

Peregrine Falcon Populations – Status And Perspectives In The 21st Century (Eds. J.Sielicki & T.Mizera) with preface by Prof. Ian Newton – available now

Peregrine Falcon Populations – Status And Perspectives In The 21st Century is the most up-to-date compendium on the status and conservation of Peregrine Falcons in Europe, with articles on other crucial areas in the world. This book is the biggest collection of papers related to Peregrine studies in Europe.

Professor Ian Newton, in a preface says: "This book represents another significant milestone in the history of Peregrine studies, adding to our knowledge of the species and its recovery... The current volume will prove of value to all Peregrine researchers, whether they are professional biologists, research students, or other enthusiasts, and a source of inspiration to others yet to come."

The book contains papers on Peregrine populations in Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Russia (European and Asiatic part), Ukraine, Belarus, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Austria, United Kingdom.

In addition to European presentations, it also includes papers from countries in other continents – United States, Australia, South Africa, Israel, Malaysia.

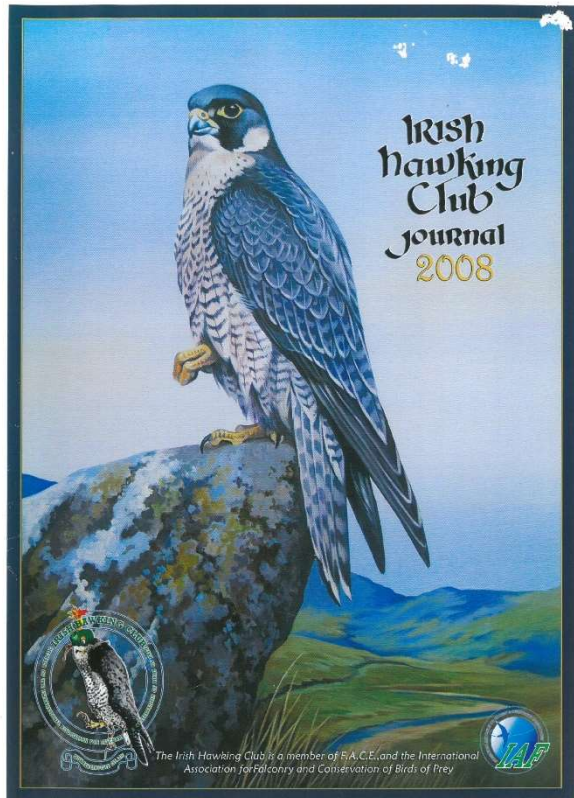
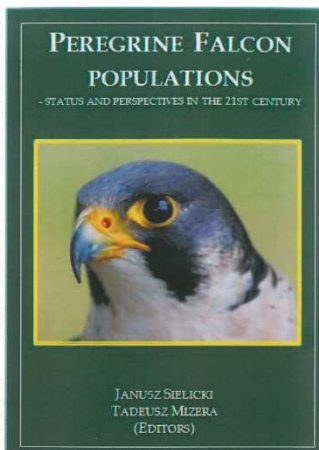
Furthermore, this book also includes papers on Saker Falcons, comparing the species with the Peregrine and studies from their central European strongholds – Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia.

The book is edited by Janusz Sielicki and Tadeusz Mizera, and is based on papers presented at the 2nd International Peregrine Conference Poland 2007, held from 19-23 September 2007 in Piotrowo near Poznań, Poland, organized by BirdLife Hungary, Raptor Protection of Slovakia, Milvus Group from Romania, Arbeitskreis Wanderfalkenschutz e.V. from Germany and "Falcon Society from Poland.

More information about the Conference and book are available at the webpage of European Peregrine Falcon Working Group www.falco peregrinus.eu

More information on the book – list of papers and preface by Prof. Ian Newton, book of Abstracts from the Conference and more – can be found at www.falco.strefa.pl Almost 60 papers, ca. 600 pages, almost 300 colour figures, hardcover with book-jacket.

The standard price is €59. To purchase, or for more information, contact us at falconline@peregrinus.pl



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IRISH HAWKING CLUB

POLICY AND OBJECTIVES STATEMENTS

The Irish Hawking Club is dedicated to the sport and practice of falconry and to the conservation and dissemination of knowledge of birds of prey. Membership is open to those who support or practice the pursuit of Falconry to the highest standards and traditions. Objectives of the Club are:

- To represent Falconry throughout Ireland and to foster International co-operation in order to maintain the sport, art and practice of taking quarry in its natural state.
- To preserve and encourage Falconry within the context of sustainable and judicious use of wildlife.
- To foster good relations and co-operation with all National hunting organisations with like objectives.
- To encourage conservation, the ecological and veterinary research of birds of prey and to promote, under scientific guidance, native propagation for Falconry and the rehabilitation of injured birds of prey.
- To monitor National laws in order to permit the pursuit and perpetuation of falconry.
- To require the observation of all laws and regulations relating to falconry, hunting, conservation and culture with regard to the taking, import, and keeping of birds of prey; the hunting of quarry species and the right of access to land.
- To promote and uphold a positive image of falconry with specialist organisations or statutory bodies which regulate or otherwise affect falconry.

Editorial

The 2008 Journal has been a true labour of love. After a bit of copying and pasting, not to mention some exciting networking sessions with foreign friends, this edition has taken shape as one of the better ones we've had, with a real international flavour. It's cute, I know, and provided that the momentum can be kept up, I promise to have the 2009 Journal out by the New Year.

That's the plan anyway, but it can only happen if contributions come from you. Reading through this issue, it is plain to see that inspiration takes so many shapes and colours when falconry is involved.

For Keith Barker and James Knight, it's the moulding of a young gos, and the discovery of things the books don't tell you. For fearless Terry Turkington, it's the simple bliss of a Saturday's hawking, or the reflection that what falconers strive for is beyond a headcount. For most of us, our old history of falconry can do the job. Before Digby and Ellis, there was a man called George Edward Lodge, who captured the imagination of falconry more than anyone since. We have been very kindy given images and articles by the GE Lodge Trust, something very special indeed. I have also compiled an overview of Ireland's falconry history ahead of the Festival of Falconry on July 11 and 12 (see www.falconryfestival.com). The IFC will be there, and anyone thinking of coming is urged to get in touch with the committee.

I must mention the sheer quality of some of the snaps that I have been lucky enough to get. I must at this point say a huge thank you to Christina Hauschildt, a professional photographer from Denmark, and her partner in crime Eva Nilschke for their superb article on Parahawking. Similarly, my article on Falconry in South Africa would be lacking without the gripping action shots of biologist, falconer and IAF delegate to Japan Kaiya Nakajima. As for Nicco Massimo's shot of the crowned eagle, well, I don't think I've ever felt so much for a hare in my life!

Hilary White
Editor

All copy and pictures to be sent to the editor at hywhite@gmail.com.

Material is subject to scrutiny by the committee.

All news items, notices, short stories, tall tales, pictures, ads, comments etc to be e-mailed at the above email address.

Members who are interested in helping in the production and distribution of the Newsletter and Journal please contact a committee member.

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enacted and culled in dirt and dried blood at his former farm last June. Seven dead birds of prey were found in Mr Lee's freezer.

Re-introduced Raptors Persecuted Again

JUST when they had begun make a serious splash in Ireland, a total of eight buzzards have been poisoned in north Dublin, Leath and Meath in the last couple months.

It was a depressing piece of news on top of the recent apprehension of a raptor in a field near Tigin, Co Wicklow, a Golden Eagle in Donegal by paraquat and more poisoned white-tailed sea eagles in Kerry earlier this year.

The true number of buzzards being poisoned may be far higher, as they often retreat to secluded spots to die, and may go unnoticed.

The preliminary findings of the BirdWatch Ireland's Atlas study 2007-2011 suggest there may now be as many as 300 breeding pairs of common buzzards in the Republic.

Hundreds of people have signed an online petition in support of the reintroduction of golden eagles, white-tailed eagles and red kites following growing concern the birds are being deliberately poisoned and targeted.

Kerry TD Jackie Healy-Rae said she does not believe the eagles had been targeted and called on farmers to report poisoned bait so the eagles could not get it.

Project manager Dr Alan Mee said it is now not certain if the project is viable. Seven of the 35 reintroduced birds from Norway have been poisoned. The poisons that are being used are banned in other EU countries. In the UK, it would be cause of illegal poisoning, he said.

Dr Mee said the purchase of poisons should be licensed, and that although it was more than likely 'not' set to kill foxes and crows, deliberate poisoning really can't be ruled out.

A review of the project is now required before any more birds are released. It is also likely that the Golden Eagle Trust will lodge an official complaint with the European Commission over the continuing use of these poisons.

The Dept of Environment has introduced legislation to ban the use of meat baits in bird control, but the Dept of Agriculture's Protection of Animals (Amendment) Act 1983 still provides for use of poison baits to control foxes. Oh, the little ironies of life...

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Cover Image

Falcon Resting by Richard Ward

Manipulated by Aaron Leavy

We are continually look for striking, memorable images of raptors for our covers. If you have any, please forward to the editor.

News and Updates

The Editorial always welcome pieces of info – sightings, lost hawks, conservation matters etc – from members.

Address by IHC President Eoghan Ryan

EARLIER in the year, I was asked would I be interested in standing for the post of President of the Irish Hawking Club. I felt that the club needed a new direction and a new impetus, and with this in mind I decided that I would go for it.

To those of you that don't know me, let me introduce myself. I served as Secretary of the Club from 1999 to 2005. Towards the latter half of 2006, I was asked by the last committee, if I would take on the new role of 'Department Liaison Officer' and made a submission on the Department of Agriculture's proposed new Annual Wildlife Act. I have been a falconer since 1997 when I first took a female sparrowhawk and then a male red tail hawk for about eight years. I have also hunted Bows, during various seasons at his bank, merlin and goshawk. I have also been engaged in a number of rehabilitations of wild raptors. At the present time I don't fly a bird, pre-emptively due to work, family and other personal commitments, but my passion and enthusiasm in falconry remains very strong.

I am fortunate in my timing of taking up my position, to follow on from what I think was perhaps one of the most successful AGMs we've had in a number of years, with some very interesting and excellent presentations from Dick Bartlett on Grouse Management, Jo Oliver on the Falconry Festival, and Hilary White on South African Falconry and Birds of Prey. I would like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow Committee members for their interest, dedication and commitment to the club, as well as outgoing president Liam O'Brien for his commitment. Also, Anne Leavy (who is not on the committee) continues to support the club very actively in his assistance on graphics for newsletters and journals and we are very fortunate to be able to avail so readily of his talents.

Looking to the future, my aims for club are as follows:

- To have a club that serves its members.
- To provide better and more regular communication to members.
- To protect falconry and ensure adequate representation for its members, particularly in relation to possible changes in legislation and the inappropriate enforcement of existing legislation.

To provide adequate opportunities for falconers to meet and integrate, through field meets, seminars, and other social events.

To respect the falconers of the island of Ireland and internationally level.

We have discussed a number of initiatives that we will be implementing to secure the above aims over the coming months. Some of these initiatives include updating our website, regular newsletters and email updates, club insurance, and a regional structure supported by local members. I have finally established – after numerous emails and telephone calls – a date for a meeting with the National Parks and Wildlife Service, to pursue a number of issues which were notified in the last newsletter. By the time you read this, this meeting will have taken place. Also, the club has been accepted by the South Regional Game Council as an affiliated club, which if we take up will provide us with insurance and compensation as part of the National Association of Regional Game Councils (NARGC). This means further investigations to ensure it offers the coverage that really suits our needs both individually and collectively and will have to be taken back to the membership for full ratification, but nonetheless is a positive step forward.

