasoned racing pigeons for the Sky Trials. This really brings out the best in the falcons.

Thanks again to all last year's competitors, without you this unique falconry spectacle would not be possible. We are looking forward to seeing more competitors this year 2004.

It occurred to me that next year 2005, will be the tenth consecutive year that we have held a Sky Trial. We need to plan something special to mark this. Let's hear your suggestions! For people who are new to Sky Trials, Falcons are judged and scored on the following criteria:

Mounting	- out of 20 points
Position	- out of 20 points
Pitch	- out of 20 points
Stoop	- out of 20 points
Pursuit	- out of 20 points
Total	- out of 100 points

THE BLACK PHANTOM UNDER PRESSURE

Greg Jean-Jacques

The pride of Southern Africa's Accipiters is undoubtedly the *Accipiter melanoleucus* or Black Sparrowhawk. It is common knowledge that over the last hundred years or so, as a result of the introduction and planting of Eucalyptus, Poplar, Pine and Black Wattle trees across most parts of South Africa, has allowed this bird to extend its breeding habitat into virtually all reaches of the country.

The Black Sparrowhawk by virtue of its extremely opportunistic, rapacious nature and phenomenal flying ability in being able to come to terms with most winged quarry has taken up residence in these clumps of exotic trees. It has not only extended its range into areas which were devoid of Black Sparrowhawks one hundred years ago but it has also increased its numbers of breeding pairs in the wild quite considerably. A great success story for a Raptor species in modern times you might say. There are different points of view on this which I will touch on later.

The Black Sparrowhawk's awesome flying abilities in the wild have been witnessed by many Falconers who have all been in awe of its capabilities and determination. I have witnessed a Black Spa Musket taking on and intercepting high flying Rock Pigeons and his sheer speed and maneuverability made him look like a missile that was locked onto its quarry and all efforts to evade capture by the Rock Pigeon were futile. Over the years, several falconers have had some fine falcons taken by Wild Black Spa's as well.

Because of the establishment of these exotic trees in and around urban areas of South Africa, the Black Spa has come into competition with racing pigeon enthusiasts and pigeon fanciers. It is much maligned and persecuted by these people.

However, the main reason for me writing this article is to bring more awareness to Falconers about the Working for Water Project, which is underway across the country. The aim of this project they say is to eradicate the exotic trees I mentioned, from our natural water courses and in so doing, conserve the precious ground water.

Numerous small plantations across the country have been cut down or ring barked as part of this project. The project is definitely gathering momentum. In Gauteng, we have had Black Sparrowhawk breeding sites that have been active for thirty years, completely eradicated with no alternate breeding habitats in proximity.

Out of approximately twenty five breeding sites that I know of in Gauteng, five have been affected by this project (or 20%). All the other sites are also in exotic trees and face a similar threat in the medium to long term. The Working for Water project not only impacts the Black Spa, but also the Ovambo Spa, Little Spa, Red Spa and Af Gos. The counter argument used here is that these raptors were not endemic in these areas one hundred years ago, so what. These Accipiters are also treated as alien invaders.

I felt I should put my thoughts and concerns down on paper. I also suggest that as responsible falconers we should keep stock of the situation and record and log all breeding sites that have been removed as a result of either the Working for Water Project, de-forestation or ring barking etc. and report these incidents to our local Conservation bodies and perhaps we can co-ordinate this

information on a national basis through S.A.F.A. I am appealing to the various Clubs to monitor the situation and log this information using a simple grid reference system.

Let me assure you if we don't assist in keeping stock of the situation, nobody else will and we could see a dramatic drop in the Accipiter populations across South Africa.



A typical "Black Spar" nest

A MEMORABLE FLIGHT

Dirk Verwoed

The Scene

The early morning was crisp and clear, as is usual during midwinter in the central part of the country. It was the last day of the week long annual South African Falconry Association's Field Meet, held this year (2003) for the second time at Aliwal North in the South Eastern Free State. I wanted to end the week's hunting on a high note, especially after the previous evening's performance.

All of life is a play, and we are all but actors...a bored Englishman once wrote, and in many ways this is even truer of every hunt with a falcon. The producer (falconer) believes/hopes we will witness a well-choreographed sequence of events; with the interaction between the highly motivated, superbly trained main actors (falcon & quarry) culminating in an explosive finale. One of the main actors (the quarry) has everything to win or lose; freedom or death, while the star of the show (the falcon) gets paid handsomely with a warm, fresh meal. The main supporting actor(s), (the dogs) are rewarded with praise or a scolding, depending on how well they followed the script, while the extras (other potential quarry, wild falcons, onlookers & Murphy) all follow their own scripts and provide us with the unpredictable variables that can make or break a performance.

I stopped the Hilux about 50 m below the dam wall, and as I prepared the telemetry, thought again about the flight of the previous evening. It was one of those "almost" flights, starting with the falcon that was almost at the perfect weight, only slightly too high. The dam was almost perfect, just a little bit too big, there were enough (?) ducks on the water, and the wind was almost right, just a little bit too strong. With visiting falconers from the UK in the flushing team, tension was building for an exceptional flight. The falcon flew strong and quickly gained enormous height with the aid of the stiff breeze, but in doing so drifted too far downwind, allowing most of the ducks to escape. When I eventually got him back overhead there were only a few Red-Billed Teal left, and his incredible, almost perfect, stepped stoop resulted in only a fist full of feathers as the crafty Teal side slipped at the last moment. A hungry evening for him, some good whisky for me and a cold night would hopefully have fine-tuned the team's motivation to perfection for this morning's attempt. I could hear loud quacking and splashing sounds from the dam and knew it would be an interesting flight, with many options to the falcon.

The Characters

With me was Nicholas, (Veterinary student and apprentice to Mark Labuschagne), Rippel, my three year old German Shorthair Pointer, and Shamal (Arabic for "Desert Wind"), my four year old Gyr/Peregrine Tiercel. I had brought him back from Dubai as a gift, but his first season with me was spent learning how to fly and building fitness through intensive kite work. That is a story for another day. Since then he has progressed to a very confident, efficient hunter and spectacular flier (sometimes) taking about thirty ducks in 2002 and a similar number in 2003.

The Flight

The iced grass crushed beneath our boots as we walked closer, and when the falcon launched from the glove the first rays of sunlight broke over the ridge behind the dam. We were stunned by the beauty of the scene that unfolded before us; the ducks also suddenly quiet as the intimidating shape of a falcon

that knows his business dominated the airspace above the dam. Looking through the bushes on the dam wall I realized that there were more than a hundred ducks (Yellowbills, Redbills & Whitefaced Whistlers) nervously swimming in circles in the middle of the dam, while several meters of water around the edges were covered by a layer of ice that reflected silver in the flat, early morning rays of sunlight. Shamal was hungry, and I knew that he would not go very high, nevertheless the slight updraft against the ridge right behind the dam assisted nicely, and when he drifted over at a reasonable pitch I gave the signal. We rushed the dam from both ends of the wall, and the ducks rose with a roar of flapping wings. Rippel was not keen to enter the freezing water and ran yelping around the water's edge, scattering a fine mist of frozen particles in the process.

The ducks wheeled in ever-larger circles over the dam, too afraid to break away over dry land to the next dam, and too wary of the dog and people below to re enter this dam. Shamal made several shallow, darting stoops to the main flock of ducks, herding them all the time like a well trained sheepdog, trying to panic some of them into breaking away and present a single target. Somehow he saw a gap, dove straight through the main flock and struck a glancing blow to a Yellowbill that forced the quarry into the water's edge. The duck crashed into the thin layer of ice, sending a shower of icicles into the air that for a brief second reflected light points like a cloud of diamonds / broken glass.

This happened twice more; each time the ducks managed to crash into ice/water followed by an explosion of brilliance, almost like fireworks; with icicles suspended momentarily in the sunlight, so Shamal had to leave them and rise to pursue the next target. At this stage the ducks had broken up into several smaller groups, with some of them escaping to the safety of the nearest dam about 500m away. Several Yellowbills remained however and at last Shamal managed to push / herd them, wheeling far enough over dry land, and he grabbed the one on the outside. They crashed into the grassland fringing the dam where he quickly dispatched the duck by biting through its neck.

The End

The perfect light, ice reflections, beautiful environment and the exquisite ballet of top predator and superbly adapted prey that we had just witnessed, is burned into my memory forever.



A Memorable Flight, The Conclusion

THE HYBRID DEBATE

Steven Squires

A cursory glance at Roberts Birds of Southern Africa will show that the sub-continent is home to some 680 bird species. Of these some sixty odd could be classified as birds of prey and of these. Of these about half could be considered useful for falconry purposes. A look at any field meet will show only five or six species are commonly flown.

Why with this plethora of choice one asks are so few indigenous species used, and even more puzzling to the novice and eco-activist is why are more and more exotics and hybrids being found on the meet weathering lawns?

Study of the distribution of the indigenous raptors sheds some light on the matter. African Hawk Eagles for example occur in a fairly small area of the country and therefore are not readily available to the aspirant bunny or guinea hunter of the Western Cape. For the topographically challenged duck hunter of the North West or Free State the large eyass or early passage Peregrine is seldom available locally.

Now in a normal world this would present little problem to the serious falconer. A phone call to an associate in the relevant part of the country would in most cases result in the sourcing of the desired bird fairly quickly and a car trip or SA Express would transport the bird safely and quickly to its new home.

Unfortunately we do not live in a normal or rational country. For obscure political reasons our country is divided into provinces. Each province employs an army of officials to duplicate the rules and regulations of the other provinces. However, in order to justify their existence to some higher authority, the officials make sure that they do not exactly duplicate the rules of the next province. This creates an ecosystem in which confusion and officials thrive and multiply. They and only they can interpret the provincial legislation. Their interpretation of the rules often conflicts with other set precedent and often lacks logic. For example a province that routinely will allow the hunting and killing of rhino for trophies, will not allow the removal of the second chick of an African Hawk eagle for falconry purposes without endless lobbying and paper work.

A province with no practicing falconers and large river gorges thick with raptors refuses a request to trap one passage peregrine Tiercel, one of the reasons for the refusal being that the species is listed as "near threatened in the Red Data Book of Birds of South Africa." The same province however permits the harvest and sale of rare "game" species such as roan antelope for commercial purposes.

So faced with these hurdles what does our guinea hunting Rambo or Rambina in Constantia do? They get on the internet or telephone and order themselves a Harris Hawk.

Lo and behold! There you have an exotic hawk (the Harris), hunting an exotic quarry (the guinea) amongst exotic vegetation (the oak trees and vineyards) and for that matter if you are a purest, flown by an exotic falconer (pale skinned). Some good falconry often results.

This is one of the reasons that hybrids and exotics should be permitted. They fill a falconry niche which is otherwise vacant. In our country of equal opportunity this allows the underprivileged in

places like Constantia and Sandton to practice falconry in their local "exotic" environments, while salving the conscience of the conservation officer who has prohibited the use of an indigenous raptor.

Why then you may ask, are there an increasing number of hybrid long wings being flown in areas where Lanners and sometimes even Peregrines are freely available?

The second leg of this argument revolves around the availability of quarry. Most of this country has had its environment substantially modified by man. While the actual modification is usually done by indigenous men, it is usually at the behest and for the account of exotic men. The result has been a very exotic indigenous environment.

The benefits to indigenous wildlife have been mixed. Some species such as peregrines and doves and ducks have benefited greatly from modern agriculture and from the conversion of large areas of indigenous flora to cereal based monocultures. Others such as the scavenging large raptors have been severely reduced by the irresponsible use of poisons and power lines.

Ducks are a prime beneficiary of dam building all over the country. The fact that ducks can be found in huntable areas and huntable quantities has resulted in some of the finest South African falconry over the last twenty years, much of it with exotic falcons. There is only one kind of local falcon that has regularly achieved success with ducks and that is the female peregrine. Even she is then operating at the top end of her prey spectrum. Falconers wishing to fly a Tiercel at ducks have to resort to an import, usually in the form of another peregrine subspecies or a hybrid.

I have only seen one female hybrid fly at waterfowl in this country and when she wasn't pirating doves from a hardworking mother black sparrowhawk she was quite able to master shellduck, and took yellowbills with consummate ease.

I have one vivid memory in particular of a 'bill that she struck about five meters in front of me near a small farm dam in the Saarland. The duck had executed a smart U turn after evacuating the dam, and was flying down a row of vine trellises back towards the water. My presence in his path made him climb slightly above the level of the vineyard into the sights of the Hybrid. She executed a 90 degree turn with a radius of about 20 meters and struck the duck at right angles as it emerged from the vineyard. The duck was hit with such force it was stone dead by the time it had bounced to my feet.

The turn and maneuverability of this big falcon would be the envy of a sparrowhawk, and her speed and punch were lethal. No peregrine no matter how big would have been able to pull off a stunt like this without a serious risk of hitting wires or vines. This is a prime example of the hybrid providing sport in a highly modified environment where an indigenous falcon would fail.

Other falconers have found that particularly the Gyr hybrids tend to strike rather than bind to their prey. This has great advantages when hunting large vigorous quarry over thick cover and in enclosed environments. Anyone who has had their peregrine pulled down into a swarthaak thicket attached to a large guinea will know what I mean. Quarry that has been struck into cover either bounces, gets up and disappears or if struck correctly is incapacitated before it hits the ground. Either way there is little struggle between quarry and falcon in thick thorns or weeds on or near the ground with less potential for injury to falcon and falconer.

Many falconers only have access to thick cover hunting, and hard striking maneuverable hybrid makes the best longing hunting companion in these circumstances.

As mentioned earlier there are a vast number of potential quarry species available in this country yet the “out of hood” ringing flight is seldom practiced. It has however vast potential and the falconer who tries to fly herons, ibises, large geese, crows, gulls and a host of others will have to look to exotics and hybrids to find suitable falcons. Our indigenous falcons are just too small.

