

No 11

# THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF **FALCONRY**

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR FALCONRY AND CONSERVATION OF BIRDS OF PREY  
MEMBER OF IUCN



2019







# IAF-AECCA 2019 Carmona Meeting

Hotel Parador Nacional de Carmona, Sevilla, Spain

December 2–6, 2019



For registrations please email to [iaf.aecca2019@gmail.com](mailto:iaf.aecca2019@gmail.com)

## IAF-AECCA 2019 CARMONA MEETING PROGRAM:

### Day 1. Sunday, December 1

- ☞ Reception of IAF Staff and AC at the hotel: "Parador de Carmona"

### Day 2. Monday, December 2

- ☞ IAF 2019 Advisory Committee Meeting (morning)
- ☞ Reception of IAF Delegates
- ☞ Welcome speech by Carmona mayor

### Day 3. Tuesday, December 3

- ☞ IAF 2019 Delegates Meeting (morning)
- ☞ Tourism excursions for delegates companions (morning)
- ☞ Afternoon and evening free time

### Day 4. Wednesday, December 4

- ☞ IAF 2019 Delegates Meeting (morning)
- ☞ Tourism excursions for delegates companions (morning).
- ☞ Lunch with "Bullfighting & Flamenco event" (Venta el Tentaero)

### Day 5. Thursday, December 5

- ☞ Hunting day.

### Day 6. Friday, December 6

- ☞ Hunting day.
- ☞ Gala Dinner with Flamenco event and Raffle.

### Day 7. Saturday, December 7

- ☞ End of the meeting.
- ☞ Departure







## Editorial

After having created some stunning artwork that has graced our last ten editions of the journal's cover, Andrew Ellis has decided to give another artist a chance. We are grateful for his commitment and generous contributions readily provided over a decade. At the same time we are pleased that Mark Upton decided to step in at short notice by providing us with an image of one of his falcons. He has agreed to provide works of art for three subsequent covers of our Journal, after which another artist would be given the chance to contribute.

To illustrate our editorial for 2019, the 11<sup>th</sup> edition, we have added a photograph which was taken around 1985 in the Doukkala area of Morocco, in remembrance of a valued falconer friend who passed away early this year. May we refer you to the article about Si Saïd Sadok in this publication.

We are lucky to have the new edition ready before the start of the next hawking season, when outdoor activities take over. We have received a good number of reports about the past hawking season from Ireland, Scotland, France and the US. We hope that you will enjoy these personal experiences which are, as always, an interesting mixture of encouraging successes and useful failures. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any first hand experiences from the field to report, as we plan to give these priority in our future editions. We also have some interesting falconry history from Hungary, New Zealand and Pakistan.

The editorial team was enlarged with the arrival of Maurice Nicholson from Ireland, a falconer and published author. We are grateful that he is willing to dedicate some of his time to our publication and to share his knowledge of international falconry with us.

IAF's President, Majid al Mansouri, has contributed his first *A Word from the President* with an inspiring message. We are also grateful for an interesting article about Arabian falconry.

We hope that you will enjoy this 11<sup>th</sup> edition of *The International Journal of Falconry*.

*Dick ten Bosch, David Horobin, Maurice Nicholson*



DICK  
TEN BOSCH



DAVID  
HOROBIN



MAURICE  
NICHOLSON



# 2019

# CONTENTS



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IAF is part of the steering committee for more  
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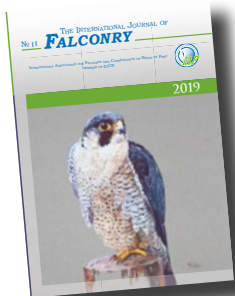


For joining our Biodiversity Group  
contact Dr. Michael Greshake



- 3** Editorial: *Dick ten Bosch, David Horobin, Maurice Nicholson*
- 6** A Word from the President: *Majed Ali Al Mansoori*
- 10** Grouse Hawking 2018: *Mark Upton*
- 20** The 2018 Grouse Season in Scotland: *Xavier Morel*
- 24** Current Status of the Northern Goshawk in Japan:  
No Longer an Endangered Species: *Keiya Nakajima*
- 26** Adored by Swedish Royalty: The Falconry Art of Flemish  
Painter Joris Hoefnagel: *Ellen Hagen*
- 28** Arab Falconry: Glimpses from the Past, Present  
and Future
- 31** The 2018 Hawking Season at the House of Grouse:  
*Steve Chindgren*
- 36** Siberian Goshawks in the USA – 2018/2019 Hawking  
Season: *Ben G. Ohlander*
- 40** “How I came to drawing birds.”: *Ber van Perlo*
- 43** My Eventful Goshawking Season: 2018/2019:  
*Sébastien Gihoul*
- 47** Hunting the Waiting-on Golden Eagle: *Joe Atkinson*
- 50** A History of Falconry in Hungary and the Establishment  
of The Hungarian Falconers’ Club.: *János Bagyura*
- 57** The New World of Falconry: Bat Falcons  
(*Falco ruficularis*) in Paraguay:  
*Raul German Palacios Principalli*
- 60** The 2018-2019 Snipe Hawking Season in Ireland:  
*Martin Brereton*
- 64** A Brief History of Falconry and Hawking with Harriers  
in New Zealand: *Noel Hyde*
- 70** Si Saïd Sadok. Obituary
- 71** Saïd: *Dick ten Bosch*
- 72** Hawks’ Varvels: *Patrick Morel*
- 77** A Historical Account of the Origins of Falconry  
in Gilgit-Baltistan to the Present Day: *Shahid Ali*
- 82** IAF AGM 2018 Germany





#### Cover picture

Painting by Mark Upton, Gouache, 45 x 35cm, 2016.  
The artist has painted peregrine tiercel *Oliver Twist*, bred by Roger Upton and presented to Mark in 1991. He killed more than 250 red grouse in great style and took his last grouse at the age of 17. Living to the age of 21, he had a lot of offspring and many European falconers are flying peregrines of his line. Mark is presently flying some of his grandchildren.

**Photo on back page** shows  
Adult female peregrine falcon  
and was taken at Little Rann of Kutch,  
Gujarat, India on 14 Jan 2018  
by Nirav Bhatt



#### Photo Credits Journal edition 2019

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## كلمة من الرئيس

عندما تمعنت في نظرات متدرب صغير في مدرسة محمد بن زايد للصقارة وفراسة الصحراء في أبوظبي، تبادرت إلى ذهني ذكريات عزيزة لأوقات كنت فيها في مثل هذه السن، وكنت بمثل هذا العزم أوصل العمل ليلاً ونهاراً لأتلم وأتقن هذا الفن الذي يربطني بأرضي وبالآباء والأجداد الذي عمروا هذه الأرض وحافظوا على نقائها وتوازنها، وطوروا هذه التقاليد العريقة التي تتناقلتها الأجيال المتتالية حتى وصلت إلينا. لقد نجحت هذه المدرسة حتى الآن في تدريب أكثر من 300 صقار يافع، ومما يثلج الصدور وجود عدة مدارس وأكاديميات مماثلة لها في أجزاء مختلفة من العالم، بالإضافة إلى الدور المباشر الذي تقوم به اتحاداتنا وأنديتنا وكبار الصقارين لتعليم فنون الصقارة وغرس مبادئها في شبابنا وأطفالنا.

على الرغم من نشأة الصقارة كهواية محببة للملوك والسيوخ والنبلاء، إلا أنها سرعان ما أصبحت متاحة لفئات المجتمع الأخرى مع احتفاظها بقواعدها الصارمة وتقاليدها المميزة في تدريب الجوارح واستكشاف الطرائد والحفاظ على البيئة والاستخدام المستدام للحياة البرية، لتصبح بذلك رمزاً للانتماء لكوكب مستدام، ورابطاً قوياً بالماضي، وشغفاً متجدداً بالحياة في كنف الطبيعة بغاباتها وسهولها وجبالها، وطريقة لا مثيل لها لتحقيق التوازن بين متطلبات الروح والجسد. لقد كانت الصقارة وستظل دوماً بإذن الله أسلوباً متفرداً للصيد يتماشى مع التوازن البيئي، ويحرص على ازدهار جميع العناصر المكونة له من صقار وصقر وطريدة، وأرض وماء وهواء، ونبات وحيوان وجماد.

ولكي تعرف الأجيال القادمة هذا التراث حق المعرفة، وتدرك ما فيه من معان نبيلة وواجبات دقيقة، لم يكتف الصقارون بتشجيع الشباب على تعلم أصول الصقارة من الكبار، بل أنشأوا لهم مدارس في مختلف أنحاء العالم لرفع مستوى الوعي بالصقارة كتراث إنساني مشترك، وكواحد من الفنون التي مارسها البشرية منذ آلاف السنين لتنمية القيم الفاضلة وغرس المبادئ المستدامة.