The first two months in this position has been quite busy. It was brought to my attention that there was a High Court appeal made by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, in connection with the young falconer in the midlands, who had a bird of prey taken from him by the local Wildlife Rangers a few years ago. The District Court judge found in his favour, but the Department have chosen to appeal it. Some aspects of this case concerned me and in my personal opinion warrant further investigation.

We have had two committee meetings to date. Last year, the IHC made a commitment to attend the International Falconry Festival in Thebes, outside Reading on July 11 and 12, 2008. The purpose of the Falconry Festival is to establish, through UNESCO, falconry as an intangible cultural heritage. This initiative, if successful, will provide protection to the art and practice of falconry internationally, which is critically important at a time when our society becomes increasingly urbanised and removed from traditional, natural and rural hunting activities. If you think that I may be overstating this, think again. In a few weeks time, we face local and European elections and, given the current economic state

of the country, national elections are just around the corner. As you aware that two of the political parties, Sinn Féin and the Green Party, have as part of their policy statements a commitment to ban blood sports in Ireland? If candidates come knocking on your door, make sure you voice your concerns and express the fact that falconry is the 'greenest' of all the hunting activities, with its most common forms based on 'pest' species such as crow and rabbit.

In supporting the Falconry Festival, I am acutely aware therefore of its role in the protection of falconry and the importance of the IHC giving its full support. I would like to thank the United Arab Emirates for generously and kindly sponsoring our return for the event. We, as a committee, have been working hard trying to tap into potential sponsorship from a variety of bodies and have managed to secure some funds from Tourism Ireland (UK), which is very much welcomed. We have word form a number of other bodies. The event seeks to showcase the richness of the tradition and heritage of falconry from an expected 45 countries worldwide, and in doing so individual countries are expected to showcase the best of their culture, food, drink, dance and music. We have secured a traditional Irish music group to come over and attend the event with us. There will be a reasonably good representation of IHC members expected at the event, and we look forward to seeing more of you over there.

In conclusion, I hope that through my direction and support from the committee, we will be able to establish a strong club that you as members are proud of and willing to support.

Harry Potter Falconer Jailed for Neglecting Birds

A 'HARRY Potter' whose birds were used in a Harry Potter film was jailed for 12 weeks after admitting keeping birds of prey in 'filthy, squalid, dirty conditions'.

Kenneth Lee, 56, of Bradford, West Yorkshire, in England pleaded guilty to 17 charges of neglect involving 51 birds and 11 chickens.

He was sentenced at Wakefield Magistrates' Court after the RSPCA found owls, falcons, hawks, buzzards and chickens, trapped,

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Fieldmeat Report I'm A Falconer... Get Me Out Of Here!

Tory Island, October 17/18 Mick Docherty

With Innisbushla off the question for our annual island meet we decided to see if Tory Island would be suitable. Calls were made and arrangements laid. I picked up Bren Higgins up and made the five-hour drive towards Maghera pier in Co Donegal to get the Tory Island ferry at 4pm on the Friday.

We arrived and met! Jim Auld and Noel Fitzpatrick at the pier. Terry Turkington, Paul Lamb, Sean Woods, Malcolm Edgar and a new member Anthony Robb had taken the morning ferry and were hunting when we arrived. We got settled into 'Beach 811', welcomed by the owner Deirdre and her kids. Bren and I got hoisted out and headed to the hunting ground.

With a 'crazy mile faller', we were greeted half way there by the King of Tory, Patsy Dan Rogers in his red Opel Corsa with personalised reg plate 'KING OF TORI' and a dent on every panel. This really set the tone for a good weekend. A real character.

Getting close to the ground, we could see the rabbitily running around. It was very windy on the island with no shelter. Ruby, my Harris hawk, was very unsteady on the fall (the long drive and very crummy boat had unsettled her). We hooked up with Terry and the crew, who were having a ball, getting some good clips but only having caught a few. There was some good sport being had anyway. Back to the hotel when it started getting dark when a bird couple said I could have the use of their tractor shed for the weekend to house Ruby. I got her settled in for the night. We all had dinner in the Café, got changed and headed for the social club for a drink. We arrived there at 8.30 to find it closed. Sean was sent to the Kings house to find out if it was going to open. Then Terry taught me command Slobban on her way to open up. 'People don't come out here for a drink till

11.30pm!' she said. It should have been known, with my father being a Donegal man. With plenty of drink taken and a lot of games of pool, it was back to bed to look forward to tomorrow's running.

When Saturday morning came, we were heading our way and would be back for a day or two. Noel took the safe open and left on the morning ferry as he didn't feel well. 'Oh no!' I thought. We all took the other option of staying on and hunting away. By Saturday night the weather was getting worse when we were last informed 'there would not be a ferry on Sunday and it would be Monday before we were going to get off.'

The social club was getting very familiar at this stage and the pool players getting better by the day (no names, you know who you are). Monday came with no boat. Everyone was taking the news well, but me - I was getting worried that my smoke and drink money was low at this stage when Bren said there was a

boat on the way and we were going to get off. I joined Terry as he was telling a joke to the priest, who said: 'I can't see that one in my sermon!'

post office here. We could organise some cash. When we found the post office, it was in a lady's front room. We went in and Bren asked this very small old lady about taking money out. 'Noooo' she said. 'We don't have a computer here.' Well I brought my salt's back no end with Bren's local expression. Monday evening I decided no more Café for me. I took over the cooker to make a large pot of rabbit stew (more like a Dublin Coddie). I went down well with everybody, plenty of compliments and seconds had all round. Young Bren and Anthony were very sceptical at first (you know the chicken nuggets and chips type) but I told them the same as I do my kids - don't discount till you taste. Well, their mothers would have been proud of me; the two boys got stuck in and liked it.

Monday night, Patsy Dan called in to see how we were doing. The craic started when Patsy began telling jokes (very long jokes). Then our very own comic Terry Turkington started and wiped the floor with the King. Then Malcolm informed the King that he could employ Terry as his court jester, which got a big laugh from everyone. Tuesday came and went with no ferry,

and any break in the weather saw us running to the hunting ground. We were having difficulty baiting enough rabbits so nearly all quarry taken had day was letting the hawk on the wing and catching what was out in the open, with some good chases had.

I got back to the cooker with a few rabbits and started a new stew (coddie), before (like Anthony informed me) he didn't feel well. 'Oh no!' I thought. 'I hope didn't poison him.' With nobody else sick and Paul (Lamb) looking after him like a good granddad and clearing the sick, I came to the conclusion he was 'home sick'. Needless to say, he wasn't having rabbit that night.

While the stew was cooking, a few topics were brought up, one being the use of perches in traveling boxes. Terry reckons our birds travel better without them, believing there is less movement. Everybody else thought otherwise. If you have an opinion on this issue, we would love to hear about it. Maybe pen something for Hilary White to publish in the newsletter.

With everybody going to bed, myself Paul Lamb and Bren Higgins headed to the local for what was hopefully the last time as a break in the weather was expected on Wednesday.

We were cleaning and packing up on Wednesday morning when I called to find out: was the ferry on its way. The left Burbeg at 9.30am I was told. Happy Days. We got everything to the pier and watched for the boat. There it was, bobbing and dipping like a toy in the bath. This was going to be an unpleasant trip for me by the looks on their faces.

Terry was further up the pier talking to the local priest who came down to bless the boat; the faces were getting worse when they heard this (joined Terry as he was telling a joke to the priest, who said: 'I can't see that one in my sermon.' I can imagine which joke it was).

So, a great time had by all, with some good hunts had along the way. Next time I will have plenty of cash with me as there's only one place to use plastic, the hotel, which closes off season. Thanks to all for a great time and brilliant company. See you there next year.

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New Member Applications

If anyone has any objection to the application for membership by the following, they must contact the committee ASAP.

Karl Graef
Cappanmore
Meelick
Co Clare

Neil Ross
Has Secretary
Irish Hawking Club
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I thank the Irish Hawking Club Committee and Members most sincerely for inviting myself and my wife Gertrude as your guests of honour to the A.G.M. Dinner. Gertrude unfortunately was in Rome with our daughter and unable to attend. Thanks for all the kind, and some rude, remarks passed about me, many exaggerated I am sure!

I am so glad that I had the opportunity to go hawking with so many interesting people over so many years, not to mention hawks and dogs, and to have had such fun and excitement with the Spars and Merlins and indeed Kestrels. I so enjoyed the many meets we had here and in the North, all the game fairs and the meets in U.K. and Czech Republic where my legs began to fail me. I owe a debt of gratitude to all the young people who so willingly helped me with the hawking and with the breeding. It is great to see so many of them still involved.

Thank you for the very elegant Award for which I have found a special place in our home. It is greatly admired and treasured by the entire family. Members are welcome to visit and see it any time they are in the vicinity. Gertrude thanks you for her most generous gift and is very sad that she could not make the meeting. Her trip was booked as a present for her 80th Birthday in November. He should like to take this opportunity to thank all of you for your sympathy and support at the time of our son Bryan's illness and untimely death.

With Best Wishes for the Club's continued success.

Rowland and Gertrude Eustace

ADVERTISING

Any members wishing to place an advertisement in the Newsletter or Journal contact Secretary Neil Ross

on
0775 2758672
or neilross10@hotmail.com

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Blackrock,
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arfe@eircom.net

26/03/2009



After two trains and one bus, we finally arrived in Pohočno. I travelled with my friend Kevin Malton, and was to meet Terry Turkington and Andy Lora when we got there. When we arrived, we met the English correspondent for the Czech falconry club, Hannah Walker, who registered us and gave us a lot of info and help for the meet.

Due to the fact we arrived late afternoon, we missed the start of the balloon lifts. As we headed to our room to put away our belongings, we kindly got offered a lift to the first by a kind Englishman called Steve. Unfortunately, after spending an hour trying to find the field, we arrived as the last Falcon was coming down. So it was back in the car and back to town.

Back in town, we took a little walk about to see all these wags. We visited the park, where we saw possibly more than 50 birds perched up in the lawn. All kinds were there, from the tiny Sparrowhawk to the massive Golden Eagle. After that, we experienced the fine cuisine and beer of the Czech Republic in a lovely little spot called Restaurant U Slunce. Terry and Andy and his father Lesley then met up with us and we discussed what our plans were for the meet. After hearing so much about the event for the past few years and after speaking to some of the guys there, I felt like a kid on the night before Christmas.

Thursday came, and with it, the opening ceremony. What a sight to behold: dozens of falconers from all over Europe lined up to be greeted by the sound of horns. A few hundred gathered for the ceremony, even the local school kids got out to see it. After the ceremony everybody left to gather with their hunting groups.

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Fieldmeet Report 'MOTHER GOOSE CALLING...'

Rosilea, Co Fermagh
Paul Larmor, Antrim

The 2008 Roslea meet was held on Saturday 27th September. Thirty rabbits were flushed from burrows with two ternets working overtime.

Four were caught on the first day, all producing short flights which made for a good day's sport. Thick ground cover, combined with a couple of juvenile hawks made for short active pursuits.

Greg Maton's 14-week-old Goshawk was well behaved, and this meet was a good opportunity to acclimatise it to the hunting environment.

William Demasse's Harris Hawk caught the first rabbit, followed by Jim Auld's bird.

Field master Terry Turkington managed the field well. We split up into two groups after lunch to cover more ground. Terry took three rabbits the following day. Special thanks to Jim Nelson and his wife for the use of their land and their hospitality.

Hunter v Mother Nature

Terry Turkington, Co Antrim

In the 90s, when we had hot summers and frosty winters, my problem was hard ground. I was hunting lurchers at rabbit, hare and fox. The dogs that we were generally using seemed to pick up injuries mainly to their feet so I found I had long breaks to let the dog recover during the hunting season and the racing season, and at the game fairs in Summer. There was no answer to my problem, or was there?