The third leg of this argument is the “do no harm” argument. There is a vociferous band of people calling for the banning of hybrids and exotics from our skies. The justification for this ban is to “preserve the genetic integrity of our indigenous falcons”. The fact that this seems closely akin to what a certain Mr. H.F. Verwoed tried unsuccessfully to impose on people in this country is beside the point.

With improved understanding of genetics and molecular biology old fashioned concepts such as “species” have had to be reviewed. The fact that almost all falcon species can hybridise, and in many cases produce fertile offspring, would by the standards of old, have defined them as one species. In some crosses where the genetic differences between the parents are large, the offspring often exhibit reduced fertility. Where the difference is small the offspring can be as fertile as their parents. It is here that the theoretical potential lies for the genetic pollution of our indigenous falcons.

Let us look closely at the reality of the situation and take the example of the peregrine in the Western Cape. There are estimated to be at least three hundred breeding pairs of peregrine in the Western Cape, which produce perhaps six hundred chicks per year. The chicks in turn start breeding at around three years of age, which would imply a sub-adult population of about two to three times the breeding population. This would give a total of about two thousand four hundred peregrines in the Western Cape. Over and above this there are the annual migrant *calidus* and *peregrinus* birds that are regularly found in the area. For the sake of simple arithmetic let's say one hundred birds a year. This will give a total of approximately two thousand five hundred peregrines in the Western Cape.

There are about forty falconers in the Western Cape. If each one (C grades included) flew a peregrine hybrid one could expect about four, or 10%, to be lost every year. Of those four captive bred trained birds perhaps one or 25% of those lost would survive. Lets then assume that it pairs with a wild bird on a nest site that looks like an aviary and lays fertile eggs. If like all the others it produces two chicks then two out of six hundred chicks for the year will have half “exotic” genes. In genetic terms there will be 0.16% exotic genes in the chick population of that year, or 0.04% exotic genes in the total population. Now it should be remembered that the genetic similarity between two species that produce fertile offspring is likely to be in excess of 98%. The total “exotic” genetic material thus introduced into this population would be 2% of 0.16% or for those of you without a calculator 0.0032%. Should these chicks survive and reproduce the effect will be diluted further until after several generations it is undetectable. Given all these minute probabilities genetic pollution caused by lost hybrid falconry birds in South African circumstances is a risk that exists only in theory.

The question then arises regarding pure exotics such as the Saker, and Prairie falcons, the European Goshawk and Harris Hawks. Do these pose a risk to our indigenous raptors as “invader” species.

Superficially we have habitat similar to that occupied by these species elsewhere in the world. There must be an ecological reason however why we have the ubiquitous Peregrine in South Africa, but not the Saker or the Prairie. Why does the European goshawk occur in North Africa and India, but not further south? Why do the *Calidus* and *Peregrinus* peregrine subspecies freely migrate to Southern Africa but not breed, and the Saker stops in North Africa?

The only answer to these questions must be habitat. Our habitat is not suitable for these species.

Exotic birds that are flown for falconry are almost entirely captive bred. To breed freely in the wild they therefore would have to overcome the nest imprinting problem, find a suitable mate, exploit the indigenous habitat and survive the competition with all the other indigenous raptors and predators. Given the immense resources required to re-introduce indigenous raptors back into other parts of the world it again seems highly unlikely that any exotic raptors could be unintentionally introduced into the local environment on a long term basis.

If these factors are considered the risks posed to the indigenous raptors by exotics and hybrids flown for falconry is minute. To fly these birds will do no harm.

In conclusion the use of exotics and hybrids has dramatically broadened the prey spectrum available for falconers to hunt. It has enabled falconers to hunt areas and species that they could not hunt before. In Gauteng they have provided sport for the ecologically underprivileged and in the Western Cape for the elderly and infirm. Nowhere have they done any harm. Their use should be accepted, if not actively encouraged and they are sure to provide more thrilling and spectacular sport in the years to come. This for falconry is a good thing.

FALCONRY AN ART & HYBRIDS

Roger Neilson

Sir,

You asked for comment from the floor on the above topic, so here goes mine. I believe Falconry is more than a sport or craft – although it most definitely is ‘sport’ and it is a poor falconer who does not learn at least one of its many attendant crafts. The quickest way to learn the falconry ‘basics’ is like any apprentice would from a master craftsman *but falconry is an art* – as much as the study of music, painting, sculpture, ballet and wine making are art forms – It is no small coincidence that many successfully falconers are also painters, sculptors, pianists, vintners, cheesemakers, writers, photographers etc (the exception would seem to be ballet dancers, I don’t know any who have made it to ‘Falconer’ or Vice-versa)

The time an apprentice spends learning from a master is quite variable. It depends on how good and keen the pupil is, how much time the pupil can spend with the master and on how good and keen the master is. Unfortunately the apprenticeship system we have is a very loose arrangement, I believe it should be more planned and formal. There comes a time when the master can teach an apprentice no more, and the artist within the pupil must take over and practice original and creative falconry, stagnate, or worse still degenerate.

I think it is time to quote here, “It is a poor pupil that does not exceed his master”. IE if a really good falconer has taught you all his accumulated ‘lore’ over the space of a few years, with youth on your side you may stand on his shoulders and reach for the stars. By ‘creative falconry’ I mean moving on from species of hawk or hawks on which you served your apprenticeship, taking new and more exiting quarry species, developing new and original tactics to deal with them and flying hawks in cast (not to mention advances in hawk furniture design and manufacture) Two things all arts share in common are:

1. Proficiency with the basics and
2. An understanding of the classics.

Just as I would advise my child whose ambition it is to become a jazz pianist to learn to read music, practice proficiency on more than one instrument, practice – i.e. Play – and understand classical music before playing jazz I would advise any falconry apprentice to become proficient in the basics of falconry practice classical falconry with more than one species of Hawk before playing ‘Jazz’ with Hybrids.

If and when the former apprentice had reached a level of proficiency of a Rudi Giesswein or a Tim Wagner with an African Peregrine, IE flown many birds of both sexes singly and in cast at a variety of quarry species. I guess you could forgive him if he wanted to fly a Barbary, a Shaheen or an anatum peregrine, (similar instruments to the one he had excelled on) in much the same way that a Vanessa Mae or Fritzy Chrysler might forsake the violin for a season or two to play the Cello or Viola. What I have not seen yet is an artist like Fritzy Chrysler hanging up his Stradivarius to play a cross between a violin and a glockenspiel! In the visual arts even Picasso was damned good at anatomy, colour harmony, perspective and had thoroughly understood the concepts of impressionist painting before he launched into cubism and expressionism (it is also noteworthy that around about the time Picasso took the art world by storm with Cubism he also started wearing clown costumes to fancy-dress parties.)

I used to think that after having taken somewhere in the region of 200 head with a series of three female and one male hawk eagle from a pretty diverse quarry base, that I was somewhat of a 'fundi' with the species and ready to make a comparison between it and the European Goshawk. The emphasis here is on 'used to think' because I met an Austrian Falconer who had taken a fully grown Roe Deer (a species as big as a springbok) over two hundred brown hare and more rabbits than he could count with an African Hawk-Eagle sent to him in 1973. Belatedly I realized that what was missing from my Africa Hawk-Eagle education was three or four seasons in both Europe and North America before I could lay claim to any 'fundi' status or make any valid comparisons. I do not believe any expertise real or imagined on my part would justify me blending a biological cocktail in the hopes of breeding an ideal Hare Hawk. Probably if one studied the Eurasian Gos and the African Hawk-Eagle thoroughly one would come to the conclusion that a 1500 gram Siberian Goshawk was a fantastic Hare Hawk in Northern winter conditions and that if you wanted to fly Red Rock Hares, Springhares, Small antelope like Dik Dik, Grysback and Duiker here in Africa you couldn't beat a 1500 gramme African Hawk-Eagle. Those Austringers who complain that a European Goshawk is too light to consistently take Brown Hares have never had a goshawk from Siberia or Kamchatka on the fist.

"Perlins" (the name given to the cross between a Merlin and a Peregrine) are by all accounts highly successful dashing little Falcons must suited for Hawking small birds out of hedges in the English countryside. The question I would like to ask of a Perlin Operator is "have you tried a 430 gramme African Tiercel, A Taita Flacon or even a small Haggard Lannerette for hedgerow hawking yet? Whilst I have never trained a Taita I have tried an African Tiercel and he was good to the point of being too good at laughing doves. I have flown Lannerettes at Fiscal shrike and can attest to the fact that they are intelligent, wait on at a pitch to suit the occasion, are swift enough to do the job and can be trained to return to an ungarnished lure and eat captured quarry as light as fiscal shrike on the lure at your feet rather than carry it to the nearest tree. Are Perlins better than that? If they are, then 'Viva La Perlin'!

Another plus for pure bred exotic Falcons is that although you might be breeding Hawks far from where they occur naturally, by breeding them you are contributing to a specific gene pool. A Falconer from anywhere in the world could contact you and say "I lost my Shahin Tiercel to Avian Herpes/a marauding wild cat/a forest fire burned my breeding chamber down/is there a chance of you having a replacement? I hear you breed pure "Shahins." If I had offspring available I know what my response would be. Conversely if someone contacted me and asked, "Please let me have one of your African Peregrines next season I want to cross it with an American Kestrel", I would tell him to go and extract sperm from the largest Harpy Eagle in his local zoo – preferably without the use of the customary plastic collection helmet used for such occasions and try that on his American Kestrel.

In the case of Gyr Falcon Hybrids – Especially those involving the larger races of Peregrine – There does seem to be a three-fold justification. 1. The hybridized offspring often have the size and strength of the Gyr. 2. Do not suffer the Gyrs lack of immunity to avian diseases of temperate latitudes and 3. I've got to admit that some of the photos I've seen of these crosses depict birds that are exquisitely beautiful. I do wonder however, if they fly any better than a pure Gyr would.

I guess that sums up my response to the use of exotics and Hybrids. Purebred exotic Falcons by all means, let's breed them and when we can do them justice, let's use them. Hybrids, I would need a lot of convincing that they are better than the stock from which they have been bred, and I also have ethical reservations. For the foreseeable future I plan to improve on my performances with African Peregrines anyway, I'll stick to the classics.



A classic. Passage peregrine falcon with grey-wing francolin

“EX” THE GARBAR GOS

Angus Burns

Towards the end of October 2003, I was given 3 captive bred Gabar Goshawks to raise for Ben Hoffman. Prior to being given them I had enquired with Ben as to whether he would sell me a captive bred Gabar and the result was that I was landed with 3 in my care to raise and socially imprint. The food I had stored in my fridge (from hunting with an African Goshawk) was sufficient to feed the new hawks and all three were successfully reared before I chose my hawk from amongst them. I decided on a little male and named him “EX.”

To socialize him properly, I made him accustomed to many strange sites and sounds and would take him everywhere with me whilst manning and handling him all the time. Once he was hard pennaed, I began to cut his weight and train him properly. EX was a minute hawk with Yarak being reached at 125 grams. I place a lot of importance on obedience in the field since a disobedient hawk can waste valuable hunting time. As a result, I emphasized glove training and lots of flying to the fist before considering proper entering. During the training period I began to run short of food for EX so I borrowed an African Goshawk from Ben Hoffman named “Roxy,” to aid me with acquiring more fresh food. At the time I had a friend over from England who was a strict vegetarian. She was intrigued by the idea of a hawk killing birds for the owner so I took her hunting with “Roxy.” The result was an awesome chase after a mousebird and a stylish mynah kill. My friend admitted that the killing aspect of falconry wasn’t quite her cup of tea but that she understood the necessity for the hawk to take life. The result of including her on the hunt was that someone who was initially opposed to hunting later accepted its place in the natural order of things. I think that more falconers should endeavor to explain their interests to people who do not have any understanding of it. This can result in “enemies” of falconry becoming valuable allies in the future.

Once EX’s obedience training was completed, I proceeded to serve him many live birds which switched the little chap on and a week later he was hunting in the field with his first attempt at catching wild quarry ending in two Ayres Cysticola kills. I continued to find him a multitude of different grass birds and always ensured that he caught something wild (on a daily basis) so that his confidence levels increased.

EX turned out to be a very tenacious little bird and would often persevere after a jet-propelled LBJ (“Little Brown Job”) for 100’s of meters normally resulting in a kill. In one particular chase he was gaining on the quarry and made a snatch at in the air but the bird (a croaking Cysticola) did what could only be described as a “barrel roll”, thus side-stepping him at the last moment. EX performed a little twist in mid air and put on the after burners forcing the quarry to give up and head for the grass. This was the unfortunate LBJ’s mistake as he pounded it into the ground and took its life. I rewarded him with a fully gorged crop.

I continued to hunt with EX in the company of many people during his first hunting season and on many occasions with John Bamber who was entertained to some wonderful flying by the little musket. Of particular note was the day that EX chased a lark. The lark rung up into the sky and flew with great speed away from us. EX decided on a different approach and kept low to the ground, flying with determination in the same direction as the lark. EX’s strategy paid off and suddenly the lark plummeted out of the sky towards a “safe” hole (which it had obviously been planning to enter all

along). EX intercepted the lark just as it entered the hole and was rewarded with a fresh kill... what a flight!

Charlie Arter (KZN Wildlife District Conservation Officer for Richmond) came with to witness EX on a windy afternoon during autumn and had the experience of seeing EX ring up after a bird, fly around above our heads and then kill it by his feet.

On one sunny afternoon I went hunting with Shannon and Ben Hoffman. EX chased and caught a few button quail, which, on closer inspection turned out to be Black Rumped Button Quail (BRBQ). For those bird enthusiasts out there, the Black Rumped Button Quail is classed as a "Red Data" species and according to KZN Wildlife's records, was not supposed to occur where I was flying EX. KZN Wildlife were most grateful for the data and specimens of quail that I provided them with and have now included the data on their GIS system thus increasing the known range of the BRBQ – an excellent example of how falconers can assist local conservation authorities with useful information.

EX would catch anything from 2 – 7 birds in an afternoon and I would fly him on average for 2 – 2 & ½ hours per day. He was super fit and super obedient – an absolute pleasure to hunt with.