Por favor, escaneie este código para obter a tradução em português



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إن المبادئ التي تعلمتها في الصغر هي التي جعلت المحافظة على الحياة البرية في أعماق قلبي وعقلي، وهي التي تدفعني اليوم إلى أن أدعو جميع أخوتي الصقارين إلى أن تكون الأجيال القادمة موضع تركيزنا لتتأكد قبل كل شيء من وجود من سيتحمل المسؤولية من بعدنا. وبغير ذلك، فإننا نخطر بلا شك بمكانة الصقارة وبتقاليدها وبقائنها نفسه في المستقبل. وتأكيداً لعزمنا النهوض بواجبنا نحو الشباب ليقوموا بواجبهم في منع اندثار هذا التراث الإنساني المتقرد، فقد اخترنا الشباب محوراً للدورة القادمة لمهرجان الصداقة الدولي للبيزرة الذي تنظمه دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة، والذي سنركز فيه على مدارس وأكاديميات الصقارة الدولية لاستعراض إنجازاتها وتطوير خططها وبرامجها وتقديم الدعم اللازم لمواصلة عطائها من أجل ربط الماضي بالحاضر، والحاضر بالمستقبل.

ماجد علي المنصوري

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主席的话



# A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT

When I noticed an avid young trainee in the Mohammed Bin Zayed Falconry and Desert Physiognomy School in Abu Dhabi, it awoke in me fond memories of the times when I was of the same age. I, too, had been just as determined to continue working day and night to learn and master this art that was, for me, such an important connection both to my homeland and to my parents and grandparents. It was they who had maintained the purity and balance of this ancient tradition that had been passed on down through the successive generations to our present-day falconers.

This school, so far, has succeeded in training more than 300 young falconers. It is gratifying that there are several schools and similar academies in other parts of the world, that also carry out this training of falconry and its principles to our youth and children, along with the more direct role played by federations, clubs and senior falconers.

Despite the emergence of falconry as a favourite hobby of kings, sheikhs and nobles, the sport has rapidly become available to all classes of society, while still maintaining the strict rules and traditions of the training of birds of prey, along with the study of predators, conservation and the sustainable use of



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wildlife resources. Falconry, though its roots are strongly attached to the past, has grown to become a form of hunting eminently suitable for the maintenance of a sustainable planet. It generates renewed passion for the life to be found in the natural world of forests, plains and mountains and bestows an incomparable solution to mankind's quest to balance the demands of the soul and the body.

Falconry has always been and will always be a unique method of hunting in line with ecological balance and where all its components can flourish such as: falconer, falcon, prey, land, water, air, plant, animal and inanimate objects. In order for future generations to learn about this heritage and understand its noble meanings and duties, falconers have not only encouraged young people to learn about the origins of



falconry from adults, but have also established schools around the world to raise awareness of falconry as a heritage common to all us human beings. It is, after all, one of the arts that has been practiced by mankind for thousands of years, one that has led us to develop virtuous values and instill sustainable principles in our way of living.

It is these principles, that I have learned from a very young age, that have made the preservation of wildlife something deep in my heart and mind, and it is today that I call upon all my falconer brothers to be the focus for our sport among our future generations and to make sure, above all, that there will be others following us who will take up the call and the responsibility to carry on our sport after us. Otherwise, there is the risk that falconry and all its traditions will fade away with the passing years.

As a confirmation of our determination to prevent the disappearance of this unique human heritage, we have chosen young people as the focus of the upcoming edition of the International Festival of Falconry, organized by the United Arab Emirates. Our focus will be on international falconry schools and academies, reviewing their achievements, developing their plans and programs and providing the necessary support for them to continue their engagement in connecting the past with the present and the future.

*Majed Ali Al Mansoori*

*President of the International Association for Falconry  
and Conservation of Birds of Prey*

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# *Grouse Hawking 2018.*

*by Mark Upton*

By midsummer 2018, we were getting reports from Scotland and the North of England of very poor grouse numbers due to the unusually hot, dry summer the UK had suffered. It seemed the drought led to insufficient water on the moors at the crucial breeding time, resulting in extremely high losses of young grouse. The grouse chicks not only didn't have enough water but it is critical for them to eat a very large amount of insect protein in the first few weeks of life. The lack of standing water on the moors had been detrimental to insect production too.

I hawk on a moor situated in what is called the "flow country" of Caithness in the far North of Scotland. This country is much flatter than most of Scotland and, most years, is much wetter, most of the ground being bog. It is rather like the arctic tundra. This ground doesn't hold the large grouse numbers that can be found further south, although we usually have enough for hawking. I was hopeful that the usual wetness of this ground would mean that we would be less affected by the drought. Indeed; the decline was probably less pronounced than on the higher density grouse moors but, starting from a lower initial number of grouse, the result was similar and the hawking was to be seriously affected by low numbers. Not only were the numbers lower due to so many chicks being lost, but also, most

of the grouse we did find were old, cunning birds, in ones or twos, which are much harder to fly.

I went to Scotland with two intermewed peregrine tiercels, both with several years' experience, and an eyass peregrine falcon, bred by Mathew Gage. The breeding pair were a falcon of his and my tiercel, the younger of the two tiercels I was flying. Also with me were the most important part of a grouse hawking team: two English pointers. *Giveme*, an eight year old bitch, had been one of the last of Stephen Frank's pointers and was given to me after his death. The other was a young, unmated dog, bred by Stephen Lea, *Cheeky Charlie*. Good grouse hawking is only possible with a very good dog, especially when starting a new hawk. The pointer bitch is very reliable, covering a great deal of ground and, with an excellent nose, is a superb grouse finder. Her only drawback is that she will not flush. Most years, this is not a problem but, with the low grouse numbers, it was going to be a big drawback. I usually manage to flush the grouse by walking in under the waiting-on hawk myself. With few grouse, and with most being singles or pairs, flushing without a dog becomes very difficult. It can work with made, waiting-on, hawks who will patiently wait while you try to flush a bird. For a young bird, who needs prompt, decisive flushes, life becomes very difficult.



Low grouse numbers would also make getting the puppy going very difficult, as he wouldn't get the experience and chances necessary for training him. Pointer puppies in training make lots of mistakes, getting too close to points or not close enough to hold the grouse. If they can get three or four points every time they are run, they quickly learn from experience about different wind conditions and scent. If you can only find a single point for them in a day and they get it wrong, they don't learn much and progress very slowly.

I started to hawk on my present moor in 1998 with my father, Roger Upton, and we hawked there for many years until he was too unwell to continue. The area has a wonderful history of grouse hawking, going back to the Old Hawking Club. John Frost flew the club hawks on the neighbouring ground and is, in fact, buried in a nearby graveyard, where he was laid to rest after succumbing to pneumonia while hawking. Gilbert Blaine and Ken Palmer both flew on nearby moors in the early 20th Century. In the second half of the 20th century, Geoffrey Pollard started hawking the "flow country," followed by Stephen Frank, Roger Upton, Ferrante Pratesi, Fulco Tosti, Umberto Caproni, Christian Saar, Eckhart Schormair, Giles Nortier and Patrick Morel. Sadly, with the slow decline of grouse numbers at the end of the 20th Century, many of these great names left for better moors further south.

Although not starting grouse hawking seriously until 1991, I spent many earlier seasons hawking with my father in Caithness from 1970 onwards. Not only was I taught by him but I spent many days hawking with these other great names. It was both a privilege and a great education. Each had individual styles, all successful and informative to watch. I look back on those days with great fondness and indeed sadness as so many of them are no longer with us. Much of the lovely ground they flew on has been destroyed by misguided and environmentally damaging afforestation, resulting in the disastrous decline in grouse and other bird numbers.

The UK grouse season starts on what is known as the "Glorious Twelfth" of August. I rent the ground and cottage I stay at, by the week, for a four week period. The 12th this year fell on a Sunday, so the season would commence on 13th August. It is an eleven hour drive from my home in the South of England to my hawking ground so, to break the trip, I stayed with a falconry friend in the English/Scottish Borders and so arrived after lunch on Sunday 12th of August. After hawking on the same ground for so many seasons, and being old friends with the owners, the cottage is a much loved old home – an old keeper's cottage with the original kennels for my dogs and an old stone pony stable, converted to a mews. The hawks, dogs and myself are all very





comfortable. A large fenced garden, tidily kept, makes a wonderful weathering ground for the hawks and the dogs can run around loose, being an extra deterrent for unwanted wild peregrines and buzzards.