After a lot of heartache, I had a brainwave and found the Irish Hawking Club. Hawks hunt rabbit and hare like dogs, but they also hunt birds such as pheasant, duck, crow etc, so I had a wider range of prey. But the main thing was the weather factor. The hard ground wasn't a problem any more as the hawks weren't running on it - they were flying or in a tree. I didn't have to give up my night-time rabbit hunting as the Harris hawk is well suited to lamping - they don't catch as much as a good lurcher but the achievement factor is better.

The same applies to ferreling - you don't catch as much as a good dog. As you have to reward the bird for each kill, she is normally full after half a dozen or so. But I am well pleased by then. A dog could double or triple that but a good spurt but the achievement factor is better with the bird.

One other advantage of hawking is permission. Some farmers say 'no' to dogs and 'no' to guns. The hawk is ok. It

Fieldmeet Report Pohočno 2008

Pohočno, Czech Republic, October 8-12
Sean Woods, Antrim

Terry, Andy and Lesley decided to go with one of the falcon groups, while Kevin and myself went with the mixed group on the coach. It was quite strange sitting on a coach beside an eagle! After the 45-minute journey we arrived at the field.

Our group consisted of four Goshawks, a Harris and six Eagles. We entered the field and our first slip was on a rose deer. It was a lovely long slip, but the Eagle missed off at the last moment! Later discovered this was to be the norm with the Eagles and deer. The next few slips were on hare with both Goshawks and Eagles. These resulted in some amazing flights, with the hares using every tactic they had to avoid the birds. At one stage, one hare must have jumped four or five feet to avoid an Eagle!

Soon, the gamekeeper was on the wacky telly, and within no time a car arrived in the field blasting horn sounds from the radio and a boot full of beer! After a drink, we got on the coach again and travelled to another spot. As before, we had some excellent flights of hare. We went on to catch another few and then the gamekeeper blew the horn to call an end to the day's hunting. We then took a short walk to a lovely little log cabin where we spent the rest of the afternoon having a few drinks and some tasty mixed game goodness.

The following day, Kevin, Steve and I who met on the first day, and myself went to see the Falcons fly. While Terry, Andy and Lesley went with one of the Eagle groups. The morning was a bit of a disaster with not one single point. But in the afternoon we joined with the other Falcon group. Once joined with the other group, we

started to get point after point. These resulted with us getting to see some spectacular flights. One Falcon in particular, a 7/8 Coy 1/8 Saker HT a cock bird with such force on the closing it appeared as if it had been shot. We moved again to another spot where we saw another couple of flights. Due to the amount of hares on the ground, we had a lot of wasted mounts. It really was nice to see the whole set up, dog on point, falcon mounts, and then the falconer getting the dog to break just at the right moment.

Considering the slow morning we had, we actually ended up with a very respectable 16 pheasants for the day. Later, at the end of day closing ceremony we saw that their had been two deer caught also that day. Terry and Andy were lucky enough to witness one being caught.

Saturday came, and unfortunately this meant the last day of the meet. After the morning ceremony, there was a small display put together for the crowd, and after this we went to gather with our hunting parties. Terry, Kevin, Steve, Andy and Lesley went with the Falcons and I got offered a lift by a Dutch guy called Harry to see the Goshawk group. Something I was really looking forward to seeing after the disappointing flights in the mixed group on the first day. Off we went in the car, and unfortunately we followed the wrong car and fell in with an Eagle group!

If I took a good hour to get to the hunting grounds, Harry, our driver, lost an arm when he was younger, and he still drives a motor car. At one stage he was chaffing on the phone, and trying to drive with his knees. As you can guess, it felt a lot longer than an hour.

One of the concerns brought up was the change in frequencies on which we came into effect next year. This caused some amusement. The redundant signal is going to be shortly decommissioned by a mobile network, since a discussion avoided into some light hearted debate on whether your receiver would pick up your daughter's mobile conversation, or at a flick of a switch, all house and car alarms would be activated simultaneously. Alternative uses for adaptation included an improvised metal detector or a Geiger counter in the event of the unthinkable.

And the good news is that despite two full days hunting, no telemetry was needed, hence your daughter's intimate dialogue with her boyfriend is safe. No alarms were activated and that funny looking cloud in the distance, turns out not to be mushroom-shaped after all.

went effect sheep or cows, although free range chickens can be a problem and are best avoided (even if a fiver starts it out!). Another option would be the shotgun - you can shoot ground game and birds (not all birds as most have a season). If you are any good, you can get large bags which are hard to carry. Rabbits are easy sport and it's effective pest control with a gun, but hare, god forbid, are so large and only come away without a dog chasing. They should be left alone. I can't see any sport in killing hares with a gun. I don't fly it with my hawks, although I like to see a good course with a single dog with this hare usually escaping. That's sport. The difference between gun and hawk is if I bopped ten rabbits and missed nine of them with the gun. It was a bad day for me. If I do the same with my hawk, I had ten good flights and a kill - that's not so bad as I had the pleasure of watching the flights.

So we have sorted out the hunting problem. Or have we? We are now well past the hot and dry 90s. It's now cold and windy 00s! The wind can work both ways - it can help birds gain height, but for rabbit hawking the wind prevents rabbits bolting and makes it a lot harder for the bird to catch the ones that do. The rain slows or even stops the bird flying. It gets a heavy sodding. So do we go back to the dogs who like the wind for stalking their prey and the rain for softening the ground, or do we wait for man to create a universal creature that can handle mother nature's ways of protecting her creatures? She is a more than worthy adversary, and long may she provide us with food and sport. Remember, conservation is essential in all hunting sports. I think I will stick with falconry - it's more sport with less killing.



and is a sure way to wake you up in the morning after a long night on the Czech beer! He was telling me all about the Goshawk he flies back home, and how he has trained it to do dead with his problem. Also in the car with us was David Jones, a very friendly chap who some of you may remember from a talk he did at the club's AGM a few years ago.

Before we hit the field everyone had some lunch and then off we went. Our group consisted of five Golden Eagles and a Barnswell's Eagle. We formed a beeping line and off we went. We got to see a few hare flights. The Barnswell's put in a brilliant flight at a hare running up hill, a lot faster and agile than any Eagle I had seen fly that week. Unfortunately, due to it catching, we didn't get to see any more slips with that bird.

Later on in the afternoon we put up a deer. Nobody knew who's slip it was, so mistakenly two golden eagles were slipped at the same time. The deer missed its way slightly uphill then turned and started to approach some cover to its left. One of the Eagles hit it just before it got in. The other Eagle came in also, but thankfully jumped off again. An eagle taking a deer - that's not something you see every day.

At this stage, it was still early in the afternoon, so we left the falconer and Eagle with their prize and continued on. The hares we were putting up were all flushed uphill. The Eagles have to get to see and do it again next year.

www.sakobichiv.net

Fun With A Fat Finnish Female

James Knight, Co Mayo

How do I summarise my first season with an imprint female Finnish Goshawk? How do I capture the exhilarating, nearly 300 heartbeats, the exhilaration of watching her thermal during short periods of track, the satisfaction of her successes in the field, the frustration of tracking her only to watch her move on at my approach? I have no idea. There is too much to say, so much detail, too many lessons learnt, so many old assumptions left drifting in the wind like feathers plucked from her prey. All I can do is try and give you a taste, a small belting.

First off, there was nothing conventional about any of it. I imprinted her with the same basic idea that I applied to my now six-year-old male. She was hand-fed from the time I collected her at approximately 12 days old. No 24 hr food availability, no lure, no latching her to her food - nothing clever whatsoever. Just hand-fed, face-to-face, back to nose. How was going to avoid all the noise, aggression and bad trails of this type of imprint? Simple, I wouldn't bring her weight down. Well, at the start anyway. The whole process was fluid, we changed it as we went along and what a journey. Here are half a dozen memories and now I will stick to tradition and just write about the good bits!

Before hunting proper she loved to play. I could go into her chamber, offer up my glove onto which she would stowly and deliberately step. Then with my right hand I would throw a tennis ball to bounce off the floor about six feet away. She would sniff at the

At the end of the day's hunting, we attended the closing ceremony of Pohočno 2008. Then it was off for a wash and a bite to eat before the hunt ball, which happens at the last night of each event. The ball was held at hotel Holub, not far from the town square and within walking distance of the castle. The organisers had got a show band in for the night, but the real entertainment for the night was watching these guys dance! At one stage, an English guy asked if one of the guys dancing had one of those electric dog collars on, the way he was jumping around. It was a long night, and a lot of us didn't get to bed until about 7am.

No surprise, we missed the 8 o'clock train the following morning and had to make a rush to catch the only other train of 10. Thankfully, Andy was able to give us a lift to the station and we made it on time. Poor Kevin wasn't looking his best, spending the whole trip home, be it train, bus or plane, with a plastic bag on his knee. We were later to discover it wasn't just a nose hangover, but alcohol poisoning. Luckily it happened on the last night and not the first! Thankfully, he's well recovered now.

It was an amazing trip. I got to see styles of hawking, and types of birds I've never seen before. The food was lovely, the drink was lovely and, most importantly, the Czech people were absolutely lovely. I was sad to leave the place, but I'm sure we'll be back to see and do it all again next year.

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got her interest back to the rabbit. It's difficult, she is not hungry. Food is not a reward when you are not hungry. I didn't have the courage to take it off and throw it about for a game like I often did with her tennis ball, but finally, I get her to eat. Walking back, feeding off a rabbit hind leg, she seems to chase another one. She wanted to leave her food for another chase.

It's early morning and I am driving to work. I have a rather fluffy, relaxed Goshawk on the glove showing little interest in who's ground until we see a few tracks - then, she shows a modicum of interest. Finally, we come to a really easy one and I can't resist it, so out the glove - it was the decision. She catches it. It's a good moment, not because of the flight - it's awful - but because she's an imprint. She's killed, not bagged game, but wild. Because it's now I want to manage her, good flights are not my priority now - her temperament and personality for the next 20 years. It's a good moment too because I can go on to walk without trying to retrieve her - that's a huge relief. I jump over the wall, approach her, dispatch the rook, pick her up on her kill, walk back with her, get over the wall and put her in the van. No aggression, no noise - a sweet treat.

An hour later and she has had all that time on her kill, feathers are everywhere, but she has eaten her fill and has jumped up onto her travelling crate looking out of the window. We go through town and she starts showing real interest in rooks and jacksnaws along the road, more interest than before her kill and meal. I have to stop and box her up, to stop her trying to get out of the window, but my mind is



Out In Africa

Hilary White, Dublin

Photos kindly provided by Keiya Nakjima and Nicco Masimo

I was when we came to a third gateway that James and I began to worry. Our SatNav was now in a state of utter dementia, leading us along a network of seemingly identical dirt roads. As I opened and closed this final agricultural gate, I wondered to myself if this was what they meant by 'deepest, darkest Africa'.

We had been driving for some nine hours at this stage. My neck was sore from craning to identify roadside roads, and my partner in crime was scrambling in the dashboard for a stray 43rd cigarette. We had spent the previous evening in Grahamstown, in the company of Alan Stephenson, one of the South Africa's falconry silverbacks. A biologist, and one man raptor university, he had directed us to a heavenly corner of the Eastern Cape to watch wild Lanner falcons imitate Andrew Ellis paintings and

observe a regrettably derelict, but impressively huge, Crowned Eagle nest, the perfect man to provide a background to this land of huge horizons, abundant game and a fascinating range of niche-filling birds of prey.

Finally, we slumped into the Black Mountain Hotel in the wee hours, wishing a slow painful death to our GPS 'navigator'.