Disaster struck late one afternoon. I was out hunting EX as usual when he flew off the fist and down a slope towards some trees. EX would often do this and then return to the fist after I called him. He didn't return and I presumed he had chased something. My suspicions were confirmed when I arrived at the bush to find it full of very frightened mouse birds. I flushed them out but EX did not appear. "He must have chased one into the ravine below," is what I thought so I went to collect my telemetry receiver from the car. I got a signal and walked towards it. About 50 meters ahead of me, a long crested eagle flew out of the grass. I thought about how lovely the eagle was and didn't even entertain my worst fear. As I walked closer to where the eagle had been, my telemetry signal got louder and to my horror I found EX lying on his back bleeding profusely from his wing and head. He was still alive but had been on the receiving end of a terrible attack by the eagle. I could only presume that the eagle had tried to rob him of a mouse bird that he had caught and being an imprinted accipiter he had refused to comply - with disastrous results.

I rushed the severely injured EX to Ben Hoffman's centre where we administered immediate treatment (pills to combat any infection and to reduce the shock) and then I took him home. I kept him close to a heater all night and then rushed him to Oliver Tatham (the renowned vet) first thing in the morning. Oliver looked at him and expressed his surprise that EX had actually survived the attack. The following week involved daily visits to the vet and after 3 weeks, he seemed to be recovering. I was not sure what the prognosis would be for EX as a hunting bird (after the wing damage) but I was prepared to try and rehab him to a state where he could catch things again. After some time, he began flying again but was very stiff and unable to catch anything. I persevered and managed to get him to take the odd grassland bird but nothing in the manner and style like he used to.

Weeks went by and I went off to Aliwal North with John Bamber and Greg McBey for the annual 2003 SAFA meeting. I took EX with and hunted him up there. It was clear however, that EX had sustained a wing injury that would prevent him from ever hunting like he used to. The entire 10 days at SAFA, EX managed to catch only 2 birds. The one was a rather pathetic Butcher Bird kill and the second was quite exciting (an unfortunate Bokmakierie) but other than those two, he just failed again and again to catch anything and I was faced with a decision as to what I should do with him.

I decided (on returning from SAFA) that it would be nice for EX to still be used in a productive capacity and not just sit idly in a pen, so I offered him to Shannon Hoffman for use in her display

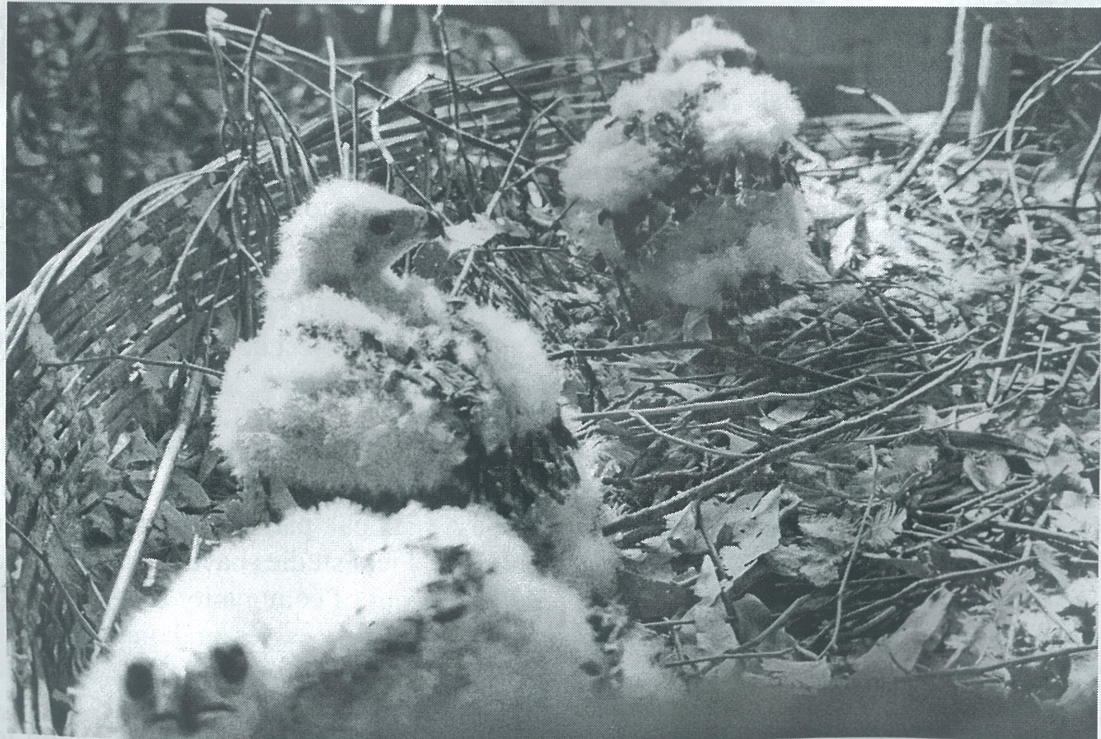
show. She accepted and EX should become a member of her display this year. On the positive side, he ended his first 6 months of hunting on exactly 261 kills – all off the fist and many in spectacular style. I will miss hunting with the little guy but such is the nature of Mother Nature – often very unpredictable and sometimes quite violent.

For those who are interested, I include a list of some of the bird species that EX succeeded in dispatching to the after life:

Ayers cisticola, common waxbill, croaking cisticola, rufous naped lark, broad tailed warbler, widow bird, mouse bird, finches (different species), yellow throated longclaw, house sparrow, fiscal shrike, black rumped button quail, bronze manikin, orange throated longclaw, bokmakierie, wryneck, flycatcher, swallow.

Upon analysing all of EX's kills it was apparent that EX predominantly caught cisticolas (about 60%), closely followed by rufous naped larks and finches with a miscellany of other species making up the difference.

In closing I can only recommend the Gabar Goshawk as a hunting bird. If you want to hunt a lot with a high degree of success, the Gabar Goshawk is a sure bet!



Captive bred Black Spars

THE PEREGRINE FUND'S RAPTOR PROGRAMME IN AFRICA

Ron Hartley and Rick Watson

Started in 1991 The Peregrine Fund's (TPF) Pan-African raptor conservation (PARC) programme is an integrated effort to conserve birds of prey and their environments in the Ethiopian biogeographic region, by developing local capacity for conservation through hands-on training and education in applied research and management techniques, while applying these techniques to threatened raptor species and habitats. There has been much international cooperation and communication, also fostered by presenting results at a number of international conferences.

Over 25 students have been supported through M.S. and Ph.D. degrees. New information has been collected on 27 of the 89 diurnal raptors that occur in the region, and conservation interventions achieved for 3 of the 16 species listed as globally threatened. With 12% of the world's human population and the world's highest rate of population increase, habitat destruction has continued unabated over the past two decades.

Loss of forest habitats and woodlands is likely to cause substantial population declines in wildlife, including raptors and extinctions are possible. Of the 313 species of diurnal raptor in the world, 100 (32%) are found in Africa and its islands and 65% are species that breed here. Three species are listed as endangered, and 12 as threatened locally at least.

As top of the food chain species, raptors serve as useful indicators of overall biodiversity, locally and regionally. They are also sensitive to many environmental changes caused by chemical pollution (e.g. DDT and other pesticides) and habitat destruction. Changes in the abundance and distribution of raptors serve as early warning indicators of these underlying environmental influences and of the need for management. Thus, biologists study raptors, not only to preserve them as interesting and charismatic species, but also to use raptors as indices for design and management of protected areas, to identify special areas of high biodiversity needing conservation or management, to monitor the health of the environment, and to train conservationists in the critical effort to conserve biological diversity.

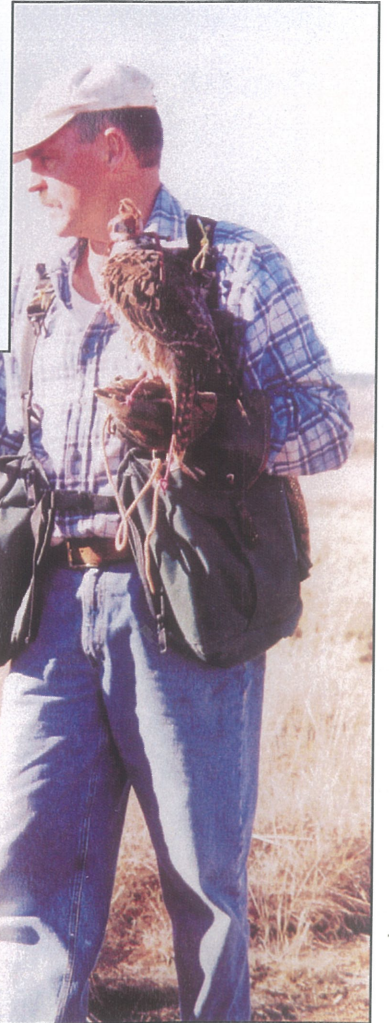
Key projects are in Madagascar and East Africa where work commenced in 1990. Other project areas are in Zimbabwe and the Cape Verde Islands. The Peregrine Fund (TPF) has also supported small projects in Cote d'Ivoire and currently supports the Cape Vulture project at Kransberg in South Africa. TPF has been careful to focus on areas and/or species that need attention.

Madagascar has some of the world's most endangered raptors and TPF has succeeded in rediscovering two raptors previously thought by some to be extinct, the Madagascar Red Owl and the Madagascar Serpent Eagle. TPF helped create Madagascar's largest national park to protect 210 000 ha of rainforest habitat for these species on the Masoala Peninsula. Field studies have been completed on the endangered Madagascar Fish Eagle. It has pioneered the concept of community-based conservation to protect some of the country's last intact wetlands shared by fish eagles and indigenous Sakalava fishermen.

TPF has trained and supported Malagasy students who will continue work on conservation long after TPF involvement ends. Aristide Andrianarimisa and Lily-Arison Rene de Roland continued the Masoala avian monitoring programme. Ruth Tingay completed field work on the fish eagles for her doctorate. Russell Thorstrom runs the Madagascar project.



*Aliwal North 2003
(see pages 11 & 12)*



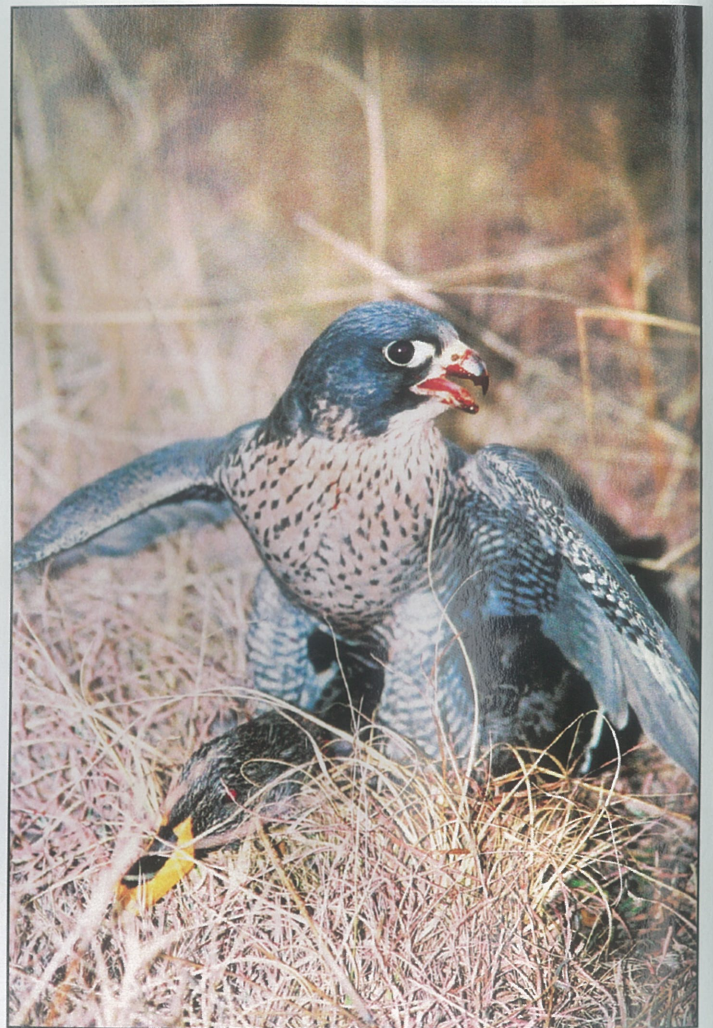
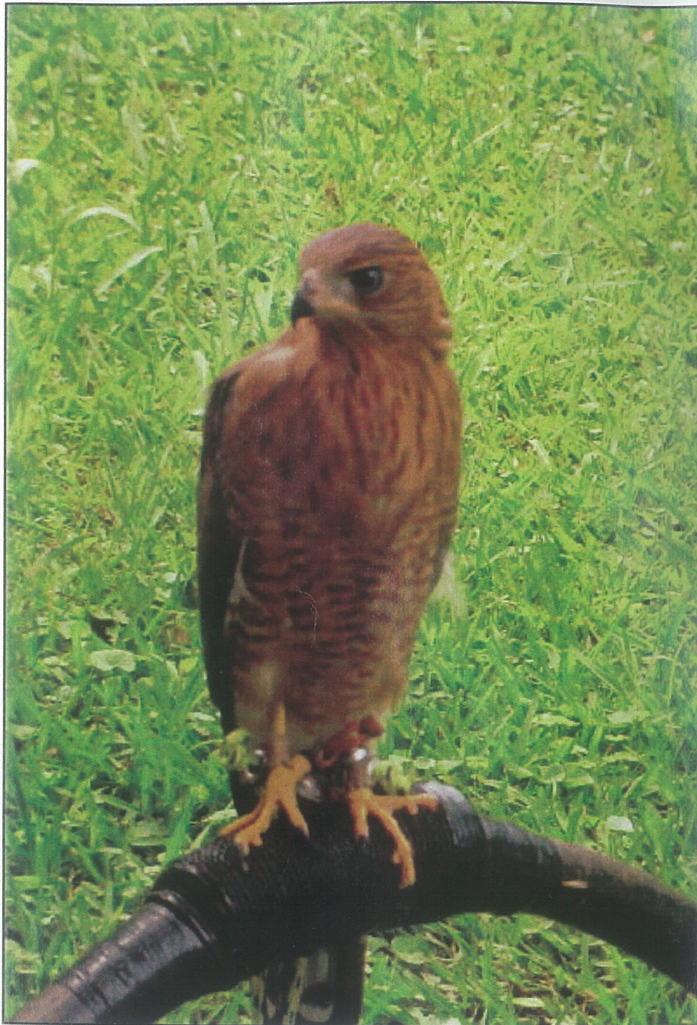
*Anton Muller Passage Peregrine
(see page 39)*



*Ready for the hunt
Alan Harvey's Kayla
(see page 4)*



*Ex - The imprint Gabar
(see page 25)*



*Shamal on Yellowbill Duck
(see page 15)*



*Francois Breedt releases ZinZan
over a Free State duck dam
(see page 25)*



The Black Phantom strikes by Ray Black (see pages 13 & 55)



Paul Venter outside Gilbert Baine's Lodge at Camster (see page 41)



*Scottish Grouse Hunting
(see page 42)*



*Gyr / Peregrine on Grouse
(see page 42)*

The East African biotype has nearly 20% of the world's raptor species, together with the associated diverse range of habitats and biodiversity. Increasing population pressure has been negatively impacting on raptor populations, while 75% of these are poorly known. Hence the emphasis on East Africa. Simon Thomsett is busy establishing a captive breeding programme for the Bearded Vulture. Munir Virani is working on the rare Sokoke Scops Owl and monitoring the African Fish Eagle population in the Rift Valley lakes. Catherine Gatome obtained her masters degree on the hematology and blood chemistry of the African White-backed Vulture.