It was good to arrive the day before starting the season. I put the three falcons out to weather and relax after the long journey, unpacked and prepared things for the first day's hawking. Being a Sunday, I wasn't going to hawk, although in the afternoon I went out onto the moor and flew the hawks to the lure so that they were ready for the following day. They were all quite hungry following the long drive and the two tiercels flew well. I was on my own, so just released them and let them fly around me for a while before showing them the lure. Flying conditions were lovely and I was on a good slope so, being experienced hawks, both waited-on over me, going up well, before I showed them the lure which both came to readily. The young falcon, whom I had named *Estella*, had come to me quite late, being a second clutch falcon. I had to train her quickly and she hadn't been flown loose yet. She had been coming well to the lure on the creance for a few

days but always overshooting it as if she didn't know how to stop. The beauty of Scotland is that there is little to draw off an inexperienced hawk and, although I would have liked to call her to me from someone else's fist for her first flight, I wasn't able to. Fairly confident that she wouldn't go off. I sat her on the wall of an old cemetery, way out on the moor, and walked away from her. When I got well away, I showed her the lure and she came immediately but, like at home, she didn't know how to stop and land on it after she had gained speed. She circled and made several attempts to land and then drifted off up the river valley making height. When well away, she turned to my whistle and returned to the lure, making more height as she came into the wind. I had found a grassy patch, grazed by sheep, to put the lure on and she stooped at it. Whilst coming too fast to land, she was tired now and, after a couple more attempts, landed on it in a very amateurish way. I had been impressed with her flying and was now confident she would come to the lure even if it might take her a while to alight. All I needed now was to find some grouse the next day to give her a chance.





On Monday, after shopping for stores in the morning, I was raring to go. With the usual falconers' optimism, even if reports were bad, I hoped I would find enough grouse to fly. I went on a beat, or area of moor, we call the cemetery beat, because it is close to the old cemetery. This is close to the remains of a village, abandoned during the Highland Clearances of the mid 18th Century, when the landowners pushed the local Scots off the land to make way for sheep farming. The cemetery has a white painted stone wall around it, making it a great landmark on much of the moor. Once out on the hill, my optimism took a hit; the ground had been ravaged by heather beetle. These lay their eggs in the heather and their larvae eat the stalks, destroying the heather and leaving it a horrible rusty colour. Red grouse must have heather to live on and so this damage was going to have a bad effect both on their food supply and on my season. Luckily, after a few years it grows back again and so the ground can recover. After quite a long walk, the old pointer bitch came on to a point. I flew *Pip*, the younger of the two tiercels, whom I had bred in 2014. He is a big strong tiercel, very handsome, and his parents were both good grouse hawks. It was a nice slope to fly on and he went up to a lovely pitch for his first flight since last September. Unfortunately, *Giveme* lost the point and I couldn't re-find it so I had to take *Pip* down to the lure. I was still pleased with the flight because he had waited-on beautifully for a long time while we tried to find the grouse. Being alone, I was unable to take the hawks out on the cadge as I couldn't risk leaving hawks on the ground whilst flying one of them. There are eagles around in this country and a couple of hawks on a cadge would be easy food if I had to go off a bit during a flight. I therefore had a longish walk back to the car for *Up*, the older tiercel. Bred and trained by me, *Up* had been flown for a few seasons by Fulco Tosti, taking a lot of grouse on better ground than mine, until Fulco retired from hawking. He is a fine high mounting tiercel, although a little small for grouse, especially when a big cock grouse gets up. After another long walk, *Giveme* came on point and I flew the tiercel, when a pair of old grouse got up almost immediately a little away from the point. The tiercel chased them a little way before giving up, not being fit yet. Stupidly, I thought these were the grouse from the point and so didn't get the tiercel up over the point when he came back. Two more old grouse flushed from the point and he had another chase.



I went back to the car to get *Estella*, found a point quite quickly on a nice slope and flew the falcon, who immediately made height, but not enough, over me. Having never had anything flushed for her before, she wasn't attentive enough and didn't see the single grouse which flushed wide of the point. It was a typical first day of the season, when things didn't go quite right. The hawks and dogs needed to get back into the routine of things after 10 months of no hawking. I was pleased with how they had all flown but depressed with the state of the moor and the few grouse I had seen. It was going to be a hard season, and I was going to struggle to get the young hawk going. Luckily, the two tiercels had had enough good seasons to not be affected and, if necessary, I could ground them and concentrate on getting *Estella* going.

The second day, I went out on a further beat which is usually my best ground; vast vistas of rolling moorland with not a house, tree or fence for miles. Soon after I got out on the ground, the working pointer was chased by five arctic skuas; an ominous sign as there had



to be a nest nearby and they are extremely aggressive to the peregrines. They don't usually hurt the falcon but so intimidate it with their superb flying and stooping that the hawk is prevented from waiting on, ruining the flight. After a while, they gave up and left the dog and I went a long way further out onto the ground before working her again, in the hope they wouldn't come up. *Giveme* found a nice point and I flew *Pip*, who was just going up nicely when up came the skuas again. He tried hard to defend himself, rolling on his back in the air to protect himself from their attacks, but five adversaries were too many for him and they put him onto the ground, where I had to run to him to stop their attacks. I don't think they actually hit him but they were very close and, while defending himself, he had broken two tail feathers on the thick heather stalks. I decided that it was impossible to fly here and, returning to the car, drove to the other side of the valley and started out again. I had a very long walk and the dog, being unfit, was beginning to tire so I turned for home. On the

way back, I got a point and flew *Estella*. She went up to a good pitch for a beginner but too far downwind. She saw the grouse flush and we had a long hard chase with her coming back high. In a good grouse year, in the early season, there would often now be another grouse at the point to flush. When a young bird comes back high, this is always a great lesson. Unfortunately, it wasn't to be this year. This was the only grouse I saw that afternoon and so *Up* didn't get a flight. The skuas were going to be a further problem on top of low grouse numbers: being protected in the UK there is little that can be done about them. They usually move off the moors to the coast by the beginning of September. In the meantime, my best ground was going to be very difficult to fly on.

The next few days went quite well, although the hawks often flew without anything being flushed for them. I was immensely pleased with *Estella*, who had learnt very quickly and was waiting on beautifully. *Up* had had a kill and *Pip* a good knock down. I had a few





days with guests out and my family had arrived to stay for a while, which meant I could carry a cadge and get further out onto the moor with their help. The moor I fly on is vast but has very few tracks onto it, so most of it is only accessible by long walks. Taking the flying hawks with me, rather than leaving them in the car, is thus much more practical.

I had a disastrous day, however, when I tried my best beat again. I had a nice point, where I had seen one of the few coveys of grouse there were. I tried *Estella* as she badly needed a covey to flush rather than an old single grouse which were beating her. She started to wait-on nicely when a skua came and attacked her. It was a single one, which meant she could cope with it fairly well, but evading it took her attention away: she drifted off on the wind and I lost sight of her. Luckily, I had a GPS on her and was able to stay still and track her as she went in a huge half circle around me, a couple of miles away. Eventually, she came back into sight, still flying with the skua. After a while, she managed to evade it enough to come into the lure. I was relieved to get her back and didn't think that much more about it until the next day. When I flew her the next day, she wouldn't leave the fist. I eventually tried to throw her off and she sat on the ground at my feet, refusing to fly. Obviously the skua had frightened her much more than I had expected. I had only had a peregrine behave like this once before, following an eagle attack, never after a skua. This really put me back because it took another week of flying before she got her confidence back enough to wait-on again. This was a real blow, it being the optimum time to get her first kill, when there was still the chance of finding a youngish grouse for her.

With the family with me, things had become a little easier as far as getting out on the moor was concerned as I could take the cadge or my wife would carry a second hawk for me. We were a little handicapped, though, by two young children who enjoyed the flying but not the walking. I also like to spend some time doing things with the family, while they are with me, which limits time on the moor. For all that, it is wonderful having the children out and seeing their faces when we have an exciting flight. They love coming up to the kill and watching the hawk enjoy its reward. I also take out quite a few guests from the estate, including the landowner's family who are old friends. Falconry isn't just about our own enjoyment and getting flights; it is also about



showing others our sport and encouraging youngsters. Nothing endorses our art more than showing falconry in the best light and achieving this entails spending time talking to people. This means not going so far and getting as many flights as I would on my own, but it is a worthwhile sacrifice.

By the end of August, all the hawks were getting fit and we were having some tremendous, high flights. *Estella* had got over her skua attack and was going up nicely, although not in a good enough position yet. I had only killed a couple of grouse each with both the old tiercels and not yet entered the young falcon, which was depressing. The two tiercels would normally have had seven or eight kills by now and the lack of kills was entirely down to lack of grouse. In fact, I was surprised with how well the hawks were going, considering that they were getting a lot of bad serves. Most points were on singles or pairs of old grouse and, on a moor where they see wild hawks most days, they know every evasion tactic there is. They do everything they can not to be flushed in the first place. They will run and run through the heather, trying to evade the dog and falconer and often, when we did eventually flush them, they would get up very wide and go away into the wind. The hawks were compensating for this by waiting-on high and patiently, sometimes for up to ten minutes while we tried to flush. Even then, the grouse would often jump when the hawk had taken a wide turn downwind.