W elcome to Africa', grinned Dr Adrian Lombard the next morning, handing me a bottle of Edmund Oettle's organic wine and a bag of bilongo (shreds of addictive dried meal). Adrian seemed to be everywhere and nowhere throughout the week, naming the arrangements of SAFA's International Fieldtrip, co-ordinating the movements of foreign guests like ourselves and generally being on call

around the clock. A bushman's holiday for a GP like himself.

Speaking of doctors, falconry practice in South Africa is in rude health. Thanks to the efforts of Adrian and his contemporaries, particularly the late great Ron Hartley, falcons enter into the sport through an apprenticeship scheme which maintains enviable standards, before going on to reap the benefits of both wild take and widespread captive breeding. There's also the small matter of the environment.

Where we hawked over the course of the week was, apart from the miles of barbed wire, a paradise. The highveld grassland was wide open, with few trees, duck ponds and a mat of stub-high golden meadow. Longwings from the damper, more enclosed Western Cape rubbed



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A Friend In The Air

Words by Eva Nitschke, Denmark
Photos by Christina Hauschildt, Denmark

Scott Mason is a pioneer. As a falconer he is the only one in the world to fly with his birds of prey. Parashooting is the name of the unusual combination of the popular sport of paragliding and the traditional art of falconry. What started as an experiment has now developed into a new sport and a commercial success where everyone can get to experience parashooting for themselves.

Free as a bird, is an expression we often use when longingly looking towards the sky. To be all the way up there, high in the sky, light as a feather, circling with a great view, ready to dive down to where ever you may wish, closely encapsulate our ideas about freedom. The dream of all dreams - to fly.

How many hunters and falconers have not, through the ages, stood craning their necks to better observe the fascinating play of the birds of prey high up in the sky? Everyone longing to fly alongside the rules of the sky, matching their artful manoeuvres.

The 37 year old British falconer Scott Mason has made that dream come true. He has successfully trained both black kites and vultures to follow him and land on his gloved hand while he flies his paraglider. What started out as an idea and an experiment has developed into the new sport of parashooting.

A later meeting

Scott Mason had, eight years ago started travelling around the world, when his interest for birds of

prey lead him to Nepal as one of the first steps on his travels. The small Asian country with over 840 species of birds, 80 of them birds of prey, was like heaven for a passionate falconer. In the city of Pokhara down by Lake Phewa, with a view to the Annapurna mountains, he met Englishman and paraglider Adam Hill, who had started the country's first paragliding company offering courses in paragliding as well as tandem flights.

'Adam could teach me to fly a paraglider and I could introduce him to the art of training birds of prey. Together we wanted to fly with the birds in order to gain the abilities to find thermals, something both paragliders and birds of prey have a need for,' explains Scott Mason as he turns his eye towards the cloudless Nepali sky, where a dozen paragliders, displaying all the colours of the rainbow, glide majestically out over lake Phewa to prepare for a landing at Maya Devi.

It is the place to hang out as a paraglider in Nepal. People from all around the world come for the experience of being one with the sky in the company of the snow-capped Himalayan mountain tops and the view out over Lake Phewa. This is where Scott Mason lives with his girlfriend Anita. Adam Hill with his family and a third partner: Graham Saunders Griffiths.

70-80 paragliders can land at Maya Devi every day, where Scott Mason runs the Himalayan Raptor Rescue Centre, a small rescue centre for birds of prey. Birds arrive here either because they have fallen out of the nest or been injured. With Scott Mason they are being cared for and looked after as well as humanly possible with the

view to release them back into the wild.

The Birds come to me

Scott is a falconer with firm principles and a great respect for nature. 'The birds come to me,' he grins, while we are making our way over to the aviaries. About 10 birds a year arrive at the Himalayan Raptor Rescue Centre, most of them for a brief period only.

'People come with birds they have found. We look after them and if they recover fully we release them back into the wild. In some cases where they have been too injured, I will start training them for parashooting,' explains the falconer, before adding: 'In the wild, they would not be able to survive, while here they are being looked after and flown every day.'

He glances fondly at Kevin, the three year old Egyptian Vulture. He has a great personality and is everyone's favourite. He trustingly jumps up on his gloved fist, knowing that he is to be weighed and then it is off to the hill to get some or under his wings.

'We got him when he was very small, as he had fallen out of the nest. We had to keep him as he became imprinted on humans,' explains Scott, one of the very few falconers in the world to train vultures. According to him, vultures are intelligent, social and curious, and that is a good starting point. It is also the only bird to make use of tools. As an example the Egyptian Vultures in Africa use a stone when they want to make a whole in large ostrich eggs.

hands excitedly on such land, and since their dogs had got used to the drier scents, their hawks reaped the abundance of game.

Take Edmund Oettle. He told the winemaker led his Gyr/Peregrine through a week of dazzling duck strikes, providing us with as many heady flights as he did bottles of cabernet sauvignon. The first time I saw this bird fly, he unexpectedly took

glitch on a telegraph pole. 'Something's up', murmured Edmund. A minute later, two Secretary Birds excused themselves from a nearby field, of which point the hybrid took off, mounted up and didn't mess around in doing so. He shimmered up and up, through the late afternoon haze, and came overhead. Before he was exactly above us, the order was given to flush, at which much roaring and cursing ensued. One spectator cried 'it's too early!' 'No, it's perfect', replied the winemaker. The ducks swept off the pond, into the field before returning towards their haven in a tight arc, at which point the hybrid plummeted down, tearing through the game and bringing the flight straight towards the spectators. It was something else.

And so it went that longwing men like Edmund, Trevor Oettle and Alan Harvey prospered that week, not only with duck but with francolin and partridge too. It was also hugely satisfying to see the Lanner falcon doing what it was put on earth to do - hunt. It's unfortunate these fine, dextrous raptors

one spectator cried 'it's too early!'



'no, it's perfect' replied the winemaker.

are confined to display work in northern Europe, and thanks are due to Zayin Vermaak for showing us that, armed with brains and a wide tail, they can be very deadly indeed.

Part of the intrigue of falconry in Africa is the exotic species of hand to flight. Most people would consider night hawking with Africa's most ferocious eagle off the back of a speeding van a little unwise, but professional snakehandler Bryan Vorster is not like you and me. His male Crowned Eagle was a monstrous jumbo of flamboyance, muscle and sharp bills, and its manner was a testament to his handling skills. This form of hawking has its chaotic moments, but seeing the bird use its acrobatic single-mindedness was sobering. Unfortunately, Bryan was less successful in his attempts to cue NAFA's Shawn Hayes of his pathological fear of snakes during his after-dinner performance.

Belle of the ball for me however was Tunjara. I had wanted to see a Black Spar off the bat for many years, imagine a giant European sparrow,

proportions and that long bird-swooping middle toe kept in fact, but black on top, with white underparts, and finished off with eyes of claret red and the brain of a gnat. Tunjara was a calmly imposing presence on the busy water in the field, she was a guided missile, exploding from the glove of her owner, Hank Cholman, and mopping up game in her wake.

It is interesting times for the IAF, those present at this 39th AGM heard how the organisation has applied to be officially recognised as an international NGO. Of the 49 member nations, 30 were represented, all giving presentations in relation to the drive to have falconry recognised by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage. At present, the UAE, Belgium and France have made submissions. If they're successful, the implications for the protection of falconry worldwide are great. As well as this, it has been revealed that China has somewhere in the region of 20 to 40,000 falconers, and it's the IAF's hope to incorporate them and further strengthen this most important institution.

Of course, I'm only touching on the events of that magnificent week. To do it justice, a small volume would be needed. SAFA and its people are due a great deal of thanks for the freeness, hospitality and sport they provided. A hard act to follow. salfalconry.org.za

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'Here I don't have big ostrich eggs but I gave Kevin a chicken egg. He had never had an egg before. First he tried to open it with his claws. Then he took the egg in his beak and dropped it against a rock. He undertook a whole thought process to perform that action. Scott grins while he weighs a content Kevin, who knows that it is time to stretch his wings.

'Some birds of prey are always weighed before they are flown. The relationship between bird and falconer is mostly about the food. They can't be too fed up before they fly.

Under Kevin and Scott's wings

The large paragliders are being packed and hoisted up on the roof of the red Jeep. Enough talk, now there will be some action - or rather flying. The thought is heart-stopping, but not none the less. We dive in silence. We are on our way to Sarangkot. The paragliders favourite take off.

While Scott prepares the large paraglider, Kevin sits on my gloved

hand looking curiously around him. He is a rare gentleman amongst birds of prey, and takes it in his stride that he is sitting on the hand of a virtual amateur. Finally Kevin is let off. He flies out past the hill, circles back and is away. In the meantime the tandem harness is attached to Scott's harness and we are ready. As ready as one can be of the prospect of running off into thin air, knowing that it is 1600m down to terra firma. Out over the edge, and then we are in the air. It is an incredible feeling. Light as a feather, Scott steers towards thermals that can give us a lift. It is surprisingly silent with the most incredible view. Free as a bird, one can understand our longing. Scott blows his whistle as a signal to Kevin. In my gloved hand I have a piece of raw meat and I hold my hand out to the left, but many seconds pass before he is there. He lands on my hand and eagerly eats the raw piece of meat before he is off again and flies in front of the paraglider. We are soaring in silence. Kevin comes back repeatedly when he is whistled for and he knows that there is a fresh piece of meat in the glove. Suddenly he is gone. He does not react to the whistle. Scott is a bit

worried, as he has just seen two Steppe eagles circling.

'I fly with my birds in extreme conditions. It takes so little to lose one. The wild eagles can attack. It has happened, but luckily Kevin is great, as he knows his strengths and will out-climb them, when he is higher than them he is safe,' he says while we fly out over the lake and lose height. He whistles again and suddenly we can see the Egyptian Vulture out on the horizon. He lands on the gloved hand again and this time remains sitting for longer. When I ask Scott if Kevin is tired, he grins and says: 'No - he is just cozy. He uses more energy here over the lake when he flies, that is why he remains sitting for longer. For the birds it is all about conserving energy.'

And he is gone. We slowly circle closer and closer to land. We land and feel again under our feet again. It has been fantastic. On the ground a Scott's girlfriend. With a whistle, she calls Kevin back to earth. Only a few minutes later the Egyptian Vulture lands and walks around, majestically begging for applause for having done it again. He



together we wanted to fly with the birds in order to garner their abilities to find thermals, something both paragliders and birds of prey have a need for

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suddenly he is gone. Scott is a bit worried - he's just seen two Steppe eagles circling

keenly takes the rest of the meal and trustingly jumps up on Scott's gloved hand to get back to his aviary.

The daily training

In the afternoon and the fresh air in the aviary, which is 800m above sea level, it getting colder. It is time to train the birds who have not learnt to fly with the paraglider.

Scott works over to a black kite that is practically skipping with impatience. Sazona is the name of the female bird. The name means 'sorrow' in Nepali but according to Scott the bird is a true nightingale. 'An aggressive bird, that doesn't like anything or anyone, she also bites. But she loves to fly - and that is the only thing she likes', gins Scott on his way over to the bird, that eight years ago was patently responsible for him taking the decision of letting go of his job as a designer in London for a future with Nepal's birds of prey in the Himalayas. 'She is the oldest of our birds and has been here from the beginning' tells the passionate falconer. He adds that the likes can be a little hard to motivate as they do not need much food. They use very little energy. But they are naturally very sociable birds. While he trains Sazona, a wild kite comes flying in very low and sits on a pole nearby and looks on the proceedings with curiosity.

'It's Dave. I found him half dead on the road and looked after him for a year. Then I released him back into the wild, but he comes back every day. Sometimes he takes a bath and flies away again, other times he stays for a while longer. He has a particular dislike for

one of our kites.' Scott chirps on his way back to the aviaries, where another kite is waiting. A lovely bird, that arrived only a few months ago with a damaged wing, I am expecting her to be ready to fly with the gliders soon' explains Scott, while the bird jumps up on his hand.