Over the past decade we have increased our knowledge about the population status and ecological requirements of the endangered Sokoke Scops Owl, Augur Buzzard, African Fish Eagle, Martial Eagle, Crowned Eagle, Rüppell's, Egyptian and Bearded Vultures. These studies have increased our skills to design and implement effective raptor research and monitoring programs in Kenya; fueled interest, enthusiasm and awareness among students and local communities; and enabled us to develop a network and association with raptor biologists worldwide. We have supported and trained six students at Masters and Doctoral levels.

The Zimbabwe Project was one of The Peregrine Fund's first in Africa, begun in 1983 with a focus on the rare and little-known Taita Falcon. Our partnership with the Zimbabwe Falconers' Club has been the basis of our efforts in Zimbabwe. With a relatively small investment of financial support and technical expertise from The Peregrine Fund, the ZFC has become a significant leader in raptor conservation and research in the region.

Much has been accomplished, including landmark investigations into the effect of DDT on the Peregrine Falcon and other raptors, the status and distribution of Taita, Peregrine, and Lanner Falcons, and Ayres' Hawk Eagle, raptor community studies in Batoka Gorge, Save, Triangle, and Malilangwe Conservancies, Esigodini, and Matobo Hills, and training and local capacity development at high school and graduate levels. The ZFC programme has been a leader in the captive propagation and release of the African Peregrine since its first successes in 1981, and it established a similar programme for the rare Taita Falcon by 1993. The unit first bred Taita Falcons in captivity in 1997.

The Cape Verde Kite was only recently recognised as a distinct species and this project aims to prevent its extinction as part of an overall effort to ensure the survival of other endemic raptors. Surveys for Cape Verde Kites were initiated in May 2001, but by August few individuals were sighted. However, much was learned during this phase and in June 2002 Jim Willmarth and Simon Thomsett located a group of what appeared to be both Cape Verde Kites and Black Kites on Maio Island. They trapped five of these which were sent the UK, where they were housed at the National Birds of Prey Centre under the care of Jemima Parry-Jones.

DNA studies will reveal the phylogenetic relationships between Red Kites, Black Kites and some subspecies, and Cape Verde Kites, and identify the genetic relations between them and the kites we captured on Cape Verde. Coupled with further monitoring of the Cape Verde Kites, this information collectively should assist us on the way forward with conservation interventions.

Support has been given to Pat Benson at the University of the Witwatersrand in support of his ongoing, long-term population dynamics study of endangered Cape Vultures in South Africa. Pat has been studying colonies at Kransbuerg and Manutsa. Support was also given to Simon Thirgood at the University of Stirling, Scotland, in support of research on the raptors of the Bale Mountains in Ethiopia.

Although political problems continue to beset several of the countries above, our representatives have continued to pursue their programmes effectively. Developing networks which attract committed and

capable individuals, especially volunteers, are a key part of our successful conservation strategy. In this vein we try to build teams around people with a passion for what they do, an invaluable component in successful conservation.

Ron Hartley

*Research and Falconry Coordinator, Zimbabwe Falconer's Club
& Zimbabwe representative, The Peregrine Fund
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Hunting concentration

SUSTAINABLE USE OF BIRDS OF PREY

The Limpopo Falconers Club

A brief history of falconry

The art of Falconry has been practiced for roughly 4000 years. It originated as a form of placing extra food on the table. With the advent of the shotgun, a far easier and more successful way of hunting, falconry became more of an art reserved for the aristocrats. It must be remembered that throughout this time falconry birds were sustainably harvested from the wild ranging from eyases (nestlings) to the trapping of both juvenile and adult birds. In today's world few falconers trap haggard (adult) birds but rely on captive bred, wild eyases and the trapping of passage birds (immature).

Mortality – a justification for the sustainable removal of birds of prey for falconry.

“Although there are many conservation minded falconers in South Africa, there has been a turbulent relationship between many falconers and ornithologists in particular the Raptor Conservation Group (RCG 1996; Ryan 1996). However, South African falconers have assisted ornithologists and conservationists (Tarboton & Allan 1984; Jenkins et al. 1991; Jenkins 1995; Lombard 1998; Oettle et al.) There is also a significant resistance to the harvesting of raptors from the wild (RCG 1996), even if biologically justifiable.

Ironically the same detractors praise the efforts of the ZFC, whose government falconry policy is based on the legitimate harvesting of birds from the wild”. – Falconry as a Conservation Tool in Africa, R.R. Hartley (Raptors at Risk – Proceedings of the V World Conference on Birds of Prey and Owls RD Chancellor and B.-U. Meyburg 1998).

It is a known fact that birds of prey throughout the world have a very high natural mortality rate, especially in their first year of life. There are various scientific papers that have been written on this subject and it is not our intention in this short paper to cover all the existing scientific data, we will leave it as just that – a scientific fact. (Peregrine Falcon Populations: Their Management and Recovery – Tom Cade, James Enderson, Carl Thelander and Clayton White; Understanding the Bird of Prey – Dr. Nick Fox)

The figures quoted vary quite substantially between species, ranging from 60% to 85% dying before they are a year old. It can be said with certainty that in most species over half the young fledged will die during the first year of life (Birds of Prey – An Illustrated Encyclopedic Survey by International Experts 1990).

From a falconers perspective the harvesting of certain species from the wild is seen as “saving” youngsters from a near certain death, as well as increasing the survival rate of the remaining immature birds by reducing the competition and stress placed on them by the environment. If one looks at populations of raptor such as the Saker Falcon used in the Middle East for falconry, where large numbers of birds (2750) are trapped annually, these practices are within the bounds of wise and sustainable use. (Raptor Conservation Today – B.-U. Meyburg and R.D. Chancellor Proceedings of the IV World Conference on Birds of Prey and Owls 1992)

A very basic look at a pair of Lanner Falcon would illustrate the potential for the sustainable harvest of young birds from the wild:

All things been equal Lanners are sexually mature at the age of three years but lets assume they only find a territory and mate by the age of four. Per year this pair would produce three offspring. Now there are also various scientific papers on the age of birds of prey (Birds of Prey – An illustrated encyclopedic survey by international experts 1990), but again lets assume this pair breed until they are ten. Of the six years of breeding only two of those young needs to reach sexual maturity to replace the parent birds to keep a balance. In effect we have sixteen Lanner Falcons produced by this one pair that are dispensable (3 young x 6 years = 18 young – replacement of parents 2 = 16). As Dr Nick Fox says “A healthy population is controlled by mortality, not by productivity”. (Understanding the Bird of Prey – Dr. Nick Fox 1994)

The above illustrates why when certain ecological imbalances are addressed, Birds of Prey numbers have been able to recover relatively well within a short period of time. One only has to look at the recovery of the Peregrine Falcon from DDT poisoning in certain parts of the world, where their numbers are now greater than in recorded history. (The Peregrine Falcon – Derek Ratcliff; Peregrine Falcon Populations: Their Management and Recovery – Tom Cade, James Enderson, Carl Thelander and Clayton White).

I believe one of the other incentives for allowing a wild take is the fact that falconers are motivated to get into the field and find raptors (Falconry as a Conservation Tool in Africa R.R. Hartley - Raptors at Risk – Proceedings of the V World Conference on Birds of Prey and Owls RD Chancellor and B.-U. Meyburg 1998), which helps the scientific community and the conservation of birds of prey. This was the case with falconers reporting the decline of the Peregrine Falcon in the States and Europe, which made the scientific community aware of the affects of DDT. (The Peregrine Falcon – Derek Ratcliff; Peregrine Falcon Populations: Their Management and Recovery – Tom Cade, James Enderson, Carl Thelander and Clayton White).

From a local perspective, of the two known, and the then estimated fourteen Peregrine Falcon nesting sites, in the former Transvaal area, we now have a confirmed twenty-six active breeding sites in this same area (T. Wagner pers.comm.). This, together with the first discovered Taita Falcon breeding site, was though the work of the local falconry community.

If one looks at the local raptor population within the Limpopo Province we feel that the research has been done by far more qualified persons than ourselves to justify the sustainable harvest/removal per year of a few birds of prey for falconry purposes. Please refer to the following source material:

1. Falconiformes Conservation Assessment and Management Plan Workshop Workbook - 17-19 April 1995 Badajoz Spain
2. The Status and Conservation of Birds of Prey in the Transvaal – Warwick Tarboton and David Allan
3. Birds of Prey of Southern Africa – Peter Steyn
4. The Atlas of Southern African Birds Volume 1: Non-passerines Edited by J.A. Harrison, D.G. Allan, L.G. Underhill, M. Herremans, A.J. Tree, V. Parker and C.J. Brown

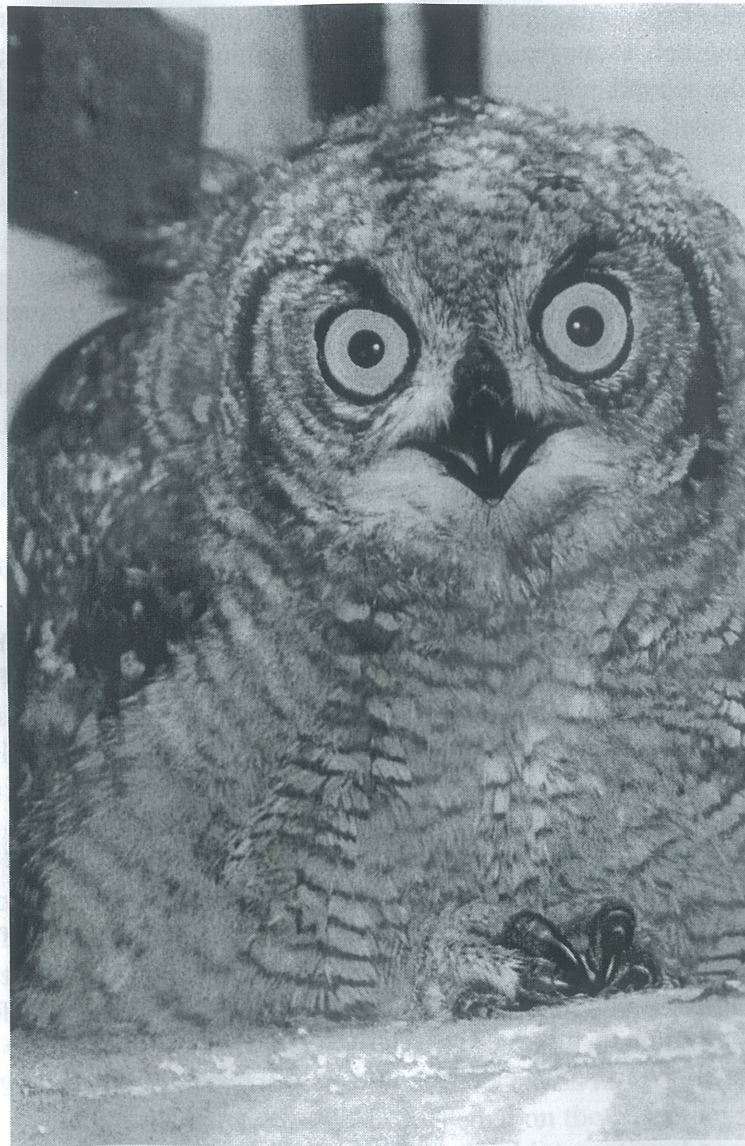
In conclusion we would like to thank the Department for all their assistance to date and a special thank you to Mr. Kobus Pienaar for all his help with the Limpopo Falconers Club. To put this whole wild take into perspective I would like to end off with the following quote by Dr. Nick Fox:

“When you consider that birds have been taken from the wild for falconry for thousands of years, coupled with the fact that falconry has never contributed to the extinction or near extinction of any raptor or its prey, it seems extraordinary how unbalanced the pressure has been on falconry by protectionists, compared to the pressure on the major factors in the fluctuations of raptor populations”.
(Dr. Nick Fox – Understanding the Bird of Prey 1994)

Trevor Oertel

Secretary , Limpopo Falconers Club

24.11.2003



CAPTIVE BREEDING

Mike Thompson

I acquired the female of my black spar pair in 1998 from Greg Jean Jacques and the male came from Jonathan Hall in 1999. The female was about three years old at the time and the male was two. Both birds were trained and hunted in their first year.