Towards the end of August, James Pollard, a very old friend of mine and son of Geoffrey Pollard of grouse hawking fame, arrived in Scotland. Not flying a hawk of his own at the moment, he still comes up for the grouse hawking and has days with various falconry friends. We were brought up hawking together and James knows everything there is to know about grouse hawking, so is a great help and a pleasure to take out on the hill. James came out regularly with me this season. Another falconry friend, who had lived in Caithness as a boy and carried the cadge for my father in the 1970s, also came up with his daughter and enjoyed a day with us. On this day, the weather was nice but very windy. We tried the ground where the skuas had been. Luckily, they seemed to have moved off and did not bother us. We quickly found a point and I flew *Estella*, who had by now got over her skua attack. She got up quite nicely, although she found it difficult to hold a decent position in the wind, due to inexperience. A grouse got up wide and she was beaten. *Pip* was waiting on nicely, when he saw something away down the valley and disappeared after it. When he came back, we couldn't find a grouse to flush for him. *Up* flew beautifully in the strong wind

but we were unable to flush a grouse for him. After I took him down, a grouse went away from the point.

As September went on, the two old tiercels were really beginning to perform and, although we still were not putting enough grouse in the bag, we were seeing flying of the highest quality. Both were flying good pitches of between 500 and 1,000 ft, according to the GPS, and on the rare days we were able to give them a decent serve, they were usually killing. The old opinion that tiercels are too small for grouse and can't kill them outright was proven wrong on most occasions. Even *Up*, the smaller of the two tiercels, usually only needed one strike. Lots of reflushes are not good sport and, in fact, I only ever follow a grouse up if I think it is badly injured and shouldn't be left out. I find this makes the hawks more determined to kill the grouse on the first flush.

Although the tiercels are closely related, they fly quite differently. Both have similar wing beats and make height very quickly, which is important on our ground as the grouse will flush too soon if the hawk doesn't immediately get over them. *Up* is very flamboyant and enthusiastic, going up in tight circles, often a little







downwind of me, then putting on more height as he powers forward over the point. Having had lots of kills in the past, he is extremely quick into his stoop, clever at keeping with a twisting grouse and is a good footer. For a small tiercel, he is very confident. *Pip* is much bigger and uses a lot of sky to go up, taking great big turns, usually upwind of me. This is always good because, even if the grouse flush early, he is in a good position to take them on. I started *Pip* five years ago in another bad grouse year and he hasn't had a really good season yet, so he lacks a bit in confidence, although he is improving with every kill.

There are two other grouse hawking parties near where I fly. Matt Gage and friends were on the moor next door and Philippe Justeau nearby. Most seasons, we have a few joint days on each other's ground, which is always enjoyable. It is nice to see other falconers' hawks fly and share successes. Matt is now flying a couple of hawks with my bloodlines so it is especially enjoyable to see them go. This year, because of the low grouse numbers, we decided it was no good trying to hawk together as it would mean some hawks wouldn't get a chance of a flight. Although not able to fly together, we were still able to socialise and had some

lovely evenings together at each others' houses. On top of this, James Pollard organises an annual falconers' get-together in Caithness, where falconers, friends, keepers and landowners join each other for a meal. We had a great feast at the Ulbster Arms Hotel in Halkirk, a sporting hotel which many falconers have used over the ages. This year, we were also joined by two new parties hawking in Caithness, from England and Spain. A great evening was had commiserating with each other about the difficulties of the lack of grouse, talking about how the hawks and dogs were going and the good old days in Caithness.

Another evening, James Pollard and I drove two hours south to join other falconry friends at a dinner organised by Frits Kleyn. Frits has cooked an annual dinner for the falconers in Scotland for the last 25 years or more and it has become tradition. Again, it was good to see the other falconers and hear about their sport. Usually, further south, they have higher grouse densities and more opportunities of flights, although the ground is more hilly. Sadly, this season they were struggling as much as we were in the north. For my last week's hawking, an old friend of my father's and mine, Lance Gibson, came to stay with me. Lance used to help us

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with good dogs for the hawking but unfortunately now doesn't have a dog. It was still very nice to have him up hawking, because, like James Pollard, he knows all about the sport and is a great help. This week, we were able to get right out to the furthest parts of the moor. Here, we found much better grouse numbers, some in coveys. Being very wet ground, I think they were able to survive the drought better than elsewhere. I had some truly lovely days together with Lance and James. *Giveme* worked well, the hawks flew beautifully and we had a few more kills. *Estella* was now flying really nicely and was very unlucky not to kill her first grouse. In this week, she had much better opportunities and managed to put a few grouse on the ground, taking feathers from one or two. Although extremely disappointing not to enter her, she has the makings of a good grouse hawk and hopefully, next season, we will have more grouse and will get her going.

My last day was a beautiful day, with a wind that was probably a little too strong for good flying. I decided not to fly *Up*, who had had a beautiful kill the day before from a classic pitch. Here is the day's entry from my hawking diary:

*Weather:* Sunny with very strong WNW wind calming

*Pointers:* *Giveme*

*Guests:* James Pollard

*Giveme found a point as soon as we let her run. I flew Estella who got up reasonably but I couldn't flush immediately. When they did go, she had lost some height but still had a little stoop, putting the old bird on the ground and then chasing it out of sight. She came back but there was nothing else there.*

*Giveme found another point before going too far and I flew Pip, who was going up very nicely, a long way up wind where there was some lift, when a single grouse went on its own. There was nothing else there so I took him down.*

*Then went quite a way before Giveme came on point. A single old bird went on its own and then Giveme worked on and came back on point so I flew Estella thinking there would be more there. There was nothing. I ran on, in the hope of finding more, as we were near where we had seen grouse yesterday. After a long long search, Giveme came on point. Unfortunately, as I ran down, I flushed a single bird which Estella chased out of sight. She didn't reappear and I was hopeful she might have caught it. Then, she did reappear and I put Giveme back into the point. A huge covey went before she was all the way back and she chased right across the valley after one and put it in but didn't get it.*

*We started for home and found a nice point and I flew Pip again. He went to a very nice pitch and very exact. A covey flushed and he bound to one easily.*







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When I was asked by Dick ten Bosch to write an article about my 2018 grouse season, I was slightly embarrassed, thinking; how do I write about such an appalling season with so few kills? I asked whether he minded an article about a bad season to illustrate how hawking isn't always the success we tend to think it is. We often read, in journals and magazines, about the great successes in falconry but, as we all know, not all hawking is good all the time. I won't put my exact score because my father, Stephen Frank and other falconry friends always thought it poor practice to talk about scores and I have followed this example. Hawking shouldn't get competitive. Needless to say, my father, Stephen Frank, Geoffrey Pollard and others all caught

thousands of grouse in their careers, something the present generation will never have the chance to do because we don't have the same opportunities. I made a very low score this season due to the conditions but know that, with the same team of hawks in earlier seasons on the same ground, I would have taken between 25 and 50 brace. All is determined by country and quarry numbers. This is why it is vital for falconers and the IAF to undertake environmental and conservation work to help quarry numbers around the world. We have done fantastic things with raptor conservation and now have no problem getting top quality hawks to fly. That is of little use if we have no quarry to fly them at.

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MARK UPTON

is the son of Roger Upton, the well known British falconer. Practicing falconry since childhood, he has many years' experience with longwings, mainly flying peregrines at red grouse in Scotland.

From an early age, Mark accompanied his father on many trips to the Middle East and has been lucky enough to regularly join Arab friends on houbara hawking trips in the deserts.

For many years, Mark has sat on the committee of the British Falconers' Club, served as British IAF representative for the last six years and been an IAF board member for the last three, recently becoming Executive Secretary. With a great interest in falconry's heritage, Mark founded the British Archives of Falconry and sits on the Falconry Heritage Trust's board.

As well as being a falconer, Mark is a professional artist, well known in the falconry world for his paintings of hawks and hawking.

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# *The 2018 Grouse Season in Scotland*

*by Xavier Morel*

2018 was a beautiful, diverse and very busy hunting season: I spent 3 weeks in September hunting grouse in Scotland. In October, we went to the BFC, Woodhall Spa meeting in the UK and to the IAF meeting in Germany, organised by the DFO. The month of November was spent in Ireland for snipe hawking, which included a couple of great field meets and, as always, spending an incredibly nice time with our Irish friends. In December I went to the French Champagne

region to hunt partridge and after Christmas we went to Spain for 3 weeks. We finished the season at the end of January with the ANFA meeting close to Montargis in France.

In September, I was lucky to go on a moor in Scotland by kind invitation of Suzanne and Alan Van Vynck. I was joined there by my girlfriend Kelly Van Looy, my friends Damien Vasserot Merle, Gilles Lafosse and his wife Brigou, and some people invited by Alan:



Leigh Wakeman, who was present for all the stay, and Terry Simmons and Douglas McKenzie who spent some days with us.