'It is possible to train a fully grown wild bird of prey. It sounds incredible but they are so governed by their instincts, they will respond if there is food. Not all birds are survivors: the mortality rate of birds of prey in the wild is very high. The rescue birds are often those that would not have survived in the wild.'

The ones we see in the sky - they are the real survivors', states Scott, before looking yet again longingly towards the Nepal sky, where the two Steppe eagles from earlier circle majestically in the cool-true blue.

Free as a bird - kings of the sky.

Fact 1:

Parahawking is the art of training birds of prey to fly with paragliders. Scott Mason started Parahawking in Pokhara in Nepal back in 2001 together with his two friends Adam Hill and Graham Saunders Griffiths. By combining paragliding with the ancient art of falconry the birds of prey are trained to fly with paragliders, lead them to thermals and even perform acrobatic manoeuvres.

Eagles, kites and vultures are natural soaring birds. Just like paragliders, they use thermals to fly long distances and conserve energy. The birds lead the paragliders to thermals and are re-

warded with food for their efforts. The birds and the paragliders become flying companions.

Fact 2:

Bird of prey conservation

Nepal has no tradition of falconry, so when Scott and Adam started training two young kites that had fallen out of their nest eight years ago, the locals were incredulous. To win the birds they took them for walks on their gloved hands.

'In England, people will stare at you if you come walking with a bird of prey on your hand. Here in Nepal they literally dive off the roof.' Scott laughs, he does an impressive amount of work to protect Asia's vultures.

The vultures, who are carrion eaters, are in a bad way. Millions of Asian vultures die because of the drug Diclofenac that is given to sick and dying cattle to treat pain and inflammation. When the vultures eat dead cattle that have been treated with diclofenac only small amounts are enough to cause renal failure in the birds resulting in their deaths. Their decrease in numbers is catastrophic. In the past 12 years, three species of vultures have decreased by 99.8%. If nothing is done to save them they will be extinct in 10 years.



The Black Sparrowhawk - An African Icon

Dr Adrian Lombard, Capetown, South Africa

Introduction

I stand with a group of three other falconers on open fields on the northern edge of Cape Town's suburban sprawl. It is an early summer morning and we are here to track a passage Lanner falcon. Each summer there is an influx of passage Lanners to this area and they roost on the electricity pylons that snake across the landscape. One of the group calls out 'Look there!' pointing to the East. We look and from the glowing sky, before the birds we see a kites dove flying as if the hounds of hell are on its tail. And indeed they are, for behind the dove, like a heat-seeking missile is fixed a black sparrowhawk. The hawk is in a deep manoeuvre, its wings tucked and its tail feathers fanned. It is pursuing its quarry, twisting and turning across the sky. The dove's nerve breaks and it flies towards a grove of trees: the hawk does, then the dove dives towards the ground and the hawk becomes one. We remember to start breathing again. One of the group mutters 'What is that to fly!' and I grin because I do.

Biology

The black sparrowhawk, *Accipiter melanoleucus*, is the largest of the sparrowhawks. It is to be found in woodland and forest through southern and eastern South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Zambia, central Africa extending to West Africa and parts of Sudan and Ethiopia. Its secretive habits may lead to it being overlooked but it is more obvious in the breeding season when the birds display.

The adult birds are found in two color morphs. The sexes are alike in col-

oration but differ significantly in size, males weighing 446-630g and females up to 980g. The typical colour form is black on the upper parts including the head with indistinct barring of the tail. The undersides of the flight feathers are pale grey with dark grey barring. The birds typically have a large white bill extending from the throat to the whole of the underparts. This may vary considerably being reduced to a white chin spot and bar across the breast. In the melanistic form, the birds are almost completely black, usually with a white streak under the chin. The melanistic form is generally uncommon but is the predominant form in the Western Cape. Juvenile birds are mottled brown on the back and reddish below with black streaks. There is also a pale colour form in the juvenile that is pale beige below with 'black' streaking. There is no clear correlation between the colour form of the juvenile and that of the adult, but in my experience, all melanistic birds have developed from the reddish juvenile form. The legs and cere are bright yellow. We remember to start breathing again. One of the group mutters 'What is that to fly!' and I grin because I do.

As already mentioned, the black sparrowhawk is a bird of woodland and forest, and is generally unobtrusive by habit. Hunting is normally performed by waiting for opportunities, perched within or on the edge of forest and not far from the open. It is a fast and fast across more open land using available cover to maintain the element of surprise. The natural quarry of these birds is passerine species and pigeons (66-87%) and game birds (7-17%) but feathered quarry may range from small birds to guineafowl, which

may weigh up to 1.8kg. There is even one report of Egyptian geese remains found in a nest. Chickens account for less than 3% of prey taken but, despite this, these birds are persecuted as chicken thieves. Mammalian prey only accounts for 0.5 to 1% of prey and a look at the bird's morphology, with long slender toes and fragile tail, shows that this, unlike the Northern goshawk, is a bird-catching specialist.

Breeding tends to occur from May to October, with chicks being found in the nest as late as the end of November. This very long breeding season is particularly evident in the Western Cape, and a number of pairs producing two broods in a season have been recorded. Display consists of calling and food carrying within the forest, while some aerial display may occur. I have one report of foot-clutching and tumbling performed by a displaying pair. Nests may be built in indigenous trees but the availability of available plantations has greatly expanded the range of this species in southern Africa. In this region, the nests are commonly found in eucalypts but also in pines and poplars. The birds appear to have an uncanny knack of constructing their nests in utterly unclimbable trees. I was recently involved in a survey of nests of this species. One was located 25m up in a thin, tall eucalyptus tree that was in the centre of a group of commercial bee hives. Displaying proved the better part of valor in this instance and the nest remained unimpaired by man. The nest consists of a platform of sticks and lined with green leaves. The nest may be re-used annually and sticks are added so that old nests may become fairly large. There is one record of a nest being used consecutively for 22 years. This has not been our experience in the Western

Cape where nests are often destroyed by high winds. There is also a significant threat from Egyptian geese, which are nest raiders and will take over black sparrowhawk nests even when active, laying on top of the sparrowhawk eggs or even young. There is considerable aggression around the nest sites between these species.

Between one and four eggs are laid and incubation lasts 28 days. The majority of the incubation is performed by the female and the male provides food. The nestling period lasts 40 to 47 days, thereafter the young remain in the vicinity of the nest where they can be heard calling vociferously as they pursue their parents for food. They tend to become independent some seven to eight weeks after leaving the nest. Overall productivity has been estimated of 1.4 young per pair per year. I suspect that this varies from region to region and may be lower in the Western Cape.

The black sparrowhawk is listed as 'Not Globally Threatened' and is a CITES II species. It is a species that has expanded both its range and population in South Africa, where it has benefited from the introduction of exotic forests and a dramatic increase in dove and pigeon populations with modern farming methods. It is threatened by the proposed felling of these same forests as well as by poisoning. The population appears to tolerate a level of persecution probably aided by its secretive habits. It is also threatened by nesting competition with Egyptian geese and this results in a significant number of nesting failures in the Western Cape.

Falconry With The Black Sparrowhawk

The 'black sparrow' has become an icon of Southern African Falconry, with outstingers from around the world showing a fascination with this dramatic and legendary bird. For all this, the legend must be fairly young and I cannot establish who first trained this species. The history of falconry in Southern Africa is relatively recent, with the earliest falconers appearing shortly after World War II. It is probable that this species was first flown by Eustace W Poles in Zomba or John Hough in Zimbabwe, in the early 1950s. I am not aware of any of these birds being im-

ported to Europe or Britain prior to this time, however, Jack Mavrogordato flew at least one. They had already achieved a reputation of being difficult and somewhat 'hysterical' birds when I started my falconry apprenticeship in 1966. While I know of a number of falconers flying these birds effectively prior to this, it was Ron Hartley, who started flying black spars in 1972, who put them on the map. They are not as popular, if respected, falconry bird in Southern Africa and there is a considerable body of experience in their use.

In essence they are large sparrowhawks and not the African equivalent of the Northern goshawk. It will die in the management and husbandry of these birds. I can remember my father who was an able horseman, saying of thoroughbreds that if the horse could find a way to damage itself, it would. This statement holds true for black spars: they are the racehorses of the raptor world. So the black sparrow will test the husbandry skills of any falconer and they will also test the patience and self control of any young falconer. Regrettably, I am aware of a number of young falconers whose careers have foundered on the rock of this bird's temperament. It is, however, my experience that with correct and careful management, the majority of these birds become tolerant and compliant hunting partners. There have been two birds whose temperament and hunting performance has led me to cut their jesses and wave farewell to I suspect, *mutua* relief.

The captive breeding of these birds remains in its infancy. We have been spoilt in Southern Africa, that the abundance of these birds has made them readily obtainable from the wild. Enlightened nature conservation outfits have also tended to encourage a limited wild harvest rather than insist on captive breeding with the attendant issues of feeding and private ownership. This has resulted in limiting their availability for export.

A falconer has thus a choice of taking a nestling or trapping a sore-hawk. A nestling taken at 12 days is ideal if one wishes to make an imprint, while a breacher is ideal if one requires a parent-reared bird. Care must be taken as this species shows a great propensity to

scream. The sparrowhawk is a good choice for the experienced falconer as they will generally settle well, accept the hood and can be hunted relatively quickly. Passage birds are difficult to obtain once they have dispersed from the nest site and as they get older they may become more set and they become less tolerant. We do not trap haggard birds as these constitute the breeding population, but the trapping of these birds was fostered by the Zimbabwe Falconry Club because they were believed to be extremely difficult and to have a significant risk of dying from the stress of handling. Ron Hartley flew one haggard female who proved to be a very tolerant and easy bird. My own experience with rehabilitation haggards has not been encouraging and I have limited my efforts to filtering them for release.

I have experience with two imprint birds. The first was a female who was very vocal but was a dramatic and courageous flyer. She, sadly, died early in her career, following a fusillade with a guineafowl. The second was a murrelet that I made by carefully following the McDermott method. He was a delightful bird who was completely bionic proof and gave thrilling flights, when he was in the mood. It does, however, take considerable effort and resource to make a good imprint. Probably the best black sparrow that I know is flown by my good friend Hans, Chalmers. She is now a five-line, narrow-winged imprint female and she remains a stunning and predictable falconry bird, regularly taking guineafowl in fine style.

Most of the black spars that I have flown have been parent-reared birds. Even these have a propensity to being vocal around the mews, but are well-mannered and not aggressive towards the handler. With some caution in their management they can be confident and steady, working well with this dog.

The art of flying black spars lies in their management and there is no single formula that works for all birds. Rather, one must be flexible in handling these birds, becoming restless and excited as these before-horn results. The birds tend to analyse problems and correct as a rule. They approach and this can lead to self-judging. I tend to tether the birds early in training, then free them as soon as I can. Even in a free mews, these birds will train them-

more experience is needed with imprinting black sparrowhawks and this may, in time, be a full potential

A bird which is too high in condition will be temperamental and fly without enthusiasm, while a bird that is low will lack energy and is at home in cold, wet weather. These birds have a fairly rapid metabolism and lack the cold tolerance of the Northern goshawk.

The Hunt

A confident and well-made black sparrow can be a thrilling and rewarding hunting companion. The converse is obviously true, that an ill-made bird will be frustrating and demoralising, the outstinger then filling Nick Fox's description of being 'arouse and introspective'.