From inception the birds were placed in a double pen each section measuring approximately 4.5 metres by 5 metres wide and 4 metres high. The sections are divided by a brick wall with a rectangular opening 1.5m by 1m.

The idea being to allow the male to escape from any fatally aggressive behaviour on part of the female.

During the period the pair have been together I have never seen the male fleeing in panic neither have I witnessed any threatening behaviour from the female. If anything the female occasionally takes herself off to the seclusion of the second pen to escape the attentions of the male especially in the run up to the breeding season when he sits next to her and makes rapid piercing high pitched calls which the female may find more welcome if she were sitting a long distance away on the other side of the plantation. During this last year I have noticed the pair often sitting together, even out of the breeding period.

Each section is provided with a nest ledge 3.5m off the ground. On the ledge is placed a large wicker dog basket and from May each year copious amounts of fresh eucalyptus leaves and twigs are placed in the basket with the result that the nest is now quite large. The birds spend a lot of time rearranging the sticks and discarding surplus foliage. In the main section where they have laid eggs there is a blue gum tree that has now grown over the nest site.

One food front: I buy 1000 day old chicks from Hi Line every four months or so. What the rats and rindhals don't eat I feed I feed up to six weeks old on starter mash then Thomas my assistant slaughters and freezes them. They are largely fat-free and with the liver and heart intact make a good manageable staple diet that the hawks seem to like. It's also a fairly safe food source, the downside being that ideally according to the Peregrine Fund (and I think Tim Wagner as well), the birds should get freshly killed food at least during the breeding season. I do breed a limited amount of quail and trap doves in the duck pen but only manage to serve live or fresh food twice a week. This is evidently not sufficient for peregrines but for black spars and lanners its seems to suffice.

In 1999 and 2000 no eggs were laid and no courtship or copulatory activity was observed. In the 2001 year one egg was laid but not in a nest – on a ledge close to the ground. This at least was some cause for hope although I had long since become cheerfully used to feeding pairs of raptors with good appetites that may just as well have been statues for all the offspring they produced.

Then on 24 July 2002 the first egg appeared in the right place on the nest. I suspected the female was going to lay for 2 weeks prior to this egg she started to look lethargic and sick and stood for long periods in the water bowl. The second egg was laid on 27 July and the third on 30 July – so far so good!

The decision to disturb the pair by removing the eggs for incubation is stressful for a breeder. There is always the risk that the birds will go berserk and break the eggs or shut down and not recycle. On the other hand if the eggs are infertile it will afford the pair another chance to lay fertile eggs. In

consultation with Greg Jean Jacques I decided on 7 August to remove this first clutch of 3 magnificent eggs and place them in an incubator at 99,5 degrees C. As luck would have it exactly 3 weeks later the first egg of the second clutch was laid. The lanners had always relaid after 14 days so this 3 week gap was noteworthy to say the least. The second egg appeared after three days and then no further eggs were laid.

The 3 eggs in the incubator were all fertile but only one hatched on 3 September 2002, which was disappointing. This chick I hand raised with a male lanner chick that hatched two days later. I had read several articles that cautioned against placing a rapacious hawk chick with an easy going falcon. It was however the lanner that dominated the relationship throughout. The black spar chick was good natured and retiring, the lanner noisy, aggressive and ill mannered. Both chicks were given as much food as they could eat and no attempt was made to cut the weight. The first day out on the creance the black spar came 50 metres and this is the advantage of an imprinted bird. The little fellow never bated and the bit of screaming was easily tolerable.

If you think you are having a happy time where raptors are concerned then expect the worst: On the last Sunday in November (the same day I detected serious bumble foot in my female Scottish peregrine) I go into the black spar free mews and notice that the bird is sitting on the ground. A sense of helpless terror grips me – I know a sick bird when I see one. A weighing of the bird revealed a drop from 520 grams to 440 grams. This is a breeder's nightmare, especially coming at a time when work pressures were preventing me from spending too much time with the birds. The ailing dehydrated black spar was immediately plied with vitamin solutions direct into the crop but to no avail – before the bird could be got to a suitable vet on the Monday it had died.

What a depressing setback! Unfortunately no autopsy was done. I am sure, given the symptoms, that aspergillosis was the cause of death. I have read 2 articles in American Falconry that point out that black spars are particularly susceptible to this disease.

It was some compensation that the second clutch of 2 eggs hatched, the first on the 5th October and the second on the 8th. This is of interest: The time from laying of the first egg to hatching is nearly 39 days. This pair, a male and a female were left with the parents to raise.

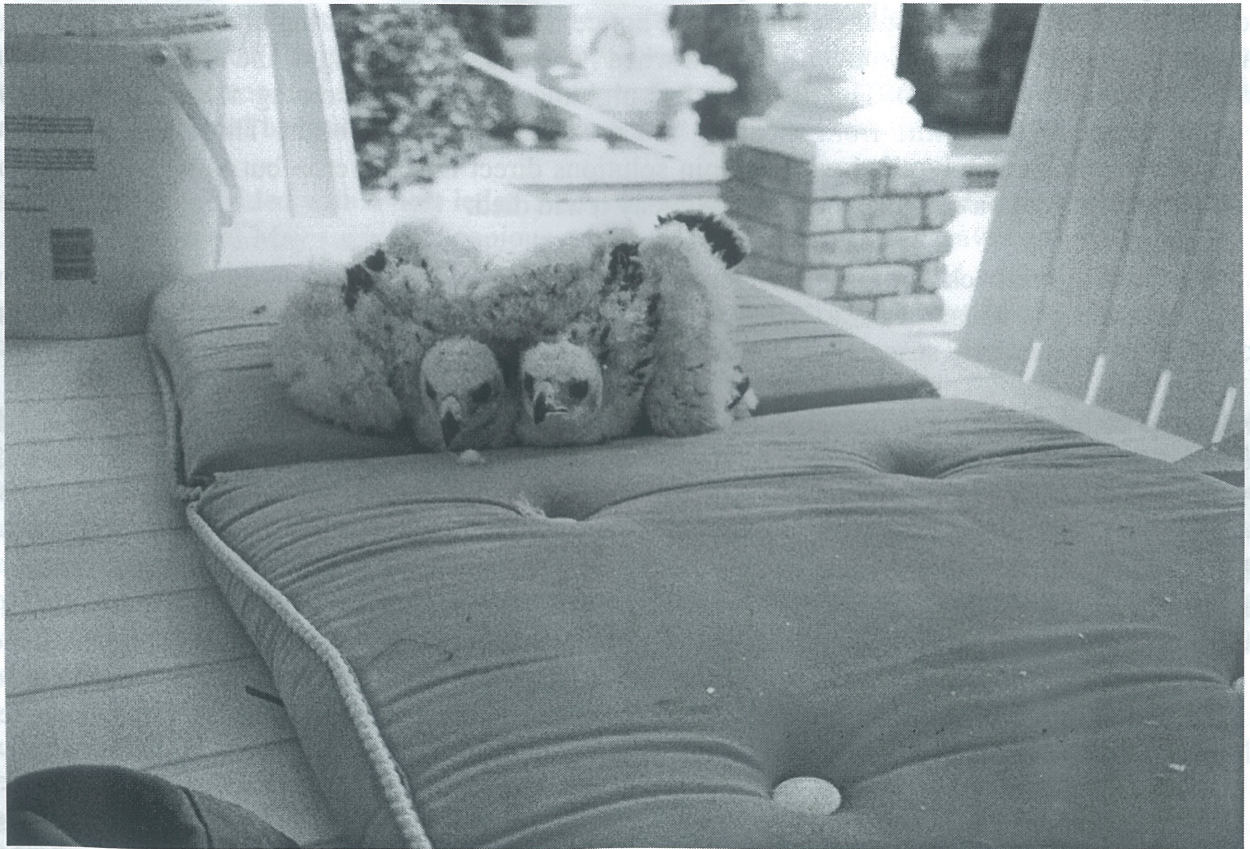
In 2003 season the pair, now looking more settled, laid another 3 eggs, the first on 1 August 2003 – a week later than the previous year. I decided not to attempt a removal for incubation but left the eggs with the parents and all three eggs hatched round about 10 September, confirming the aforementioned 39 day period from laying to hatching. Again the chicks were left with the parents whose rearing instincts and abilities seem to be faultless. Both male and female participate in the feeding process with great zest. Quite a pleasure to observe.

Having produced black spar chicks in 2002 and 2003 the next of the amateur breeder's dilemmas arises: What to do with the chicks? Since I started the breeding project in 1991 this aspect has always had its own anxieties. Gabs produced one year and I then released them on my plot, as there was no call for them. There was never much interest in captive bred lanners so I made several available to the Escom project and the occasional one went to a falconry centre for display flying. The Af Gosses I did manage to find homes for at a nominal price. Having started out as an independent breeder and having carried the cost of the operation for 13 years I have proceeded on the basis that the disposal of the birds must be my decision alone, subject of course to provincial and international permit requirements.

Of the 6 black spars produced to date, one died, two have gone to a falconer in Japan. The saint seducing power of money in this instance! One was made available to a breeder in Wales. One of the

2003 females went to Greg Jean Jacques and I have retained on eof the 2003 males. Fortunately black spars are still fairly easily procurable in the Aussie sponsored gum plantations and elsewhere so it makes sense for a breeder to recover some of his costs by disposing of these highly coveted birds overseas on a commercial basis.

I am sure everyone goes along with this reasoning.



HAWK EAGLES

Dave Fowler

Firstly let me make no apologies whatsoever, when the word Rhodesia is mentioned, in fact I have been known to be fairly offish to anyone referring to me as a "Zimbo", having established this factor, and having been asked to write something on Dogs (Pointers) Falconry, Wingshooting, etc, here goes....

Being an outdoor type most of my life, with an abiding interest in wildlife. It transpired that I ended up in the BSAP (police) for my sins, and one day I was completing an Annual Performance report for our Cadet, who, when questioned about hobbies interests etc, mentioned Falconry", This immediately put the lad in very good light, and after numerous questions, he volunteered to take me out and "catch a Black Shouldered Kite". Needless to say everything was dropped, and the intrepid lad (Alan), was bundled into a Police Landrover, taken home where we collected a Trap (Bal Chatri) and a wriggling white mouse.

Within an hour, in the suburbs, we trapped a BS kite, Alan was now my tutor thus far, and after several days, much to my delight, the bird was flying to the fist. From here I devoured all written matter on the subject learning about "eyeasses", "passage birds", "hacking", and all the magical phraseology of Falconry.

From the BS Kite I had a huge leap to a Male African Hawk Eagle ("Fury"), who was pre owned but not hunted by Rudi Geisswein. To my dear wife's, trepidation, Fury was moved into the bedroom corner on a large Ring Perch, which sat on a singularly unattractive square of mute stained tarpaulin (I eventually found a spot for him in the garage after dire threats of divorce etc). Fury was a juvenile bird in excellent condition wearing his russet colours, looking almost cute at times, until he footed you with a vengeance when excited, or when presented with a tidbit at the wrong angle. In Rhodesia at that time it was not illegal to hunt a hawk at night with a spotlight, consequently we enjoyed many evenings bouncing around paddocks in decrepit Land Rovers on various farms, in pursuit of Scrub hares and the occasional Spring Hares, spotlights ablaze, much screaming, climbing trees at night to retrieve very pissed off Hawk Eagle, and occasionally actually making a kill. Wife was not impressed being awoken at 2am to have a bloodied hare waved in her face to be proudly regaled with the merits of Fury's first kill.

Our weekly hunts developed in quite a social affair, some of the farmers even came along. On one particular occasion, we had 3 Falconers with AHE (Naturally they were flown separately) and 4 Visitors (That night the brandy was flowing well due to the cold weather) so we set forth, 7 of us crammed into a clapped out SWB Landrover. After a while a hare was spotted going like a greyhound for the cover alongside the barbed wire fence (I must say here that the hares had become fairly wise to us, and the mere sound of our rattling approach, spurred them to new speed records). We immediately accelerated (sort of) to cut the hares line of flight, Hawk bells jangling, bouncing around, with muffled "For f..... sake, you're squashing my bloody Hawk" and words to that effect, when we hit an ant bear hole and one of a our party, disappeared over the tailboard into the dusty night.... Needless to sat being the gentlemen we were, we carried on, with cries of "watch the f..... light, s..... keep your hawk down...J..... watch where to bloody rabbits going etc etc...

The hare made it We turned back and picked up a disheveled dust covered individual, whose name escapes me, (as does much at my age), who was complaining about a sore leg.... He was told not to be such a bloody wingger, and we carried on the hunt. A few hours later on arrival at the farm house, it

was established to poor fellow had a compound fracture!!!! There were many of these nocturnal incidents, another "goodie" was the night Rudi's H.E. took a SKUNK. The stench was eye watering. Rudi, was dropped off ASAP, and banned for the night.

Whilst on the subject of H.E., a young apprentice Brian Talbot had a bird of note, Diana, a huge female who was successfully flown at guinea fowl, she in fact took and killed (with assistance) a half grown Duiker which weighed at 15kg. Fortunately for me Diana actually liked me! And it was a hoot when after a hunt or flying session, she would cuddle down on the car seat next to me like a duck, and go to sleep!!! My Bro' in Law, Rob James, had a male bird with the glamorous name of George! George would unhesitatingly fly to the fist at night, and one night Rob called him out of a tree after a missed flight near an African Kraal. George left the tree in a jangle of bells whilst we focused the light on the glove, there was a whistling of wings, then a further loud jangling of bells as George gracefully flew straight into a pole near the kraal which was used for an Ariel for someone's radio within the kraal. I will always have a soft spot for the African Hawk Eagle, and regard them as the Bull Terriers of the Falconry World. Even during the war years in Rhodesia, we carried on flying them often in remote operational areas, on airstrips. I think any self respecting Guerilla ("Freedom Fighter") would not have gone within any distance of this group of mad white men....