I mainly flew my 2015 tiercel peregrine *UFO* and some days my *minor* female *Victoria*, who proved to be rather irregular in her flights; flying very well one day and doing nothing at all the next one. Kelly brought her saker *Dolf* but the grouse were too scarce to give him a decent chance so he only had three or four slips on grouse during the three weeks' stay. Kelly was discovering Scotland and was totally charmed by the pure falconry in difficult conditions in the midst of amazing scenery. Alan was flying two peregrine falcons and a  $\frac{3}{4}$  gyr-peregrine tiercel. Gilles was flying two peregrine tiercels and Damien was flying his Barbary falcon. Terry was flying a peregrine-prairie falcon, Leigh a gyr-peregrine-saker tribred and Douglas a couple of gyr-peregrines.



Host Sue  
and Alan  
Van Vynck:  
Woodhall Spa

The Dell Estate is a nice mountain moor, close to Whitebridge, nearly at the end of Loch Ness. The moor is rather tough, with big slopes that require one to be fit, especially if you want to follow the dynamic pace of Alan! The dogs used were Alan's famous *Whitmore*, Damien's pointer *GB*, Gilles' English setter *Gaz*, my pointer cross *Hutch* and Douglas's pointer *Midge*. We had a great stay on a difficult moor where, unfortunately, the grouse





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Ufo taking  
a break



were rather scarce, hard to find and difficult to hunt. A combination of circumstances (a long hard winter, a wet spring and a dry hot summer) ensured that the grouse breeding season had been catastrophic with most shooting days around Inverness and across Scotland being cancelled.

We saw almost no coveys, and most flights were at single adult grouse which knew perfectly how to elude our falcons; bailing on the ground at the last moment, doing a sharp turn just before being hit, or, after having been hit, flying strongly away. It was hard sport. In fact it was so challenging that we enjoyed the successful flights even more than we would have had had there been an abundance of coveys, because every

grouse bagged was earned the hard way, both for the falcon as for the falconer. The fitness level of the adult mature grouse was amazing. After having eluded the falcon or even after having been hit, they were still capable of flying over a hill of 200-300 metres' height, right from the bottom of the valley with incredible strength, leaving the falcon behind like a racing car would do with a small city car. In particular, those experienced tough grouse are a proper challenge for a tiercel peregrine and the flight really has to be perfect in order to get even close to a kill.

To illustrate the difficulty; in an average season Alan catches between 35 and 40 grouse. In this season only seven or eight (if I remember correctly) were taken by







Alan Van Vynck –  
Leigh Wakeman  
on grouse

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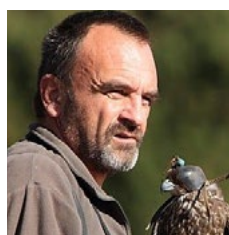


his falcons. His flights were spectacular with his very experienced birds always in position and keen to attack. Terry managed to kill a grouse in nice style and Lee went home very happy after having managed to ground a grouse from a nice pitch after several unsuccessful attacks. Doug was not so fortunate. Damien and Gilles Lafosse also had flights in very nice style and at incredible pitches but did not manage to bring any grouse home. *Ufo* killed only one in a spectacular, clean hit but narrowly failed to kill at least eight more because he did not hit them hard enough and the grouse managed to fly away. It seems to me that as he is used to hunting partridge mainly this has an influence on the way he was hitting grouse. He would have needed a couple of weeks to get used to this new game, the new landscape and the weather conditions. He also completely missed some grouse that were waiting until the very last moment before bailing or making a sharp turn, although he is very experienced at hunting snipe and other elusive game. He is a dependable bird, nearly always in place at pitches of between 150 and 250 metres' height.

The dogs did a good job, with a special mention for Alan's dog *Whitmore* who was 100% reliable, clever and astute, as only a crossbreed can be. Doug's pointer *Midge* was also working nicely. I was happily surprised by the work of my pointer, *Hutch*, who had become a reliable and clever dog. Unfortunately, this would be his last season as a back problem would subsequently condemn him to retirement at the end of the season. The weather was... well, Scottish! We had some nice days but most of them were a mixture of heavy rain showers and strong or very strong winds. Once the

falcons had learned to use the lift which is always present on those steep slopes, wind was rather an ally instead of a problem. On some days, Alan and I were flying in stormy conditions when the wind was so strong that it was difficult for us to stay on our feet.

The atmosphere of grouse hawking in Scotland is truly special; the landscape is stunning, the game is beautiful, the weather conditions are extreme and flying in good company strengthens friendships. It is a must for any longwinger to experience this at least once in his lifetime. Sue was a true mom to all of us, cooking every evening for the whole group and producing a huge amount of excellent food. Thank you, Sue; we truly felt at home and welcome. The kindness of our hosts was beyond all expectations and we hope to repeat the experience this year, provided Brexit allows us to travel with our birds. We had an incredible stay and I wish to thank again Sue and Alan for their wonderful hospitality.



XAVIER  
MOREL

Xavier started falconry in 1979 at the age of 13, under the tutelage of his brother Patrick Morel, the former IAF president. He flew goshawks for the first 10 years and then switched over to longwings. He has practiced falconry in most European countries as well as in Morocco and has worked as a professional falconer. Xavier is currently sales manager for Micro Sensory GPS Telemetry Systems, which he helped to develop.



Fig. 1



## CURRENT STATUS OF THE NORTHERN GOSHAWK IN JAPAN: NO LONGER AN ENDANGERED SPECIES

*by Kei-ya Nakajima, Ph.D.*

The northern goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis fujiyamae*) is the archetypal hawk of traditional Japanese falconry (Fig. 1). Wild goshawks were provided for falconry under an official system for the ruling class until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, after which social changes led to the sport's decline. Wild goshawks, along with other traditional falconry birds (Eurasian sparrowhawk and peregrine falcon), were included among species listed under the Protection and Control of Wild Birds and Mammals and Hunting Management Law. Keeping wild birds of prey was prohibited, except for purposes related to conservation under permission of the prefectural government.

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, following World War II, Japan achieved remarkable economic development, but this resulted in destruction of nature. Populations of raptors, indicators of ecosystems' health, unfortunately decreased as a result of this situation. This included goshawks in forested or open-field habitats close to urban and industrial areas. In 1991, the Japanese government's Ministry of the Environment (MoE) released the first edition of a Red List for Japanese

birds, which categorised a total of fourteen raptor species as endangered species. Traditional falconry birds were also included in the Red List. In 1993, the Act on Conservation of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora was enforced to prevent the loss of Japanese wildlife, covering a total of ten raptor species from the list of endangered species. The goshawk and peregrine falcon were included in the list for this Act. Policy based upon the Act promoted conservation measures and programmes, and reinforced the law's strong prohibition on keeping raptors for personal use.

The MoE's Red List for birds was revised in 1998, 2006, 2012, 2018 and 2019, adapting to conservation-related changes in the status of included species. Unfortunately, a remote island's subspecies of common buzzard (*Buteo buteo oshiroi*) became categorised as extinct in the edition of 2012. A peregrine subspecies endemic to other islands (*Falco peregrinus furuitii*) was also classified as extinct in the 2018 edition by virtue of the fact there had been no records of live birds since 1937. Both extinct species were removed from the list for the Act. However, the northern goshawk's status

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improved and, in September 2017, the MoE announced that it had been removed from the list for the Act. This was the first recognised case of an increase in the population of an endangered species, rather than extinction. Since it is still protected by the law, though no longer endangered, Japanese falconers cannot fly the native goshawk. Most may be satisfied flying imported hawks or their offspring, although this is not traditional falconry, in which wild passage hawks were trapped, trained and then rereleased after the hawking season. Despite this, the goshawk's new status is good news: a first step towards the final goal of re-establishing falconers' access under suitable official sanction, as in the past. To this end, Japanese falconers must strive to develop a strong understanding between falconry and conservation.



Release of a recovered hawk after medical treatment and rehabilitation



KEIYA  
NAKAJIMA

A falconer engaged in the conservation of wild birds of prey using falconry techniques and the preservation of traditional-style falconry in Japan, Keiya's first trained hawk was a northern goshawk he acquired in 1979 when just 11 years old. He also has experience of flying Eurasian sparrowhawks and peregrines. As well as being IAF's Vice President for Asia, he is Managing Director of The Japan Falconiformes Center and an overseas member of the British Falconers' Club, Deutscher Falkenorden and North American Falconers' Association.



# Adored by Swedish Royalty: The Falconry Art of Flemish Painter Joris Hoefnagel

by Ellen Hagen,  
IAF WWG contact Norway,  
Museum of Archaeology University of Stavanger.

In 1866, the National Museum of Sweden acquired five portraits of trained hawks from the Royal Swedish Museum Collection. These paintings, all by Flemish artist Joris Hoefnagel (1542-1601), provide naturalistic and detailed representations of the hawks and their equipment. The painting '*Goshawk, from behind*' distinguishes itself from the other four paintings in style, being stricter in its composition, and it might, therefore, be the oldest of the paintings. The background is a soft cornflower blue tone and, together with the greyness of the goshawk, it

appears a calm painting. The eyes are very intense, as goshawk eyes are; however, the face is very muscular and linear as a contrast to the rest of the tranquil body.