The black sparrow is a bird of great capacity. It is a courageous bird that will accept long sprints, pursue for considerable distance and dive into thick cover after quarry. They will take quarry that is twice their size. The females, hunting at 750 to 800g, will readily take guineafowl weighing 1.4 to 1.7kg while the murrelets weighing around 500g will take cock Cape francolin that may weigh 1kg. Most of our hunting experience with these birds relates to game-hawking, but there is some interest in selling them at smaller quarry such as larks. In Southern Africa, we have no suitable lured quarry, with nocturnal hares and no rabbits. The black sparrow is a bird-hunting specialist and does not have the necessary physical attributes to tackle lured quarry, with long, thin legs and toes and fragile tail feathers.

Classical game hawking is done with pointing dogs. The black sparrow will readily accept the dog as a hunting partner and become attuned to the dog's behavior and posture, so anticipating the hunt ahead. Certainly, there have been times when I have felt relegated to the role of 'convenient mobile perch and observer', while the dog and the hawk have got on with the business of hunting. A keen black sparrow will give its excitement while hunting and uses all its senses including hearing to provide an edge. One of my principle quarry is the Cape spurfowl (or francolin) and this has been a challenging area, often with thick reed beds. On occasion, while following the dog into the reeds, with the hawk high high, the bird has anticipated the flush by hearing the first beats of the francolin's wings within the reeds; and the quarry

several (one is not careful, I have made good use of the 'round perch' described in Mavrogordato's *A Hawk For The Bush*, as this raises the hawk to chest level and the bird is less at risk of damage. I fit a tall bell and suspend a tall guard from this, as soon as I begin handling, the tall guard remains on unless the bird is hunting. These birds have remarkably fragile trunks and a season will not go by without some broken feathers. I carry an elastic band (the sort used by my daughters to make their pony-tails) in the field, and slip this on to the tail as soon as I make it to a kill.

I believe that a black sparrow should be made to the hood. Being the ultimate multi-headed short-wing, this is a well-test of ones hooding skills, but well worth the effort. Once again, Jack Mavrogordato gives an excellent description of the technique of hooding a short-wing and I can only add two tips. Firstly, I believe that putting on the hood is the very first step in the training process and, secondly, never torment the bird with the hood, simply put it on and allow the bird to recognise it as a piece of safety. Once the bird is made to the hood, it can be handled and controlled without drama and upset, and one can manage the situation in the field, to allow the hawk to fly at its optimum.

I use a tall mount to attach the tail bell and to suspend the transmitter. I fit the tail mount plectrum to the two deck tail feathers and I have yet to loose these feathers on a black sparrow. Although I must admit that this did happen with my European sparrow, I dislike leg mounts laterally and I am wary of using a black sparrow on a black sparrow. I have used the backpack to attach a transmitter to my peregrine and I have found it to be a satisfactory and ele-

I recently heard it stated that 'the only reason for a bell, in these days of telemetry, is to hear what your bird is doing in the mews'. This probably holds true for the longwing flyer, but so often, in the heat of the chase, one wants to recover your hawk quickly from thick cover. I place a bell on the tail and the leg and this works for me, as the hawk seldom keep both bells silent.

Almost every black sparrow has the innate propensity to chase and hunt so 'baggie' quarry is not necessary. One needs to stimulate the natural tendency to pursue and, to this end, I have made good use of the lure machine described by Frank Beebe. The bird is trained to chase and catch a lure that is being pulled away at speed. This focuses the hawk's attention outwards, away from the falconer and towards potential quarry. It is a simple step to progress from this to pursuit of young guineafowl which are usually abundant at the time that one is ready to enter a young black sparrow's pheasant's world be the European equivalent. As Frank Beebe suggests, a bird that is used to chasing a lure that is being rapidly towed away by a lure machine will easily recover to the field. I have reaped the benefit of this with my black sparrow. On occasion, half a kilometre to the swing lure after it, both as a tool

Weight control is critical, both as a tool to monitor the bird's health and in anticipating its performance in the field.

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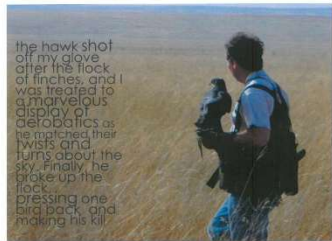
Weight control is critical, both as a tool to monitor the bird's health and in anticipating its performance in the field.

rocketed out to find the hawk already airborne and at pace. We tend to hunt in fairly thick cover and the francolin will drop back into cover to evade capture, so the process can degenerate into a rat hunt without careful management. The black spur will quickly learn that a demoralised and exhausted quarry which has been flushed multiple times makes for an easy kill, so will learn to mark quarry in without pursuing hard if permitted. One has to walk the thin line of maintaining the quality of the flights without allowing the bird to become demoralised through failure. As always, the key lies within the fitness of the hawk and the frequency with which it is hunted.

Guineafowl hunting adds another dimension to shortwing flying in Southern Africa. The wild guineafowl is a very different creature from its tame counterpart which may be found in European farmyards. The tame guineafowl is a flock bird which is attacked by a hawk. Young hawks may be bold enough to attack an individual in a flock but soon learn that this is a risky business, indeed. Lost a young bird in just these circumstances. Wild guineafowl can both run and fly strongly. In areas where they are shot at, the flock may start to run when the falconer is as much as a kilometre away. An experienced black spur will learn to fly a flock in this situation and push them into cover, without coming to grips. This allows the falconer and his dog to catch up, and the aim is then to track up the flock and allow the hawk to fly singletons. These flights can cover considerable distances and the hawk may have to tackle the guinea several times before it can be subdued by grabbing the head. On several occasions I have made in on my hawk, holding a guinea in cover, to find that the guineafowl has tucked its head under its wing for safety if the hawk relaxes its grip. The guinea is off like a rocket. My best guineafowl hawk was a female black spur that I obtained from a rehabilitation centre, and who had one leg slightly weakened by ticks. Despite this, she regularly took and held guineafowl that were at least twice her weight. I recall one hunt at dusk when I flushed a flock of guineas and she pursued one into a thicket of trees alongside a stream, I entered the trees and could not hear her bell, so

tried the telemetry which gave a very variable signal without clear direction. As it was getting dark I searched obsessively for her, and then finally heard a bell. I found her, soaking wet, towing the now-dead guinea out of the stream and on to the bank.

I am often asked how the black sparrowhawk compares to the European goshawk. I had the very good fortune to fly both birds at the same time, for a season. They were both intermixed families, excellent birds and exciting hunters. It proved to be an exhausting season that I ended considerably later than when I started, but it did help me



The hawk shot off my glove after the flock of francolins, and I was treated to a marvelous display of aerobatics as he matched their gyrations. The hawk turns about the sky. Finally he broke up the flock, pressing one bird back and around his wing.

to formulate my ideas on these two species. The black spur is not the African equivalent of the European goshawk, but rather a large sparrowhawk. The goshawk is more powerful, even taking into account its larger size, and is probably faster off the glove. The goshawk is also a more intelligent bird, in my experience, not as courageous. The black spur tends to become wedded to certain quarry. The black spur I flew that season took only game birds and preferred guineafowl. She would not fly duck and showed no interest in the occasional teal I flushed. The European goshawk, on the other hand, flew a much wider range of quarry, preferring francolin to guineafowl, because she knew they were an easier challenge and she had the acceleration to take them on the rise. I took a number of duck with this hawk, all thrilling flights,

and her quarry ranged from small gray-winged francolin to an Egyptian goose. She would not take the long drive necessary to come to grips with the wider guinea flocks, and would call off a chase if she felt it was not worth the effort. Inherent black spurs tend to accept a wider range of quarry and these will take duck and even the occasional hare.

My experience with irripint black spurs has certainly convinced me that this is the way to go, but it is an intense process that demands careful attention and analysis of the hawk's behaviour and performance. On the positive

side, one gets an intimate and privileged insight into the development of your bird's personality. The process requires plenty of time and readily available quarry, so, in my current circumstances I would be cautious to embark on this process. My real success with imprinting this species was a musket that opened my eyes to the aerial potential of these birds. I have always concentrated on game hawking and have found little attraction in hunting smaller quarry. One morning, while working my way into a reed bed with dog and hawk, I flushed a flock of binozo birds. These small finches fly in a tight swarm that seems to change direction with a single mind, zigzagging about the sky. The hawk shot off my glove after the flock, and I was treated to a marvelous display of aerobatics as he matched their twists and turns

about the sky. Finally he broke up the flock, pressing one bird back into the reeds, and making his kill almost at my feet. For this I failed to pursue the potential of this bird on smaller quarry, partially through anxiety that he may carry the effort. Inherent black spurs fly a musket at larks, but he is very cautious about company when hawking due to the fear of the hawk carrying.

Imprinting allows one to fly the hawk of lighter weight but this may make the hawk's enthusiasm to hunt unpredictable, and it is disappointing to go into the field with a hawk that is not hungry and ready to hunt. This observation is probably an indication of my inexperience with this training method. Certainly, the imprint musket, when his appetite was stimulated, gave stunning flights and took a greater proportion of kills 'on the rise' than any of my other hawks.

There is yet much that can be done with black sparrowhawks. More experience is needed with imprinting these birds and this may, in time, unlock their full potential. We need to develop their captive breeding. Aspects of training that have shown promise include pulling the birds on the site to get them ready to fly. Alternative quarry can be looked at, particularly for the muskets. Lawnings are a potentially good quarry and one of my best musket flights was on a water thick-knee. An other potential quarry would be starlings, of which there are a number of species in Southern Africa.

The flying of shortwings is an intensely personal experience; the outstranger, dog and hawk are a closely bonded unit that must act as a team. The anticipation of action excites and unites all three participants. When the action occurs, it is often very fast and this provides the thrill that the outstranger has worked towards. The falconer may provide a far better spectacle for spectators with dramatic longwing flights but he does not experience that very intimate interaction with dog and hawk that awakens the light. I recall a flight with one of my earlier black spurs, a parent-reared female named Jenny. Near my home, there is a small area of valley impinged on three sides by mountain slopes and facing across sand dunes, the Atlantic Ocean. There are some small marshy

patches with reed beds in the valley and I anticipated the presence of Cape spur-fowl. I decided that the best way to come to terms with them would be to go to the valley before sunrise and wait for the cocks to call so that I could mark the positions of the coverts. Two cocks started to call by light and I was able to get an idea of their position. As soon as light permitted, I made in with the pointer working ahead. Instead of finding the birds in the marsh, they appeared to be calling from the hill slopes. The coverts must have moved ahead of us; up the mountainside and eventually the dog came on point immediately. The sun was now rising, bathing the whole valley in a soft dawn glow, and lighting the waves on the distant sea. The francolin racketed off, flying across the valley towards the sand dunes with the black spur in hot pursuit, coal black with her white under-wings flashing in the early morning light. The flight ended in a thicket of milkweed trees amongst the dunes, later measured at 800m on the map. Recovering my hawk took some effort. I left the field without a kill, but with a memory etched on my mind's eye that will last my lifetime.

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A Brief History Of Falconry On This Island

Hilary White, Dublin

This article sets out to summarise what is known about the history and falconry on the whole island of Ireland, regardless of whatever political situation was defining its borders at the time. With this information condensed, it is hoped it will be more easily digestible to club members or anyone for that matter. Falconry as a cultural heritage is an important theme of the moment; the International Year of the Sport. Submissions are underway by various nations to have it recognised as a UNESCO Intangible World Heritage. This denotes a tradition that has been passed down through subsequent generations and has its place, however unassuming, in the life of the land.

Eric Dempsey's thorough and engaging book Ireland's Last Birds has a wealth of information on this subject, especially in the chapter about the Goshawk, which will be looked at later. Where other authors have often fallen into the trap of looking at raptor history and cultural references while ignoring the etymology and reverence that was directly as a result of falconry, Dempsey not only acknowledges it, but reveals so much more than we would have known had he not undertaken the task. For this, he is due a debt of thanks from the falconry community here.