PASSAGE PEREGRINE

A. Muller

Mention the word 'passage' and even the most seasoned and experienced falconer will lend you both his ears. In falconry terms it is a word containing a feeling of mystique, wonder, excitement, and endless capabilities. The word passage in falconry terms refers to a wild caught immature bird.

Training

Training proceeds quicker than one would think for a wild caught bird. But the difference is that passages are serious about food and remembers every lesson. Avalon was flying free fourteen days after she was caught. In general the basic training was the same as with any new falcon, but keeping in mind a nervous nature it is best to keep the falcon indoors in a quiet place and rely on the hood for other situations. However flying free was a totally different matter and I had to rely on experience from seasoned falconers as well as common sense. Nothing about flying like climbing, handling the wind and stooping have to be taught by creating situations where it is induced. The biggest priority is to get the falcon centered on you. In nature she fends for herself now she has to give up her independence and be induced to rely on your contribution for the hunt - which needless to say doesn't happen willingly. I approached this challenge on two angles. Firstly I made myself to be the best thing she ever came across by always producing a well garnished lure and later substituted by a tempting baggie - always and making sure every flying experience was pleasant one. Making in carefully and rewarding amply when picking her up. Secondly I gave her no other option but to rely on me, that is to say I flew her when and where there was no other quarry around. Flying late and staying clear of feeding areas can accomplish this. A terrain with a few scattered trees is very helpful; in that it offers cover for the few birds that are loafing about or to those whose flight path crosses your training ground. When they see the falcon, they panic into the trees rather than offering a tail chase beyond the horizon. I took the path of slow but steady progress with Avalon rather than progress in leaps and bounds, which can bounce any way. For example, although she was quick to fly free I spent another three weeks on centering and waiting on, before attempting to hunt wild quarry. Avalon is a natural mounter, for the longer I kept her waiting on, the higher she went. I think the pigeon launcher helped me in this regard in that quarry could be produced wide, making a high pitch necessary. The pigeon launcher also smoothed out the transition from baggies to game.

The slow pace paid off, for, when I did start hunting, she behaved in just the same manner and started taking game (orange rivers) like there was no tomorrow.

Hunting

Now a complete team: falcon, dog and falconer, we started out on partridges. The first was taken from a height of hundred feet (my nerves the problem) the second from five hundred feet and so it continued. With every kill she gorged which meant sitting the next day except on weekends. With her tally on five partridges, the opportunity arisen to show her bagged duck. With the familiar shout, good position and some encouragement she killed and gorged on her first duck. A small dam with a single redbilled teal proved to be the perfect setup for her next duck. We continued to kill five more teal in succession on the same dam. It may sound to easy but I was traveling forty kilometers dirt road there every second day and rushing to get the last light of the day. I believe these good experiences in succession because of the perfect setup, laid the foundation for my duck hawk. I continued to hunt

duck mostly and only flying partridges when the opportunity arose. Once the duck setup was established, more dams offered hunting opportunities.

I look back at a season with good results, thinking of my bag but also the style, not just by my own standards but also to the standards of some great falconers. But I can and have to think of at least a dozen times when things could have taken a total different course. Accidentally flushing a sand grouse resulting in a chase to the horizon, a ringing flight after pied starlings over the Stormberg, killing a duck on the other side of a near freezing Rietriver which I had to swim through receiver in the one hand above water and so I can continue. All these incidents make me realize that I can be grateful for the season I had, but it is those incidents that made it a great season thanks to a passage peregrine.

Avalon's tally for the season was:

43 ducks (redbilled teal, cape teal, shovellers, pochard and yellowbills)

10 partridges (orange river and greywing)

1 rock pigeon (accidental)

2 coots (accidental)

1 moorhen (accidental)

1 weaver (accidental)

58 TOTAL

To talk about highlights would need a book format. But I will keep it to three.

A most fantastic sight was to see my trained falcon tearing through a flock of pied starlings at an altitude higher than a mountain in the Stormberg (luckily missing). Dominating them completely and have the highly esteemed pied starlings dump like a skunk Swainson's in the valley at my feet.

Another was to see Avalon stoop through the background of a snowcapped mountain, pound a shoveller into a green wheat field and coming back to her kill at leisure for she knows it is going nowhere. (Not everyday Free State scenery)

The highest of stoops I missed. It was counted at fourteen seconds long, and thanks to the running commentary of two spectators with binoculars, whose vocabulary I cannot repeat in this article, I didn't miss a thing. The teal dumped in a watercourse resulting in a rocket like throw-up. She returned to my lure with a disappointed expression, my expression on the other hand was one of relief and gratefulness for she was out of my vision for more than thirty minutes.

Flying weight

Avalon was trapped at 740 gram (With a crop). She started responding to her lessons at 655 grams and flew at her best on 680 grams. The highest I flew her was at 695 grams but then it seemed as if she was starting to miss the ducks on her first strike, telling me the commitment to the quarry wasn't there. I kept good discipline on the weight, and even not flying for two days if the weight wasn't right.

In short, training of a passage peregrine falcon can have some great challenges for the bond can be fragile at times due to circumstances. But if the basics are done right it becomes very simple:

If it flies it dies.

You just have to make the right quarry fly.

GILBERT BLAINE'S LODGE.

Paul Venter

When I visited Scotland I was privileged to stay with Diana and Leonard Durman-Walters. Diana arranged for me to join Leonard and falconer friends on a moor. I must confess that these falconers are hunting with peregrine falcons and hybrids in extreme weather conditions. I was most impressed to see how these falcons handled icy winds from strong to gale conditions. Our gentle lanner falcon would have a struggle to stay in the sky and the area.

My day was made when Leonard invited me one morning to visit Gilbert Blaine's Lodge at Camster. It was a cloudy misty morning, but for Scottish conditions, it was a beautiful day. Gilbert Blaine was the owner of Grey Stone Lodge, Camster, since 1920. We were quite surprised to discover that the new owners were Swedes. The lady was very friendly and invited us in for tea. She told us that several visiting falconers came to see the lodge and they were thinking of establishing a Bed and Breakfast to accommodate the visitors.

Sitting in a deep chair enjoying some real tea I kept on looking at the huge stone fireplace whose sides still pitch black from all the fires that were made in it during the past years. It was amazing how the scene took my mind back to the times when Gilbert Blaine and the falconry hunting party would have been sitting before it, having interesting discussions on the days hunt. It is very remarkable and of historical value and if you ever visit the area it will be worth your while to pop in and pay respect to the great falconers of yester year.

We enjoyed the hospitality and as we stepped out I looked up at the sky and expected to see a falcon flying over.... I am sure I could hear a bell.



Gilbert Blaine's Kennels at Camster. All his hunting dogs were housed here, mainly Setters

SCOTISH GROUSE HAWKING

Adrian Lombard

I have practiced short wing falconry for many years and enjoyed long wing falconry vicariously. Indeed I am convinced that this approach gives me the best of both worlds in falconry, and I am deeply grateful that there are long wing aficionado's who are prepared to shoulder the responsibility and risk of their discipline and allow me the privilege of participating in their spectacle, stress free.

Over 40 years of involvement with falconry I have shared the thrill and experience of the sport with a number of true masters. This experience has encompassed different habitats, quarries and falcon types. Each of these combinations has its own particular excitement and I cannot express a preference, but rather a pleasure in the diversity of the pursuit. I must admit a prejudice, developed in boyhood for the concept that Grouse Hawking in Scotland must represent the epitome of the sport. Perhaps it does. I wish to share my experiences with you and the conclusions I have reached.

Last year I related the experiences of my first trip to Scotland in 1999, when I spent a week with Bryan Paterson and David Jones at Lochindorb near Granton-on-Spey. On that occasion most of the time was spent flying Goshawks. We flew Dave's Gyr/Peregrine Tiercel on Grouse in the afternoons with a fair measure of action and modest success. It proved to be a learning curve all round and one, which David has continued up to my last visit in September 2003.

It was my great good fortune to be invited by David Jones to join him once again in Scotland. On this occasion the venue was to be Auchnafree, an estate which straddles the River Almond and which lies to the west of Perth, somewhat south of our previous moor. Auchnafree proved to be a wild and rugged place, famed for having the highest-flying grouse in Scotland; this because of the steepness of the slopes and the winds which blow across them. Coupled with adequate quarry, this provides the opportunity for outstanding falconry. How one makes use of this opportunity depends, as always in falconry, on the falconers, their hawks and their dogs.

The Falconers

As with most quarries, successful hunting depends on knowledge of the quarry, the terrain and the ability of the falconer to present the quarry to his bird under optimal conditions. Here David Jones' experience and local knowledge was critical to the success we experienced. As with any other specific quarry, one must know where and how to find the grouse and anticipate its behavior. Similarly knowledge of the hunting grounds and particularly the presence or absence of lift on different slopes given different wind conditions will determine the quality and success of flights. This is particularly true with a fast and challenging quarry such as Red Grouse. We were joined by 2 other falconers. Martin, an enthusiastic Irishman who was obviously an experienced hunter and competent falconer, who had yet to catch his first grouse; and Steve (with whom I could identify), a self employed businessman who has good aptitude but limited by available time and experience. I was present purely as spectator and occasional porter.

The Birds

Dave was flying two Tiercel hybrids in their first season. The best bird was a white Gyr/Peregrine that one could see was daily gaining in confidence and experience and had obviously 'got-the-plot'. This bird provided some flights, which will always stand out in my memory. The second bird was a Black

Gyr/Prairie Tiercel, which was definitely Dave's "second string" bird. He had not yet killed a Grouse but I believe he would have done so if he had not been temporarily lost during the week.

Martin was flying a wild taken eyas Irish Peregrine Tiercel. This little bird had been entered on Partridge in Ireland but was yet to take a Grouse. On the first afternoon out he struck and pulled feathers on a Grouse. My incorrect prediction was that he didn't pack enough punch to subdue a grouse and he was soon to prove me wrong. He was indeed a fast learner knocking down a Grouse 5 meters from me on the following afternoon. Grouse are tougher characters than Partridge however, and as he made a leisurely recovery and turn following the strike, the Grouse bounced off the heather and shot off down wind. He was able to turn on the after-burners and pull down his quarry but the lesson was not lost on him. The second Grouse he stuck was given no such chance. He performed the proverbial "turn on a tickey" and piled into the downed bird.

Steve's bird was a Gyr/Peregrine hybrid, which lacked experience and became demoralized flying over challenging quarry in difficult conditions.

The Dogs

Our pack consists of 3 German shorthaired pointers and an English pointer (from Ireland). To my surprise the English falconers prefer GSP's but this obviously reflects the available bloodlines, which appear to be significantly better than those I have seen in South Africa.

That being said, Dave's GSP, "Feather", was an outstanding dog which had the measure of the Grouse. The other dogs were pretty quickly put back on the lead and we all came to rely on the ability of the clever bitch. The English pointer, belonging to Martin, was a useful dog but new to Red Grouse, and was run when Feathers was unavailable.

As in all game hawking, but perhaps most particularly in the hunting of Red Grouse, success depends on a careful, steady and reliable dog.

The Experience

Over the week I spent with this group in Auchnafree, we had some outstanding flights and a number of grouse were put in the bag. Several of these flights will remain engraved on my memory but one in particular stands out.

On that afternoon we worked a fairly steep hillside in a stiff wind. We had bumped a number of grouse and had yet to develop a really good set-up. Feather came on point in some tall heather and it was Dave Jones' turn to put his bird up – The white Gyr/Peregrine Tiercel. He was carried up and across the slope by the wind and we watched him working his way along the crest of the ridge to get back over. He came overhead but immediately turned down wind again, not satisfied with his pitch. I looked back to check the dog but, to my horror, she had disappeared. I then realized that the smart animal had lain down in the heather so as not to put too much pressure on the grouse. The Falcon returned overhead but turned away to repeat the performance a third time, steadily gaining altitude. On the third round he came back a tiny cross against the gray sky, and finally held his position.

The scene was set and Dave moved in to flush the Grouse. I strained to keep my eyes on the falcon. The grouse flushed giving their cackling call: Ah—ah- ah- ah, and the falcon plunged rowing his way downwards, coming past us making a noise like a train fixed on the grouse like a heat-seeking missile. With the steepness of the slope we could see the grouse dropping down the valley with falcon closing.

The strike and throw up dropped the grouse into the heather far below. But these are tough quarry, the falcon turned reflushed the grouse off the heather and the pair shot down the valley two dots with the gap steadily closing. It closed and we could just make out a white spot on the ground below. The long journey down to find the white bird deservedly plucking his red quarry, Dave made in while I clicked through my camera spool, but the moments I will never forget are not on film.

There are moments in memory, Alan Harvey's Sky taking greywing, Kobus' Lanner appearing literally out of the blue to stoop on orange river; Eds Gwenevere reeling in duck, Rudi's Tiercel on dove. There is never an ultimate flush and never boredom born of excess. It is the sheer free wild adrenaline rich exhilaration that, like some drug, makes us return to watch one more time for as long as life allows.



PRIMITIVE FALCONRY

Roger Neilson

In May 1980 I found myself negotiating the track that forms the boundary between the Chirisa Game Reserve and the Lower Gokwe Tribal Trustland in northwestern Zimbabwe. My English pointer named 'Rastus', my constant bush companion, was on the back of my open land rover, snout into the wind savoring all the exciting early morning scent that his hounds nose could identify in a central African Game Reserve. All but the most pungent being lost on me.

Off to my left I caught a flicker of movement between the trunks of Mopani trees and presently a full picture came into view. A hen Swainson's Francolin – I believe we have to call them spurrows these days – was being pursued by a pair of Dark Chanting Goshawks and she was flying for her life. The course that would have taken her into the Gunwales of my Land Rover had I not slackened pace twenty yards in front of me the 'Frankie' plunged into a Mopani tree that had recently been overturned by an elephant and the pursuing chanting Goshawk swung up into trees left standing on either side. I pulled up in a cloud of dust hoping to see the outcome of the chase. After a few seconds I decided that my pointer and I were going to 'influence the outcome' and I told Rastus to 'seek'. My dog responded quickly enough, but once off the back of the 'Landie' began working the wrong scent in the opposite direction to where the hen 'Frankie' had put in. Not wanting to point a herd of Impala, or worse still a Black Rhino, I had to climb out of the vehicle and redirect the dog to where I knew the bird to be hiding. Quite understandably the Chanting Goshawk objected to my presence and flew off in the direction from whence they had come.