The other four paintings are more alike in style and must have been painted around the same time. The birds here, peregrines and goshawks, are more relaxed in their facial expression and overall posture, and not as 'perfectly' posed as the goshawk with the blue background with its straight and accurate folded



wings. The paintings are called '*Young peregrine*', '*Old peregrine*' and, simply, '*Goshawk, from the front*', and '*Goshawk, from the back*'. The angles here, of the perches or the hawks' bodies, gives a perspective that invites the eye further into the painting, almost as if the birds themselves are present, creating a realistic feeling as if the viewer is within the room. This is a technique for which Hoefnagel became famous in the Netherlands. The falconry furniture is beautifully captured in detail and presentation: the jesses, the bells, the pink

detailed hood and the knots of the leash. In all of these four paintings is a tiny, checkered, white and blue heraldry pattern signifying the House of Wittelsbach, a Royal European Family. Charles X Gustav of Sweden was a Wittelsbach and ruled there from 1654. It is possible that his father commissioned these paintings, and that Charles brought them to Sweden where they still remain. The paintings can be accessed at [www.nationalmuseum.se](http://www.nationalmuseum.se).



ELLEN  
HAGEN

Ellen Hagen, from Norway, commenced her falconry experience in England in 2013 and has certified training after UK standards. As falconry is forbidden in Norway, she travels regularly to practice and learn different styles of hawking. Ellen is a museum educator with the University of Stavanger's Archaeological Museum and works on falconry awareness through heritage in relation to Viking Age history. Contact info: [Ellen.hagen@uis.no](mailto:Ellen.hagen@uis.no)

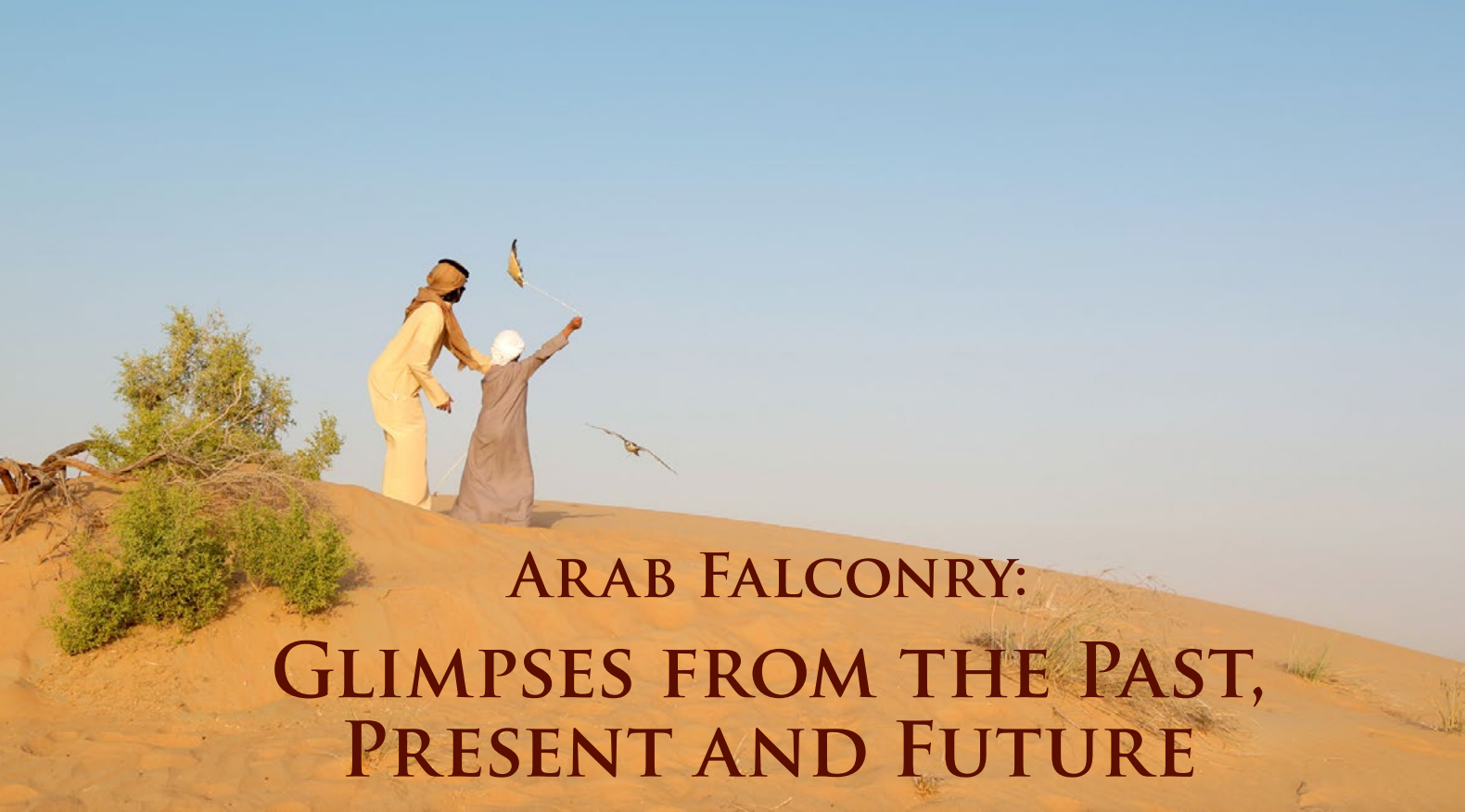




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## ARAB FALCONRY: GLIMPSES FROM THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

The Arab falconer is in love with birds of prey and, over generations, he has learned the art of taming, domesticating and working with them. Moreover, he enjoys their company and walks the earth with them, pursuing distinctive elusive quarries. One might therefore wonder about the motive that drives the falconer to master these difficult arts; to cover these long distances in rugged areas merely to acquire a limited number of flights.

Historically, Arab falconry was linked to the arrival of birds during seasonal migrations and the resultant increased numbers of local populations. This heritage survives thanks to the efforts of falconers to preserve the sustainable principles of hunting, in spite of changes to many aspects of life that have spread throughout the vast deserts of the Arabian Peninsula.

Although falconry is now a recognised cultural heritage worldwide, the Arab region in particular has one of the most ancient falconry schools in the world, which we now call “Arab Falconry.” As hawking is the term used to refer to hunting by means of a hawk or an accipiter, so falconry specifically refers to hunting with many types of falcons, the most famous of which are the *hurr* (saker), *shaheen* (peregrine) and gyrfalcon.

Some accounts relevant to the Kingdom of Kinda’s reign, which spanned from the second century BC to the seventh century AD, point out that the first Arab to practice falconry was King Al-Harith Al-Akbar bin Muawiyah Bin Thor Al Kindi. This king once saw

a hunter set a trap for small birds, enticing a passing falcon to attack one of them. As it began to eat its prey, the falcon fell into the trap. Al-Harith ordered its capture and proceeded to train it.

The Arabs excelled in capturing “passage” falcons while they flew in the region’s skies, then training, taming, domesticating and releasing them at the end of the hunting season so they may return to their usual habitat. There is no doubt that training birds of prey is not easy: it is a daunting task that needs knowledge, experience and significant patience. Finally, the falcon becomes placid, stable and indeed affectionate, like a pampered child, with the falconer if he has succeeded in training it and dealt sensibly with its psychological and emotional ups and downs.

Arab falconers have their own unique tools used by their colleagues around the world in hunting and falconry. The most important tools are as follows:

- The *burqa* (hood) is a soft mask, placed over the falcon’s head to pacify it, and removed when the falcon is allowed to chase the appropriate quarry.
- The *sabuq* (jess) is a two-part restraining strap that is tied, at one end, to the falcon’s legs while the other end is fixed to the leash, which is, in turn, tied to the block or to the falconer’s glove.
- The *wakr* (block) is the falcon’s perch, made from a metal shank, covered with decorated wood with a cylindrical top. The top is stuffed with soft straw and covered with velvet or soft fine leather to



facilitate the falcon's comfort when standing on it for a long time.

- The *mangala* (Arab cuff) and *gauntlet* (glove with a long cuff) are the falconer's protection against the falcon's claws and upon which the falconer carries the falcon.

- The *tilwah* (lure) is an object made from the wings of *houbara* bustard (*Chlamydotis undulata*) which is used for training the falcon.

- The *mukala* (falconer's bag) is an open-topped bag or sack that has a belt to be carried under the armpit. This contains the falcon's food and any accessories which the falconer may need in hunting or caring for the falcon.

Arab falconry is unique in itself, being characterised by an unparalleled tradition of enjoying pure wilderness, spiritual sport and living in, and as part of, unspoiled nature. Falconry was not merely a means of sustenance, but also an ancient heritage associated with kings and princes and their need to practice overcoming challenges and hardships, learning to bear many burdens. This heritage has extended to include various segments of society while maintaining the same decent values that stemmed from a love of nature, preservation of resources and animal welfare.