Liam O'Boin's The Sparrowhawk: A Manual For Hawking, itself something of a landmark in the development of modern Irish falconry, has a chapter in which Liam charts what is known about the sport's presence here, detailing the people and places that emerged through his rigorous research. It makes for fascinating reading, and when I

was younger, always gave me a sense of legacy and cultural continuity from those who had gone before.

The history of Irish Falconry is a nebulous subject. It has very often been looked at as something that simply went on here from time to time, something transient that was occasionally brought by visitors. This is not quite the case, as we will soon see. Meanwhile, Irish raptors were known as a prized commodity to be harvested and exported.

But how far back can we look to see an interaction between man and hawk for the purpose of actual hunting? The difficulty lies therein - for example, Eric Dempsey discusses fossil evidence of an interaction with Goshawks. Remains of these once common accipiters have been found in Meurlin Sandel, Colorado (c.7000 BC), and Dolkay Islands, Dublin and Newgrange in the Boyne Valley (c. 3000BC). But was this true falconry? Regardless of whether it was or not, it dictates that man and hawk certainly dwelled together in some capacity.

The earliest known reference to falconry is in the Irish text *Betha Colmán Maic Lúacháin* (The Life of St Colmán Mac Lúacháin) in the 7th Century, in which the King of Tara is described as having 'tá seaboich seip', or two hunting hawks. Actual falconry references are nowhere to be found until the 12th Century, when it would seem the arrival of the Anglo Normans finally secured falconry's place here, albeit amongst the nobility.

At this point, the country already had

a reputation for providing the best hawks available at the time. A Welsh monk, Giraldus Cambrensis wrote in his book *Topographie Hibernae* (The History and Topography of Ireland) about the abundant game and raptors: 'Ireland has none but the best breed of falcons. These inferior falcons commonly called by the name *lanner* are absent.'

They were so good in fact that a roaring trade opened up. Raptors, particularly the Goshawk, became a valuable commodity, something to be harvested, and subsequently used to pay rent or to gain political leverage with overlords. A lucrative black market soon emerged. It got to the stage that by 1481, still levies had to be imposed on trappers and trade-men: 'whenever merchant shall carry a hawk out of Ireland shall pay for a peregrine 13 shillings four pence, for a falcon six shillings and eight pence, for a falcon ten shillings and the poundage upon the same price.'

But legislation existed even before this. Ragnald Talbot, in 1218, was newly freed for illegally trying to smuggle a Goshawk out of the county of Dalkey. In 1386, during the reign of Richard II, a proclamation was made at Drogheda against the export of raptors, and rigorous searches took place to curb black market trade.

A 14th Century document from Kilkenny Castle details the only three types of hawks that were to be used for rent payment. Elizabethan falconers prized falcons from Cape Clear off Cork, and from Heald in Donegal. In 1531, Archbishop Cromer, the Louth-based Bishop of Armagh, presented a

list of hobbies to Henry VIII. The Earl of Thomond of Sunnary Castle, Clare, has his signature on legal documents from 1615 in which the rights to his harvest of Goshawks are made legally binding. 'This was serious stuff - raptor stocks actually written into the law. In the late 16th Century, an inventory had even been written up of Goshawks in Kerry and Limerick. Thomas Molynieux, depicting the natural history of Leitrim in the 17th Century, says: 'The woods are full of large and excellent timber: and well stocked with excellent goshawks.' In his book *Falconry or Hawking* (Edited and Transcribed by Deryn Argyle), George Luberville refers to one French falconer by the name of William Tardieu who had this to say about our best bird: 'The quality of our goshawk cannot be more excellent than that which is bred in Ireland in the north parts, as in Ulster, and in the County of Tyrone.'

A fad poem describing the falconry birds available in Ireland sums up the sentiment of the time:

The Goshawk first of the crew,
deserves to have the name;
The Falcon next for high attempts,
is gone and in frame;
The Tassel then ensueth on,
good reason is that he;
for flying hawks in Ireland next,
the falconer please should be;
The Tassel is gentlest course in next;
the fourth peer of the lands;
Combined to the falcon, with
a loves friendly bands;
The prelie Marton is the fifth,
to har the Sparhawk next,
and then the Jacke and the Musket last,
by who the birds are nexte.
In these are the hawks which chiefly breed.
In these Irish grounds:
whose match for flight and speede wing,
elsewhere be hardly founde....

From by J. Deirick's 1581 book, *The Image of Ireland*.

In the mid 1600s, Charles II's viceroys Lord Ormonde established Phoenix Park as a Royal Hunting Park just at the edge of Dublin city. The sight was stocked with deer and pheasants for hounds and quail. A high wall was built around it to keep game and poachers out. The park was finally handed over to the people of Dublin in

salvin and john barr became fierce magpie hawkers in 1857, advertising meets in local papers to get beaters on board and reportedly nailing 184 magpies with two tiercels in four months at the curragh military camp

1745. Meanwhile, in 1693, a newspaper called the Dublin Intelligence carried an ad for last hawk belonging to Lord Capal, offering a handsome reward of 30 shillings for its return.

Things really took off sport wise in the mid to late 18th Century. There are records from 1762 of Lord Brandon having a mevs of hawks and a falconer at Ardfert Abbey in Kerry. Around 1800 or so, it would appear that the Curragh in Kildare began to be exploited as a key destination for rook and magpie hawkers. Captain Salvin was based at the Curragh military camp in 1857. He and John Barr, falconer to Maharajah Duleep Singh, became fierce magpie hawkers, advertising meets in local papers to get beaters on board and reportedly nailing 184 magpies with two tiercels in four months. EB Michell refers to woodcock hawking in Monaghan, while Salvin was joined by names like Broderick and Lancelotti for continued sport on the Curragh.

It is around this time that we come to the formation of the first Irish Falconry association. In 1870, 212 Great Brunswick Street, Dublin played host to a meeting chaired by Lord Ladbroke Malahide to establish the Irish Hawking Club. The aforementioned Duleep Singh donated £50 towards the fund. After that, no records survive of what went on. Eventually, the present club was reconstituted in 1967. Before then, the bird-hawking parties came and went. William Rudge and Jack Mavrogolatos went last hawking with former IHC president Dr George Luke in the west and north west, and Harold Stevens and Philip Glazier would visit Willie McDougall at his home in Dublin in

manus in Co Louth. One hopes that they were aware of the use by Nobel Laureate WB Yeats of falconry imagery in his post war poems at the start of the century. It is undocumented whether or not Yeats actively participated in falconry. What is known, however, is that he would often watch wild falcons from his spiritual home of Dromiciff in Sligo. Yeats also had a fascination with Japanese culture, which often featured falconry.

Much is written on the poet's use of the falcon and falconer metaphors, some perhaps missing the point, or unaware of the presence of falconry around the time Yeats was in his formative years. The falcon and falconer remain vibrant symbols of matters close to Yeats' heart, particularly his lament over the unrequited love of Maude Gonne - the falcon's 'unhindered, wild companion, ranging and wondering as the falconer strives, in vain, to attain total mastery of her. The falcon is emotion and falconer intellect. In the Second Coming, we have lines such as:

Tuning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
More anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and
withered
The ceremony of innocence is
drowned,
The best lack all conviction, while the
worse
Are full of passionate intensity.

However, it is in the hawk that the falconry metaphor is taken to new levels:

Call down the hawk from the air:
Let him be hooded or caged
Fill the yellow eye his brown rind,
For leader and spot are bare,
The old cock enraged,
The scullion gone wild.

'I will not be clasped in a hood,
Nor a cage, nor night upon wrist,
Now I have learnt to be proud
Hovering over the wood
In the broken mist
Or tumbling cloud.'

'What tumbling cloud did you cleave,
Yellow-eyed hawk of the mind,
Last evening? That I, who had sat
Dumbfoundled before a hawk,
Should give to my friend
A pretence of wit.'

It is arguable that Yeats meant to say "caged" rather than "caged" in the second line of the first stanza.

Another raptor reference, presumably related by the time in slip is his little-known one-act play *All The Hawk's Well*, in which a died up world on a desolate mountainside is guarded by a hawk-like woman.

That one of 20th Century literature's most revered poets and dramatists should adopt falconry imagery is unsurprising and not entirely original. But unlike Shakespeare, who used hawking as a tool and a set of symbols, Yeats probes right into the heart of the falcon-falconer dynamic, and leaves us with a sense that he must have at least fraternised with falconers to all such insight into the relationship.

No history of Irish falconry would be complete without a mention of Francis Stevens, unquestionably the guru of the sport in modern times. Stevens came to live in Conemara in 1965, settling in the remote Fermoy Lodge, in a letter in the 1957 *British Falconers' Club* journal. The falconer, Stevens describes his move to Ireland, his search for a remote place where "my hawks can fly without risk of being sniped at" and his hacked jetlin coming to sit on a nearby rock "above the tumbling waters" while he was fishing.

Despite his best efforts, his house be-

came something of a Mecca for falconers from all across the world. Stevens not only inspired generations through his classic treatise *Observations on Modern Falconry and the Taming of Genghis*, but also imparted much knowledge to a privileged handful of Irish falconers, particularly the Hon Johnny Morris. The two accidentally invented the hybrid falcon in the 1960s, when Stevens became frustrated with trying to breed peregrines and asked Morris if he could try the feline with Morris' Saker falcon, a bird sourced by the then Iran-based US far corner Ken Corrie. The pair got on famously and hatched out two males that first year. Letters of congratulations and intrigue arrived from around the world. Stevens and Morris flew one each, noting a similar temperament to the peregrine. A further three were bred the following year. This time including a female who stunned the two men by her size. This bird appeared on the globe of Charlotte Kamping in the John Seaman film *Zorro*. She was lost by Stevens in Mayo.

In his later years, Stevens' eyesight began to fail and falconry became less practical. He moved to the smaller, more manageable Burinogah, closer to the village of Oughterda. He died in 1994, leaving some money to the IHC which went towards a breeding fund. A hooded falcon sat on the globe of Johnny Morris during the funeral ceremony in Oughterda.

Happesly this has provided an overview of our falconry heritage. It remains to be seen what new details are uncovered on the topic, of which many must still exist for those who would like to have a more detailed account of what we know. I refer them to the two books which I mentioned earlier.

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The Silent Partner

Keith Barker, Co Waterford

On the May 20, 2008, we hatched a male goshawk from the pair we have here. We named him Sioux. The breeding pair are a female German Goshawk bred by Alan Rothery and a Finnish male - my old hunting bird, bred by Chris Brown. Both were brought in from the UK. I had impregnated a male from this pairing in 2007 and had great success hunting crows and game and created a silent hawk at home and in the field come November by daily killing and feeding in the field. This hawk was fed in the early stages of imprinting by me until he could feed himself. From then on, the hawk was taken to the field for his meal rather than his seeing me as the food provider, hopefully to reduce the noise the hawk would make when it came to the weight reduction prior to entering.

It did not make any difference. The noise he made was unbearable at times, and my observations as the hawk progressed made me wonder if hand feeding or hiding the food led to an eyas made any difference whatsoever. Eyasses scream to their parents for food in their early stages until they gain independence and start killing for themselves, and then they are on their own. We hear sparrows calling in the woods to their parents for food in the summer but not in the winter months when they have developed into hunting machines. They don't need mum and dad anymore, so why call for them? I decided to openly hand feed my 2008 eyas until hand rearing just like the parent bird would do. Bringing the food to him in his den when he started to call for food. On arrival, he would be eager to feed himself, taking a few minutes each and going again until he had a decent-sized crop. Then, I would top up the eyas with a pair of surgical tweezers until he had taken his

fill. This procedure carried on until he was well feathered, and lure training began in earnest.