Fifteen feet from the overturned Mopani Tree Rastus picked up the correct scent and stiffened into a classic point. Not thinking about the departed chanting goshawks I let my dog hold the point for a while and then told him to 'Flush'. Rastus bounded into the overturned foliage and the 'Frankie' exploded out, also setting a course back the way it had come. I watched fascinated as the course she had chosen took her straight toward a tall bare tree with two 'black dots' high up in the branches. As she neared the tree, the smaller of the two black dots spread its wings sallied forth, struck her head-on and tumbled to earth with her in a wildly flapping melee (to be joined a second later by the second black dot with also miraculously spread wings.) This was all too much for Rastus who had emerged from the overturned tree and had also been watching the unfortunate 'Frankies' flight path. Despite my attempt to make him 'stay' he took off for the scene of the action at a full gallop.

When I arrived at the 'kill' more sedately some 5 minutes later I found Rastus sniffing a stone dead Swainson's Spurfowl and two rather grumpy Dark Chanting Goshawks balefully eyeing their lost meal from the high branches of the bare tree from which they had initiated the kill. I contemplated leaving the kill for them to enjoy, but then remembered that I had only baked beans and bully beef for supper that night, so I took it with me. Back at camp that afternoon I skinned the spurfowl and found a cluster of bruises around the base of the scull and upper neck, and that her lungs had also been punctured. It seemed as though one foot of her attacker had made multiple punctures around the base of the skull whilst the other had gripped her back, the hind talon and pounces of this foot had met in the lungs. My opinion of the Dark Chanting Goshawks as a candidate for Falconry went up several points. I had seen cooperative hunting between members of a pair, an aerial chase after a swift flying quarry that covered at least 150 metres, a head-on tackle, neat and devastating footwork, and lastly a disposition that was very tolerant of my dog and would in all probability quickly learn to use dog and man if given a chance to do so. I am surprised that no one in Central Africa has used this Hawk for serious Falconry. My intention is not to sing the praises of Dark Chanting Goshawks as Falconry Birds; I'll leave that for

someone who has had a serious crack at a Dark Chanting Gos. What I did do was that I ate a Spurfowl that had been taken by a cast of wild broad winged Hawks over a pointer I had trained, and that should get a person thinking about the primitive origins of the Falconers art. Incidentally the Frankie tasted delicious in its baked bean sauce!

Another bird that regularly indulge in cooperative hunting with species other than its own, is of course the Peregrine Falcon. I am sure each and every one of us who has trained a hunting dog could tell at least one story of wild Falcons attempting or engaging in 'Primitive Falconry'. I'm not going to bore you with any more of mine – They are legion and I've already told you the best one – instead I will relate a story that was told to me by the late Doctor John Condy at his home in Salisbury, Rhodesia in 1968. Its well worth committing to paper and should leave any naturalist in no doubt as to the origins of Falconry.

John was a senior veterinary surgeon employed by the Rhodesian Government and engaged in field work all over the country – wherever and whenever he was needed, which was fine by him because he loved the bush – John was very proud of his Irish Ancestry, at least one of his grandparents must have kissed the Blarney stone before they left for Africa, before the turn of the 19th century because a more charming gentleman and yarn spinner I don't think I've met in my lifetime. He knew just about everybody in the two Rhodesia's (and beyond) and he was welcome everywhere he went – even if he was slapping up Quarantine notices – This particular story concerns John, and the pupils and headmaster of Guineafowl School near Gwelo. The headmaster was of course a friend of John Condy's and they had a mutual interest in gundogs and Irish whiskey.

I forget if it was an outbreak of foot and mouth disease or Blue ticks developing a resistance to arsenical dip that drew John and his team to Rhodesian Midlands that rainy season, but to cut a long story short he established camp. Veterinary cordons, Road blocks etc and then went to say 'hello' to his friend the Pedogog of Guineafowl School – which is set in the heart of some fine rolling grassland about 20 miles east of the town of Gwelo (Gwerru if you use the new Lexicon). John's friend insisted that he use the guest cottage and not the fly camp that he and his team had spent the morning erecting, so John was duly ensconced.

As I remember the story it was at the height of summer and the country was lush and green. Exams had already been written, they school holidays were at hand, evening were delightful golden twilight times. As the two friends were enjoying a sundowner (John Jameson's of course) a group of boys carrying what looked like walking sticks approached and respectfully asked, "May we take Heidi and Trixie for a walk sir?" The headmaster an Irishman who had been recruited by the Federal Rhodesian Government in the mid 1950's replied, "To be sure milads, just you all be back before nightfall now", and remarked to John that just lately his boys had taken an interest in walking the dogs every evening that it had not rained and the dogs just couldn't wait to be off for their walk.

John clicked immediately what the boys were up to. They were white farmers sons for the most part – that rainy season was 'a year of the Quail' and Harlequin Quail had descended on the Rhodesian highveld in their millions – The kind of year you wish you'd taken up an Ovambo Sparrowhawk and not an African Hawk-Eagle – and the boys had learned how to use a weighted matebele fighting stick from 'play fighting' with the black farm children on their parents farms and were now using them to knock down rising quail. John asked if he could accompany them and watched their 'modus operandi'. They would wait for one of the dogs to come on point and then if the second dog honored the point, form up behind the dogs in time honored 'horns of the Ox' battle formation of Matebele oral tradition. Every one of them would loose his stick as a convey of quail broke cover. Sometimes they hit one,

sometimes two, sometimes they missed but they created a systematic disturbance in the grassland through which they moved.

A dozen or so plump highly edible 120 gram gamebirds were being flushed every 50 to 60 yards. Even John, bushman that he was, was not prepared for the 'Piece de resistance' that occurred after flush number three. A wild Siberian migrant Peregrine "A big black and white Peregrine with thin malar stripes" joined the hunt and began waiting on over the party at a pitch of +/- 100 feet. She was with them for several minutes – after which time the quail sat incredibly tightly – After a few stoops she managed to grab a flushed Quail in between a barrage of flung sticks and a chorus of lusty shouts from the field.

She flew off and ate her Quail on a termite mound some three to four hundred yards distant. She was back the next evening when the 'field' – headmaster included this time – sallied forth to witness the next exciting episode of 'Primitive Falconry'. On being questioned the boys admitted to having hunted with the wild Falcon on several previous occasions and that 'He' – they did not use the Falconers 'She' – always managed to catch one when they were out with 'Him'

I believe this is how falconry began. Not with short wings, but with wild Peregrines over Neolithic hunter/gatherer men with newly domesticated or semi domesticated dogs. The hunters could have been using cast nets or as demonstrated by the boys of Guineafowl School they could have used an even more primitive tool, a throwing stick weighted at one end to make it spin as it carved its way through a covey of rising Quail.

It makes you wonder how old Falconry really is. Man domesticated the dog, well over 8000 years ago, and I'm sure dogs 'introduced the Peregrine Falcon – A species with whom they shared a symbiotic relationship, long before they developed one with man – to their masters not long afterwards. No wonder it feels 'Right' to take a Peregrine on the fist, we've been doing it for a long long time!

FALCONRY & THE NEW RCG

Adrian Lombard

The relationship between falconers, conservationists and rehabilitators is often problematic. We are aware that in many parts of the world they are in open conflict. This is often the result of misinformation, closed minds and poor communication. Perhaps, therefore, the key to resolving this conflict is communication.

Falconers want to fly their hawks. In practice this is difficult enough without bureaucratic hindrance and uninformed criticism. We, the falconers, often find it necessary to justify our existence by setting ourselves up as rehabilitators and conservators. Certainly, there is a role for falconers in both rehabilitation and conservation, but this should be a complimentary role and not a reason for continuation of the sport.

It has been my experience, that, when channels of communication are opened, an amicable and mutually beneficial relationship with both conservators and rehabilitators can be established. Both groups are often astonished at the minimal impact, which we have on raptor populations and the environment, and at the relationship we can develop with our birds.

Rehabilitators may view falconers as competition within their field. There is some anxiety that falconers may be critical of their husbandry methods. There is also real concern that falconers may attempt to gobble up all the birds that come in for rehab and pervert their aim of restoring birds to health and returning them to the wild.

Conservationists on the other hand may be concerned that we operate in direct opposition with their aims. They have concerns that we wish to rape and pillage their raptor populations and specifically those populations involved in scientific studies.

There are two other standpoints that create antipathy. The first is a reasonable aesthetic belief that birds should be free and uninfluenced by human contact, thus falconry is wrong. The second is an unreasonable need to provide a scapegoat to justify a career in conservation with falconers providing a soft target to be portrayed as poachers, smugglers and traffickers.

The converse of this anti-falconry sentiment is that falconers become over-defensive and secretive. We avoid publicity and resist sharing our skills and knowledge. We refuse to contribute to scientific studies unless appropriately rewarded and acknowledged.

It has long been the concern of myself, and other reasonable falconers to seek a way out of this destructive spiral. This would be to the benefit of the falconers, conservators and rehabilitators and ultimately to the raptors that are our shared passion. The Raptor Conservation Group which falls under the umbrella of the Endangered Wildlife Trust, has long appeared to be a suitable vehicle to which our efforts could be channeled and provide a meeting ground of falconers, conservators and rehabilitators. I have been knocking on this door for many years with limited success. Recently, however, changes in management and, apparently, attitudes have opened the potential of this organization to us.

In March 2004, SAFA was invited to present the Status of Falconry in South Africa at the RCG workshop held at the Gariep Dam. Alan Stephenson was elected to make this presentation. Ron Hartley was invited to make a presentation regarding the research and conservation activities of the

Zimbabwe Falconry Club but, as he was unable to attend, he asked me to make the presentation for him.

I went with a measure of trepidation, as I am aware that there have been significant elements of anti-falconry sentiment in the RCG. The program and abstracts circulated prior to the workshop looked interesting and there was no obvious controversy. On arrival however, we were provided with a bound copy of the presentation abstracts and included in this was the notorious Falconry Policy that had previously been circulated by Dr Verdoorn and which we know to be unacceptable and unworkable. My initial inclination was to turn round and go straight back to Cape Town. Fortunately I had been given a lift up with Guy Palmer of the CNC and return was not a possibility. Good sense prevailed and, after a sleepless night I attended the Presentation session, which occupied the first day of the workshop. This session was thoroughly worthwhile.

The representatives of those Provincial Conservation authorities, which attended, presented reports on the status of Raptor conservation within their provinces. Without exception they reported a good relationship with the falconers in their province.

Alan Stephenson's presentation was well received and will be included elsewhere in this publication. I presented Ron Hartley's impressive list of research and conservation projects, and was able to add my request for an improved relationship between falconers and the RCG in South Africa. This appeared to receive a favorable hearing. The other presentations included some absolutely fascinating talks ranging from cooperation with Eskom to reduce electrocution fatalities to the Research Projects of the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute to Outreach projects with farmers in the Northern Cape. Altogether it was an impressive roundup of raptor enthusiasts who are involved a wide variety of valuable work throughout the country. Certainly this appeared to be an organization that we falconers could support and contribute to.

What then of the notorious falconry policy? Essentially it never saw the light of day. I was unable to maintain a wise silence so raised the issue several times and expressed our abhorrence of this document. This seemed to elicit a measure of surprise and certainly no energetic protagonists. The following 2 days were occupied by the "workshopping". This was led by the new director of the EWT Dr. Nick King and the EWT Manager, Yolán Friedman, who proved to be an extremely dynamic duo and proceeded to make us work our proverbial butts off.

We were required to identify threats to Raptors in South Africa.

These identified threats were grouped into broad categories and we were invited to split into working groups, each taking one of the categories. These included: -

1. Scientific data collection. (Or the lack of it).
2. Legislation and Policy enforcement.
3. Education and awareness of raptors and their conservation.
4. Habitat Loss.
5. Immediate threats to raptors.

We had to categorize and formulate an approach to dealing with these threats. I joined group 2, dealing with the "lack of uniformity in Policies and laws regarding raptor conservation and utilization". I found this group to have a very positive approach. The concern was the lack of uniformity rather than an attempt to foist unacceptable constraints. Indeed SAFA have been trying to encourage a standardization of falconry policies in the country and this may well be the route to follow.

At the end of the workshop we had to put all the identified threats in order of priority. The values ascribed to the various threats by each of the delegates were combined and thus a prioritized list of threats in Raptor Conservation was developed. It is interesting that, in the opinion of the delegates, utilization of Raptors (which includes falconry, displays, zoos and even the muti trade) came very low down in the list. Few of us would disagree that degradation of the environment is threat no 1.

Finally the future of the Raptor Conservation Group was considered. It is envisaged that one National and several Provincial or Regional committees will run the group. These committees are to be representative of all interested parties, and we were assured that falconers would be represented on each of these committees.

What does this mean to us? In my opinion we have been invited; we must now go to the party. Here is recognition of our acceptance by the broad spectrum of raptor conservationists. It is the product of our efforts to keep our house in order and to practice ethical and environmentally sustainable falconry. It does not mean that the threat to falconry's existence has been removed forever as falconry is being challenged in many forums worldwide, just as it is being recognised and accepted in other forums.

We need to participate and to contribute. Only if we stay in tune with the forefront of raptor conservation efforts will we have the advantage of acceptance and acknowledgment. How can we contribute? Simply each and every one of us must appreciate the importance of this contribution.

We must: -

1. Elect representatives, and attend RCG committees
2. Participate in RCG projects and programs
3. Cooperate with and contribute to research projects and programs
4. Collect data and record information. This can be done in various ways and every falconer can and must participate. Activities would include:
 - i) Ringing of raptors for release. If you are not a bird-ringer, take them to someone who is.
 - ii) Complete and submit nest record cards
 - iii) Record interesting observations and sitings. The local bird club magazines – such as *Promerops* in the Western Cape will be glad to publish items of interest
 - iv) Contribute short notes or articles. The Raptor Conservation Group will continue to publish 'Gabar' and we should contribute to this. There are many scientists who would gladly help falconers who lack the scientific experience to write such papers.
 - v) Above all we must continue to keep our house in order, and practice a high standard of acceptable falconry.