In essence, Arab falconry is a fully-fledged school to acquire experience and knowledge of places, trends, species and environments; to develop personal capacity for patience, triumph over adversities, difficulties and

natural conditions during hunting trips, which are distinguished by a mixture of pleasure and hardships.

Hunting trips also enable a new generation of falconers to share and acquire their ancestors' experiences, skills and rich knowledge about wildlife, flora, fauna, sites and trends. Falconry allows them to acquire distinctive morals in dealing respectfully with adults and children alike, and gently with falcons, quarry species and general wildlife.

Arab falconry has been, and continues to be, an incentive to protect natural habitats and preserve birds of prey and quarry species, for their survival, prosperity and healthy numbers are essential to sustain this heritage for future generations. No wonder, then, that Arab falconers are pioneers in the sustainable use of natural resources, the establishment of reserves with archaeological and cultural components and the protection of endangered species. Moreover, Arab falconers have excelled in utilising modern technologies to protect endangered falcons, facilitating the domestic breeding of key species trained for falconry in order to relieve pressure on wild populations. Falconers have also developed the captive breeding of quarry species for release into wild habitats, relocating these in accordance with recognised scientific standards that prevent the genetic modification of wild populations.

Various studies have been conducted on the connection between Arabs, hunting and falcons, especially by Western researchers. The best known







are books by Mark Allen, *Falconry in Arabia*, and by falconer Roger Upton: *Arab Falconry: History of a Way of Life*. In his treatise, Roger Upton stated: “With the advancement of civilisation and urbanisation in the Gulf region, the role of falconry as a source of quarries and food has declined and [it has] transformed into one of the most important traditional sports associated with the values of nature conservation, sustainable hunting, and the spirit of friendship between the falconers.”

Moreover, hunting trips have been associated with a social spirit as they always include a homogeneous and diverse group of people: poets, storytellers, scientists and rulers. They facilitate interaction between varied areas of knowledge and expertise, helping to strengthen

links between segments of society, especially between rulers and people, elders and youth. Hunting trips also represent a platform in which various social and political problems are discussed. The late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan said in his introduction to falconry: “This mixture of people with one another and with their ruler, whether a king, governor, or emir, and their daily living, eating, drinking and moving together everywhere . . . enables each member of the group to speak freely and express his ideas and thoughts without limits or restrictions, allowing the official to recognise his people’s wishes, realise their inner feelings, and understand the truth of their views, leading to reform initiatives of the people’s affairs with a deep knowledge and understanding of the people’s conditions.”

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主席的话







## The 2018 Hawking Season at the House of Grouse

by Steve Chindgren

This season I am flying three gyr/peregrine tiercels: *Zander* in his 12<sup>th</sup> season, *DC* in his sixth season and *Badger* who is two years old. During the moult, the birds are all kept on wall perches and put out each morning in the weathering yard, where they are fed and housed until sunset, at which time they are put back in the mews. They stay tame this way, although it is a lot more work than free lofting.

I began conditioning all three tiercels by flying them to a drone on August 15th. For those of you who are not familiar with this new conditioning tool, it works like this: a pigeon wing and breast or quail is attached to a twenty foot length of string, attaching the other end to a parachute that is tucked into a tube, connected to the drone. The drone is taken to the desired height, depending on the strength and condition of the falcon, taking the drone higher each day until the bird is in top condition. I feel my bird is getting in shape when it can climb 2,000 feet. In a few weeks they are fit and ready for sage grouse.

*Badger*, coming through his first moult was the slowest and still had his #1 primaries to drop. The nice thing about droning is that the birds will fly to the drone at a very high weight, allowing *Badger* to finish the moult while flying him to the drone. I no longer think it is necessary to wait for my birds to drop all their feathers as they continue to moult fine while getting them in shape with this method. The other nice thing about droning is; it keeps birds from picking up any bad habits, like landing until they are fit and ready to

start hawking. My birds love flying to it! It is my belief that the act of flying to a drone and stealing food from it is a natural behaviour for the falcon, just as adult falcons teach their young to pursue them by carrying prey in their feet.

I have two English pointers, *TJ* who is twelve and *Scotch*, a young dog who is now three. *TJ* has always run big and is great at locating grouse! I worried that, at his age, I would see him starting to slow down; not so, he performed very well. To save on the miles I run him,

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*Zander*







Steve and TJ

experience. This worked great, and *Scotch* continued to develop nicely.

Not many visitors come in early September as most falconers are slow to get their birds going. The gunning season for sage grouse opens in the middle of September and is a dangerous time to fly, especially on the weekends when the hunters can get out to shoot. A high-flying falcon can see grouse being flushed over a mile away and may wait on over other hunting parties. September was quiet this season and no falconers showed up until October. In September, the mornings are cold and crisp, around 32 degrees Fahrenheit, with the grouse easy to locate as they go to water every morning to drink. They drink in the dark and, as soon as it is light enough to see, they fly off into the sage. Running the dog near a spring will usually produce a point.

I always wondered why in the fall I find hens and seldom see the males which are twice as large as the hens. In the grouse population, hens outnumber males by approximately three to one. I'm quite sure that the number of females and males are even at hatch. As the chicks grow, the males develop slower because they are so much larger and, if predation occurs on the brood, it is more likely to be a male taken, as they are slow and less agile. Meaning; by the time the brood is full grown,

I use him to locate a point then call him off and put the old boy in the truck. I then would put up my falcon and, once it had pitch, I would have the young pointer relocate the grouse. Knowing that *TJ* won't last forever, it was better to get the young dog some actual hawking





most of the males are gone, with adult males staying together in groups and seldom mixing with broods.

Sage grouse are easier in the fall, as are all game birds. The nice part is that they hold well to the pointing dogs and flush clean, staying in the air for a direct flight, taking a good hit to bring them down. The tiercels all fly great in the early season. I alternate the hawks, only hunting one bird a day and exercising the others to the drone; this keeps them flying high and not getting overly focused on hunting. In my younger years it was important to take a grouse every day, but now I am more focused on a good pitch and a quality flight. A bird that is flown hard every day over the pointer will usually settle in a pitch of around 600-700 feet. This is a good game pitch, but I enjoy trying to improve the pitch to over 1,000 feet. The conditions for soaring do not exist in the early morning. Sure, it would be nice to be able to go out later, say at 11am, and let the birds take big pitches, but the eagles would make short work of them.

My first visitor was my good friend Gary Boberg from San Diego, California, who arrived on October 1st, as the shooting season ended. He was also flying a gyr/peregrine tiercel, a brother to my young tiercel,



both bred by Vince Piccioni. We enjoyed many flights and some great fishing! On October 7th, more friends arrived: Eloy Carlin from New Mexico, Dave Cherry from California, Mark Waller from Oklahoma and Glenn Conlen and Dave Salem from California. It was a great week sharing time with old friends and





enjoying the beauty of the high sage desert. Often, other falconers in the area stop by to socialise and it was a treat to see Anatoly Tokar and his wife Tonya, who are originally from the Ukraine and now live in New York.

September and October are my favourite months and the weather is favourable for many outdoor activities. Gary and I hawked together for three weeks. Kanako Takakura came to visit from Japan; at home she flies a gyr/merlin. It was a pleasure to meet her and go hawking. She only stayed two days, and we did manage to catch a grouse during her visit! It is always nice to see old friends. Frank Metallo from Illinois always make a fall trip to hawk grouse and, following him, was another falconer Andrzej Opacian, originally from Poland and now living in Illinois. Because his name is hard to pronounce, everyone just calls him Andy O. Andy stayed for a week and we enjoyed hawking together. He had a beautiful white jerkin that he got from the late Dr. Bob Cook, who was lost in a tragic airplane crash. Andy is not only a skilled falconer; he is a great handyman able to fix and repair almost anything! Adding cooking to his list of skills makes Andy O a welcome guest!

The winter set in early in November and, late in the month, I had a visitor from Kuwait: Majed Al Daweesh. Majed and I had several good days' hawking and had good success. On one flight with my gyr/peregrine DC, after hitting a grouse hard, he chased it for one and a half miles. We got to the site of the kill as fast as possible. The snow was about eight inches deep. When we arrived, he was screaming and making passes at a golden eagle that had come and taken his kill. The eagle left upon our arrival and DC chased it, hitting it several times before disappearing over the ridge in pursuit of the eagle. I watched his track on my Marshall GPS, holding my breath as the tiercel continued to aggressively chase. When finally he returned, Majed had found the grouse and tossed it out for him! That was a close call! Once the snow comes, the grouse become stronger and can fly for miles. Eagles become a problem and it makes hawking very tense.