I was not concerned at this time about creating a screaming hawk, which was inevitable. I wanted to create one, then cure it, with killing making it silent.

The noise was already there at this stage when he became hungry, but not as acute as later on at hunting weight. He was kept to three light meals a day during early lure training and then two in the later stage. He could take a decent-sized crop, something I put down to topping up with the tweezers at his meal times rather than 24-hour food availability, where the eyas just picks when he is a little peckish.

Lure response was good, and soon the hawk was flying free and coming great distances to the lure. By mid-August, the hawk was chasing quary with gusto. He was soon entered and taking rooks but the noise the hawk was making was a real problem. Bowed or not, the hawk was screaming his head off. This made things difficult when setting up a slip with the hawk on the fall, walking the lane to the slip. The corvids would be off in the van with a driver, it was no better.

This time of year holds plenty of gullible, easy youngsters for the hawk to captivate on, and soon the penny dropped as to what the game was all about. I hunted him in the early mornings. The farmers were cutting their crops late due to the wettest summer on record. There was less noise in the early stages of spooling, but if no quarry was found, he dropped into the habit of calling out of boredom. I would say,

He became more confident on the



black stuff, taking magpies and rooks. I took him rabbit hawking and he soon realised what the dog was for, and watched his every move, waiting for the rabbit to flush from the cover. The hawk was hunting around the 1lb, 6 1/2 at this stage. It took a while for him to get the hang of stooping the rabbits with a head hold. When he did, he became quite an expert, taking them on most outings. The dog work kept him occupied and the hawk was quiet in the field by this time. But at home the noise was a problem, even with a full crop!

He was hunted in the mornings, fed on his kill and weathered for the rest of the day on the far end of the garden. Even there, as the food was digesting, we could hear him screaming in the house.

The hide turned in mid-November. I was beginning to have doubts in the back of my mind if I had done the right thing. He was quiet in the field but at home the noise was irritating. By this time he was killing every day and as fit as a salmon. I had a holiday booked in Scotland flying pheasants for a week. The season had started here in Ireland and he had bagged a few, and I was looking forward to meeting some of my old pals in the UK.

I drove up to Wicklow on the Friday and met up with my pal Ken Smith. Later that evening, we took the ferry from Belfast to Slanzer and drove on to our venue for the week, meeting up with Martyn Furber, Harry Gilbert, Mike Taylor and Ian Bell.

We had six days of hawking pheasants. Sioux performed as well as I could expect, without for considering the weather conditions in the early part of the week and the lack of game on our

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first two venues. His weight was up on the button at 1lb, 7 7/8ths every morning.

The first day's hawking, he had two slips - a hen and a cock. The hen flew down a river bank and fast and put into thick willows. Then she flew a cock bird hard out of between through a wood. Twice he was poised under the cock ready to strike but did not finish him and I got away. Harry Gilbert's Finnish/Russian female pulled one of the memorable flights of the week at this venue with a hen that towered high and fast downriver with the cock having much ground to make up at the slip, working her way through trees to get on terms with her target. The pheasant looked as though it would escape but the gas kept low, and in the distance you could see she was in trouble as the gas was waiting for her target to come down. This hen was taken in open ground for Harry's only slip of the day.

Martyn killed a hen bird and Mike Taylor's female got killed just before dark just by the vehicles. The game show here was thin on the ground. We struggled for points and vowed never to return here for a meet during our stay.

Monday was better forgotten, as the venue we were shown was a complete waste of time through lack of game for five outings. We faced much better on Tuesday. We were hawking the grounds of the oldest inhabited house in Scotland, found enough pheasants to keep us busy and only had one mishap due to an unimply hawk that gave us the runaround for a while.

Martyn Furber's hawk killed a good cock bird early on. Sioux took to a cheery hen and gave us something to cheer

about when he fell chased a cock bird down a line of trees by the road. At 70 yards, he pulled him clean in the air. The pair both bounced to the floor and separated before he could secure him. The cock shot away and the gas pecked himself up and had a second crop, losing him in thick cover in the best wood. Ken Smith's hawk flew hard and killed a hen before we called it a day. This was our best day's flying on the holiday up until then.

We had sorted out some new flying ground kept under plenty of pheasants for Johnny Morris' day thanks to a phone call to Neil Ross by Ken. We went to gate force winds, and it was

Thursday, we were back at the old house again. We found plenty of pheasants for our outskirers here. Martyn Furber's female made light work of a strong cock pheasant, flown from the roadside into the grounds of the house. One of the gardeners raking up leaves witnessed the hawk ripping the pheasant from the air as they flew past him. He told Martyn it was a spectacular end to the flight.

I was next to fill, my only slip of the day. A cock pheasant burst from the side of a stone wall and across open ground. The hawk burst away after him. The pheasant did not get far - 70 yards tops - when he pulled him. The pair hit the floor and the cock braked him around the field (rodeo style) as I was changing over to help him out. The hawk transferred over from the back to the head to stop him in his tracks. Another good feed up for this one and I was spectating for the rest of the day.

Ken took a good hen, with his hawk forcing the hen high from the point. He waited below for the hen to come down and nailed her in some spruce trees by the roadside. Prior to this, he was unlucky with a drake mallard off

reclaiming his hawk. The hen was under serious pressure from the flush out of light kale, and at one hundred yards or so had nowhere to go except down and winged over into the crop, with the hawk plunging in to kill her for a feed up.

As I was securing the hawk, Ken stepped up for his slip as the light was fading. His hawk chased a hen bird right and side into the wind to a distant wood. Both birds entered the trees together but the pheasant got away - a crapping effort, and he deserved a kill.

Friday was our last day's hawking, we were back on the kept ground again. The weather turned nasty, driving sleet and gusting winds. It was absolutely freezing. The eyasses suffered the damp conditions and we relied to the portacabin to dry off and have a cuppa. Later the weather improved and we had some great flights. Sioux had three slips, two cocks and a hen, and he flew them like he wanted them but had a blank day.

Harry's hawk flew her heart out and she drew a blank too. Kenny tied his new hawk for a few slips in the morning and was unlucky not to find onto a cock bird that he pulled down fat and square, but to be honest he was slightly overweight and has the experience of a bird with a big heart. Martyn Furber's hawk showed her expertise again and killed two pheasants. She is a strong flyer and knows what she wants and certainly knows how to get it. She is the pheasant from the slip and the pressure she puts on the bird is unrelenting. She was the best performing for Martyn as he has put great effort into achieving this standard.

It was good to get away and fly in company again after a 12-month spell of hawking alone. The crop we had with the lads was great, and the banter you couldn't beat. We had a full English breakfast cooked by our landlady every morning for £4, and after the flying it was down to the local pub for a couple of much needed drinks at Guinness and a three-course meal. No casualties this year, thank god, and

the river, binding it in the air but, hitting the water together, the duck broke free.

Harry Gilbert killed two good hen pheasants later in the day. His last was again, from cover out into open ground, as the pheasant tried in vain to make a distant plantation. She was taken in open sheep pastures.

Martyn added another pheasant to his tally with another beautiful flight down the river valley. This hawk can really molar on and her previous seasons' experience shone through.

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we will be doing it again next time I hope.

On my return to Co. Waterford, the hawk called on the oven for the morning of our return. Then he stopped, simple as that. He had been silent in Scotland for the whole week, something I expected in new surroundings. Perhaps the activity he had going on for that week kept him out of the habit and just faded the balance. Or was it on the cards anyway?

I believe he had matured in Scotland, come of age if you like. He had recalled what his life was about - he was the hunter and I was the spectator, not the provider. This has come on throughout the rest of the season. When he killed, he was fed up, drumming into him what he had been taught in his early days. I still flew him every day and he took his fill from the fees, rabbits, pheasants and crows.

It is now early March and he is well into three figures of head heat. It's most interesting compared to some hawks that are taking multiples every outing. I like to think I created a monster and then turned him into the silent partner.

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Martyn Furber with Imprint Female Gos and his excellent German Wirehair Pointer Flynn



the gardener witnessed the hawk ripping the pheasant as they flew past him, he told martyn it was a spectacular flight

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A Good Saturday

Terry Turkington, Co Antrim

It's a cold January morning and I've no work to go to. Yes, it's Saturday, the best day of the week, and believe it or not it's not raining - well not yet! It's not even windy, just a gentle breeze blowing, perfect for a good day's hawking. The ferrets are running up and down the cage after sleeping most of the week. You would think they knew it was a hunt day. Maybe they do.

My springer spaniel sits watching the back door, waiting for a walk or preferably a hunt. The Harris flies up and down her aviary, bells jingling. She also knows it's a hunt day. It could be the air was cool that lets them know or is it my behaviour? I see a difference in their behaviour so they probably see a difference in mine.

Everyone is excited at the prospect of a successful outing. The Harris flies straight into her box, the ferrets are collared and try to get into the carrier box. Later, they will be scraping to get back out and into the warrens. I give the dog a run round the local field to let him empty. He doesn't go in his run. He doesn't bark either, not even at the neighbours' cats, although he likes chasing them (great dogs springers).

So, dog in boot, me in car where I'll be. The pheasants are out of bounds as the shoots are in full swing for the next couple of weeks. So its crows or rabbits today - can't use dog for crows, so rabbits it is. Do I go local and work hard for each rabbit or do the long drive to the real infested rabbit ground? The local ground can be kept for wet or windy days so let's not waste the good weather and go for a big bag and a big drive. It will be worth it.

The farmer will be pleased to see me. I usually start with a bit of dog work to let him know he is part of the team.

and take the edge off him. He and the bird like working together. The ferrets produce more rabbits but there are no long waits outside holes - its non-stop action. I love it when he finishes one and the bird is right above him and stoops to conquer the fleeing rabbit. I say to myself: 'I could have filmed that and shared it with other hunters!' It so rarely happens when you bring a cameracorder.

A bit more dog work and then it's the ferrets' turn. This is where the poor dog has to get back into first gear. I put him on sit and he watches the holes, knowing if one bolts he ain't allowed to badge. I sit firm where I don't want the rabbit to run, like a stop on a pheasant shoot. I put the bird in the tree where I think the rabbit will run and produce a good flight. I hide myself or use myself as another stop. The ferret has entered and there is total silence at this point.

I am totally oblivious to the outside world, completely focused on the warren, waiting for a bolt, a set of ears showing at the entrance, a bumping noise indicating a likely bolt. The dog turning his head at a rabbit I can't see due to the hedge, the bird craning her neck indicating the ferret is out on the other side of the ditch, or the best sign of all, a bell-jingling and her stooping followed by a squeal.

I run in quickly and dispatch the rabbit, trade it for a bit of steak and it's all back to positions. The poor dog is still in position, same again, then I need to dig - you can only make so much noise then the bunnies take their chances with Scratchy the hob. Its what I call a fatal mistake and it's the same result every time. I call in the dog and start digging. Ferret out and in box, now the hard bit. The bird knows the score so she is on the pile of soil. The dog's between my legs so I lie

down with back to the bird. I then put the bag over the hole and slip the rabbit into the bag. Then I fill in the hole, nice and neat, leaving the soil an inch high to allow for sinking in time.

The problem now (albeit a good one) is that there's three or four rabbits in the bag and it's heavy, so I plant the rabbits out of site from the bird to be collected on the way back. It is usually a good time to return to the car, put rabbits in the boot and have a coffee break or lunch. I don't drink tea or coffee and my team don't like breaks - they are all fit so on we go.

More flushing for the dog. He is mad for work after sitting outside the burrow for so long. The hawk takes another rabbit. I give her a feed of it and it's time for home - bag too heavy. Otherwise I would hunt on.

We will all sleep well tonight. Roll on Sunday.

The moral of the story is that you can hunt further from home and still be home early with more rabbits!

Happy hunting.



Photo by Keiya Nakajima