With the goodwill that has been established we can enter a new era in South Africa Falconry. Based on acknowledgement of our efforts and acceptance of our sport, we can cooperate with conservators and rehabilitators to our mutual benefit. We can aim to establish, by cooperation with Provincial conservation authorities, a uniform falconry policy under which we can operate, without unreasonable restriction.

We cannot afford to miss this opportunity and it is incumbent on all of us to contribute according to our particular skills and strengths.



FALCONRY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Alan Stephenson

Definition

Falconry is the art or practise of training raptors to hunt natural quarry in a way that both raptor and prey have an equal chance of being successful. The primary aim is not to catch or kill the prey; it's far easier and cheaper to do that with a shotgun. The primary aim is to see high quality flights as close to the natural situation as possible. This is not often seen in the wild unless you are there by good fortune. Keeping of raptors in captivity is not falconry on its own. Training them to fly and hunt natural prey in style where quality of flight is the main objective is falconry. This is why falconry is termed an art. It requires time, money and dedication, not to mention patience, to achieve high quality falconry.

Status

Falconry is legal and recognised in all the provinces in South Africa. Currently there are falconry clubs in the Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Free State, North West, Northern Province, Mpumalanga, Kwazulu Natal and Gauteng. These provinces allow falconry if the falconers belong to a recognized falconry club. The South African Falconry Association is the umbrella body, and although it does not prescribe to the clubs the exact rules and regulations, there is a standard set that clubs adhere to. The South African Falconry Association is also a member of the International Falconers Association, which in turn is an affiliated member of the IUCN.

Falconers have to comply with rules and regulations as set down by the clubs with certain requirements. One of these requirements is that all falcons and exotic raptors must be flown with radio telemetry. Falconers are also graded as to proficiency and experience and this determines what species of birds they are allowed to fly.

Species used in falconry

Although most species of raptor have been flown in the past for falconry and rehabilitation, the species commonly used are; Peregrine Falcon, Lanner Falcon, Black Sparrowhawk, Redbreasted Sparrowhawk, African Goshawk, Gabar Goshawk, Ovambo Sparrowhawk and Little Sparrowhawk.

Occasionally other species are flown such as eagles and Rednecked Falcon when they become available for some or other reason. Other raptors such as kestrels may be flown by apprentice falconers in learning how to manage raptors and care for them. They are not suitable for general falconry as such.

In essence it is mainly bird catching raptors that are rapacious that are the best for falconry. Although eagles have been used they are generally unsuitable in that they are difficult to manage due to their size. Of the eagles used the smaller hawk eagles are better suited to falconry.

Obtaining birds for falconry

Birds used in falconry are mostly obtained in one of three ways; captive bred, wild trapped or problem and rehabilitated birds.

Captive breeding: Currently only birds that are scarce and in demand are captive bred. Birds that have been bred successfully to date are Peregrine Falcon, Lanner Falcon, Black Sparrowhawk, Redbreasted Sparrowhawk, African Goshawk, Gabar Goshawk and Rednecked Falcon. The focus in the past was mostly on Peregrine Falcons with more than 185 bred so far.

Wild taken: Only passage birds in their first year are allowed to be trapped, or taken as nestlings in the case of goshawks and Sparrowhawks. Mature birds are not removed from the wild for falconry as they are considered breeding stock, having survived their first year. Raptors experience a high rate of mortality in their first year. Problem birds are those that come into conflict with livestock owners such as cage bird keepers, pigeon fanciers and anybody who keeps chickens. Any raptor harassing someones domestic birds is soon killed unless a falconer gets to hear of such a problem and traps the offending raptor. If the offending raptor is not needed for falconry it is released elsewhere after being ringed. Falconers are encouraged to rather trap problem birds first for falconry use.

Rehabilitated birds: Many birds are brought to falconers in poor condition due to disease, starvation or injury. These birds are evaluated and although many have a poor prognosis with no chance of survival as free flying wild birds, some can be used for falconry and released after the season.

Falconry statistics

Annual wild take of raptors – 2003

	W.Cape	E.Cape	Gauteng	KZ.Natal	Free State	Others	Total
Members	66	7	46	45	8	18	190
Active Falconers	32	4	26	15	8	6	91
Peregrine							
Wild					1		1
Rehab							
Lanner							
Wild	1	2		2	2		7
Rehab	2						2
Black spar							
Wild	2	1	1	5			9
rehab		1	2	6	2		11
Red spar				3			3
Ovambo							
Af goshawk							
Wild	1			3			4
Rehab	5		1	6	2	2	16
Rock Kestrel Wild							
Rehab	1				1	1	3
Greater Kestrel			5				5

General

At least half of the birds taken for falconry are hacked back at the end of the falconry season. Some would be kept for more than one season. The falconry season would be mainly in the winter months, usually ending about September, except for rehab and young birds that are being trained for the first time. Birds are hacked (released) back into the wild in spring and summer because at this time of the year they have a better chance of survival when prey is abundant with many young birds just fledged that are easy to catch.

Excess captive bred birds are also hacked back to the wild if not required for falconry. Only captive bred birds from known indigenous stock are released. Any exotics or hybrids that are flown have to be flown with radio telemetry by suitably experienced falconers. Although not infallible this greatly increases the chances of recovery and in preventing permanent loss. Most hybrids are imprinted to humans so there would be very little chance of their surviving or breeding in the wild. In North America where large numbers of hybrids are flown under these conditions and some lost every year, there is no documented case of hybrids breeding in the wild. The worst - case scenario was where a male took up residence at a suitable cliff and excluded the resident birds from breeding (Germany).

Other concerns about captive breeding and release of excess birds to the wild, is that it will contaminate the genetic integrity of the wild population. No data is available to support this and the selection factors in the wild favour the locally evolved species. In raptors, which are slow breeding and have distinctive mate recognition the evidence is in favour that there is very little chance that inferior genetic birds would survive. It is much more prevalent in precocious species such as waterfowl and game birds which can hybridise easily and can populate an area rapidly.

Historically falconry had great status and many cultures used raptors as a way to hunt food. With the advent of gunpowder and firearms falconry was no longer practised. In modern day it was revived but conflict between preservationists and falconers was the order of the day. With better insight into ecology and sustainable use of wildlife, the majority of conservation bodies throughout the world recognise falconry as a sustainable utilisation of wildlife. Falconers also have a good knowledge of raptors and their ecology and although not biologists can contribute greatly to further study of raptors. Several collaborations with falconers and ornithologists have produced good scientific data in the recent past.

In conclusion falconry has a part to play in raptor conservation and with ever better relationships between conservationists and falconers.

Pros and cons of legal organized falconry

PROS

CONS

Legal falconry is easier to control.	Illegal falconry no control but still practising.
Better care of raptors in captivity	Often poorly kept
More information on raptor populations.	No information on raptor populations
Scientific data.	No scientific data
Education of public.	No education
Very little impact on wild population as only passage birds are used, $\frac{3}{4}$ would die in their first year. Many birds released after their first year have a better chance of survival.	No second chance for young birds
Captive breeding reduces take of wild birds.	Captive birds easy to obtain, no incentive for falconers to study wild birds, look for nests.

RAY BLACK

Paul Venter

I deem myself lucky to have known Ray Black when he was still young and full of aspirations. Ray was at Art College, Johannesburg, with Roger Neilson and Carel Van der Merwe during 1956. Carel and I, at that stage, were working on owls in the Melville Koppies. At college Carel met Ray, and Roger and I were introduced to the two artists who already had experience in the art of falconry. Roger, at that stage, owned a Peregrine Tiercel with the name of Kim, given to him by Rudie de Wet. Rudie was the most advanced falconer and had already trained some birds of prey like eagles and accipiters. Kim was a rehabilitation bird and was injured when he flew into a cage after some doves at the zoo.

Ray and Roger lived in Hillbrow, at that stage a nice quite suburb. Roger lived with his dad in a flat and kept Kim also in the flat. One afternoon I gave Roger a lift on my bicycle to the Wits University soccer fields to fly the Tiercel. Kim was kept and flown by Ray, Roger and myself for years. Eventually, after a good moulting exercise, we released Kim at Sunninghill Park, Rivonia.

Ray and I had many falconry discussions at night time. I remember one particular night in Hillbrow when the philosophies on falconry and life kept up the taking all night long. We had a big pot of soup going, to give us energy to last the night. Ray had a strong belief in himself as an artist. He admired the painting of D.M.Henry and G.E.Lodge. Ray therefore moved to Zimbabwe and lived there to understudy D.M.Henry's artwork. He aspired to be the best and for those of you who were fortunate enough to collect paintings by this master painter, it was an opportunity that only occurs once in a lifetime. Ray was also a great Elvis fan. He could, when he was in the mood for it, imitate Elvis with his guitar and even do all the steps.

We hiked to the Magalies Mountains to go and trap lanner falcons. It took us all day to do the trip from Melville to Magalies. The only food we had with us for one week was a rucksack full of dried peaches and a few tins of condensed milk. Ray believed that the condensed milk would make us so sick and sweet that we would not feel hungry all day. Needless to say by day two both of us were suffering from diarrhoea in a bad way.

Thereafter we lost weight as we were too scared to indulge in any dried peaches or condensed milk and we decided that the clear mountain water was healthy. We saw lots of vultures flying at Scheerpoort...no falcons yet. One night we tried to sleep in a cavelike overhang but some big cat with yellow eyes made us leave our sleeping quarters for a bed on a haystack near a farmhouse. The area was known for leopards! Next day we went up the mountain once again. We also weathered a thunderstorm and that was scary. A set of nets was put up in an open space in a field near the mountain range. Ray and I kept eyes on the nets all day.

Late afternoon two falcons suddenly appeared over the mountaintop. We watched them with binoculars and next moment both were in full stoop towards our nets – the Falcon first and the Tiercel just behind. Lady luck smiled on us eventually. We secured the two birds. Being my first lanner I was very happy to take the Tiercel and Ray would train the big bird. It was Saturday afternoon and we started the long way back to Melville. One old couple gave us a lift that evening for about 10 kilometers. Ray and I walked all that night and arrived in Melville midday Sunday (Sewendelaan was near my home)

Raymond touched the lives of falconers and naturalists where ever he went. It normally did not take long before you knew you were in a serious technical conversation with the old master painter.

Ray, your paintings on our walls will always remind us of your perfection.



Old mates (left to right): Jack Stühl, Ray Black, Paul Venter, Collin Williams, Tim Wagner

A LANNER CALLED GEOFF

Paul Venter

Geoff, a tiny Lanner Tiercel, was born in September 1995 in Nylstroom, Limpopo. Of the three eggs laid his was the only one that hatched. The parents Dusty and Arak were transferred to the Nylstroom breeding project and did not really have enough time to establish themselves in their new environment. The pair produced 28 chicks during the period 1990 to 1997. In one year Dusty laid two clutches of eggs and the pair raised three plus two chicks. The Tiercel Arak was very aggressive and was blessed with feet almost the size of that of a peregrine tiercel's feet. Geoff was named after my falconer friend in the UK, Geoffrey Pollard. I have some memorable hunting experiences with Geoffrey Pollard hunting grouse with falcons on his moor in Caithness, Scotland.

Raised by the parents, Geoff was now hard pennaed, on the glove and ready to go for the feathered stuff. Because he was a small Tiercel, Pierre and I started flying him at 380 grams. Pierre trained Geoff but he was hunted with by either of us depending on time availability. He showed early signs of a great flying. From cast off he would head directly into the wind and keep on pumping his wings until he was at a great height. Normally a circle would follow and then he was heading into the wind and going higher and higher. On his sixth flight Geoff went into the blue sky during an early midday hunt in Rustenberg with Kobus Bezuidenhout. We flushed sand grouse for him at this tremendous pitch and we witnessed a beautiful swoop at the quarry as these master flyers yet again outmaneuvered a deadly well aimed stoop. A few feathers drifting slowly in the wind told the sad story.

Geoff was used mainly for dove hawking. Here he absolutely proved his mettle and really gave us, on many an occasion, excellent quality flights and kills. A lanner will perform well when the conditions are good for the flight. Therefore timing is very important when hunting with the lanner. Midday and early afternoon, when it is hot with ample warm updrafts, is in favour of the lanner for a good performance. Wet weather and cold winds normally do not suit the lanner or flying very later afternoon.

A day hunting doves in Rustenberg will be in our memories for many years to come. Pierre and I saw doves in an acacia tree and we both got very excited as it was in very open country and it looked like easy quarry.

Pierre cast Geoff off and the doves stayed motionless in the tree whilst the Tiercel was heading into the wind and upwards away from them. We stood frozen with one eye on the doves and the other on the Tiercel. Eventually came the turn and Geoff was coming over at about four hundred feet high. At this stage breathing stops. Now...Now...yes...yes...HAAAAA..... And we ran forward to flush the doves. My goodness, the next moment Pierre and I fell into a ditch about four feet deep and overgrown with grass and bushes.

I was very disappointed as the doves were gone and we missed the flight. We laughed whilst assisting each other out of the old mine prospecting type of hole. Out with the assistant falconer and soon the welcome, nice bleep sound had Pierre in Geoff's direction. When we arrived there we both burst out laughing again because Geoff did not care about the world, he was sitting plucking his trophy. A memory that will have a very special place in my diary forever.

Continued overleaf...

Other outstanding kills worth mentioning were three doves taken head-on. Pierre had an experience where Geoff hit the dove so hard but he did not bind to it. The dove fell directly to earth and landed nearby. Geoff turned and landed on the dove with the dove's head still in one foot.

During the period 1996 to 2002 Geoff accounted for 874 doves and 6 young francolin.



MEWS VIEWS

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