It was fun getting to know Majed and, during his visit, we were joined by some of the employees of Marshall Radio Telemetry. In attendance were Robert Bagley, Dave Marshall, Kevin Harcourt and four other employees who came to see their product being used

Gary Boberg







Andrzej  
Opacian

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in actual hunting situations. Ricardo Velarde was also in attendance and provided us with several delicious meals! We had a fun day in the field.

The sage grouse group up in big flocks as the snow arrives in late November or early December when we flew my gyr/peregrine tiercel *Zander* on a large flock of grouse. After driving past the flock of hundreds of birds, we went a good half mile further to where we could get out of the car without flushing them. I put up *Zander* and let out the old pointer *TJ*. We all got back in our trucks and began to caravan down the two-track road with the dog working in front of us. Approaching with the falcon already at good pitch and following the trucks ensures that the grouse will stay pinned until we get a point. We flushed lots of grouse and the 12 year pro *Zander* rolled over and came through a wave of grouse making a clean kill. Everyone in the three vehicles could watch the tiercel following us by using their mobile devices, which showed his height and position, until the dog went on point and then we all quietly exited the trucks to watch the flight!

It was a fun season that I finished by flying my three tiercels at the 46th Annual Utah Sky Trials. It's hard to believe that I flew my birds in the very first Sky Trials 46 years ago. With the birds put up for moult, I anxiously await the first feather to drop as I count down the days to next fall! Thanks to all my guests who made this a season not to be forgotten!



STEVE  
CHINDGREN

Steve Chindgren is a world-renowned falconer born and raised in Salt Lake City, Utah. His love of birds dates back to his childhood growing up in Emigration Canyon. After his first spotting of a Cooper's hawk in the mountains behind his childhood home, he was intrigued to learn about the sport of falconry. He read an article on falconry in the 1957 May edition of *Popular Mechanics Magazine* and got his first falcon (a kestrel) at the age of seven.

Chindgren has always had a keen interest in raptors and other birds. This interest continued with growing intensity throughout the years. At the age of nine he got his first red-tailed hawk, then began hunting long-wings in 1968 at the age of 17. He has never missed a hawking season since.

Chindgren's drive, dedication and passion for the sport is unparalleled. He dedicates himself to the hawking season every September through February at his infamous House of Grouse Ranch in Eden, Wyoming. He has produced eight different films on the sport of falconry, including the popular *Red Grouse Hawking Scotland and House of Grouse*.

In the summer, he produces and presents a free flight bird show at Utah's Hogle Zoo. He has produced several hundred captive bred falcons.

Steve is married to Julie Chindgren and together they have two beautiful daughters, Jena and Jessica.

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# *Siberian goshawks in the USA – 2018/2019 hawking season*

*by Ben G. Ohlander*

Early on in my 54 years as a falconer, I diversified my experiences with a variety of raptors. However, as time progressed, I began to narrow my efforts and eventually focused on trapping, training and hawking passage North American goshawks. Career and family commitments, plus pursuit of quality hawking opportunities based on game and land availability dictated my hawking's direction. Goshawks fit the bill due to the continued challenges in obtaining, training and hunting these hawks on a variety of catchable quarry. For me, the essence of falconry is not satisfaction of one's ego in killing large numbers of game. Instead, it entails the development of one's hawk to the highest levels of performance based on recognized falconry standards that include manning, hooding, maintenance

of health and plumage and hunting a variety of quarry species.

My experience with goshawks began 35 years ago with a trip to Wyoming, USA, to secure my first eyass goshawk, a male taken at ten days of age from a nest near Laramie. Since that time, I've "harvested" wild-taken North American goshawks for falconry including both imprint and passage hawks. Of these, my greatest enjoyment and quality of hawking has been with the passagers. However, I recently I decided to expand my hawking horizon with two parent-raised (PR) Siberian goshawks (*albidus* subspecies) acquired from professional raptor breeder Lance Christensen of Spencer, Iowa. I obtained *Tyrion*, a male in July 2015, and *Kyran*, a female, in August 2018.

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Ben's tiercel







This past season was my fourth hawking with *Tyrion* and he's developed into my second-best game hawk from all perspectives. Unfortunately, our first season was limited due to a knee injury I sustained in the summer of 2015. By way of information, my best goshawk was a passage North American female, *Heidi* that I trapped in Minnesota in 1992. Based on the results of a hydrogen isotope feather analysis, her natal area was middle-to-northern Manitoba, Canada. I flew her quite successfully for ten years on a variety of quarry.

*Tyrion* is a wonderful hunting companion with such a positive focus on all things associated with living a falconry-based existence. He's easy to manage, has little to no fear of my Brittany, doesn't mantle or scream and flies multiple quarry species such as pheasant, rabbit, ducks and quail. He maintains his plumage well due to a free-flight mews and other safeguards. Now, at the season's end, his plumage is identical to the start of the season, with no broken feathers whatsoever. His normal flying weight is the same as the somewhat small Rocky Mountain subspecies female gos at 880 grams, including a backpack transmitter and leg bell.

Again, my focus is developing my hawks' innate hunting abilities in providing quality, difficult flights with little emphasis on daily multiple kills. Almost all flights with *Tyrion* and *Kyran* have been single-kill hunts. While living in Indiana, I learned this from my experience during the first two seasons' hawking with a Wyoming female imprint gos, *Diana*. At that time, my interest was multiples – mostly on the numerous cottontail rabbits (*Lagomorph* ssp – average weight 1,000 grams). Over time, I noticed decreasing field performance when catching relatively easy multiples. During our third season, I began the practice of single-kill hunts. My main effort was developing the goshawk's hunting and flight performance through more difficult

flights in tighter cover as well as providing more flying freedom. Given these changes, my falconry with *Diana* improved. I noticed her learning new techniques that enhanced her flying and hunting abilities. She also developed some of the attributes of a "passage goshawk".

During this last season, *Tyrion* came into his own while hunting in difficult cover conditions with a low rabbit population. The bunny population was at a low ebb due to the population cycle and effect of substantially wet weather. Given these circumstances, he needed to work hard for success. Although he did reasonably well on cottontails, we did focus more on ducks this season and he continued to perform well

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Ben in Iowa





with quality flights on the good numbers of ducks available. All duck flights were one-kill hunts this year, although given their abundance, multiple duck flights/kills would have greatly enhanced my kill numbers.

Many of us in Minnesota fly our goshawks both in the traditional manner, “off the fist”, as well as following on from trees. This is out of necessity given the forested conditions and heavy cover where rabbits are found locally. Many astringers maintain the mantra that a gos should never be flown from trees either on the initial flight or for reflashes. However, *Tyrion* and other goshawks flown at rabbits in Minnesota follow

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In the bag



the falconer and dog beautifully. Such flights develop a more interesting experience for the falconer. They also improve the hawk's capabilities and conditioning when compared to one explosive flight off the glove. With more open habitat, *Tyrion* is comfortable riding the glove as long as needed. At least initially, flights at the ring-necked pheasant are always from the glove and hopefully from a point by the Brittany. Reflush flights may be from a tree, bush or the glove.

This past season, my plan was to hunt bunnies early on, ducks from mid-December through to the end of January (our duck hunting season) and then hunt primarily pheasants in February. Unfortunately, unusually adverse February weather, including deep snow and winter storms, created extremely difficult travel and hunting conditions. Fresh storms and snowfalls occurred continuously every few days and snow depth in the field was 2/3 to a metre deep. This year, I decided not to use my snowshoes and end the season somewhat early.

*Kyran*, my first season female Siberian, was flown mostly on ducks. As expected, she's much bigger than *Tyrion* and flies at approximately 1,250 grams. At first, she tended to crash into the water with each attempt at ducks, missing many of them while getting wet in the process, but did catch a few using this technique. With different strategies for flushing, she began catching them in the traditional manner – binding in mid-air from underneath. Both hawks ended up wet in the stream many times with a duck in tow and with cold winter weather at or below 0° F/-18° C. As might be expected, their tail feathers and primaries would freeze so it was important to get them back to the car as soon as possible to thaw them out. Otherwise, by season's end, the feathers would become somewhat brittle and tend to break. Over time, *Kyran* commenced longer distance flights, but her size would intimidate the ducks back to the water. This made the remaining ducks more difficult to reflush. To some degree, this began to turn her off ducks. *Tyrion*, however, absolutely loves ducks and this year's flights were, again, exceptional!

This past season, I made two trips to Nebraska primarily to hunt black-tailed jackrabbits (*Lepus californicus* – average weight 2,400 grams). Although we have the larger white-tail jackrabbits (*Lepus townsendi* – average weight 3,400 grams) in Minnesota, this was *Kyran's* first season. I therefore wanted to focus her, where possible, on cottontail rabbits and ducks with





*Tyrion on the season's first duck kill, a drake mallard*



*Kyran's  
1st Duck*

a few initial flights on the somewhat smaller black-tails. During our first trip, *Tyrion* quickly grabbed a black-tail, but lost it as we jumped in to help. During both trips he doubled on cottontails twice and the first trip we hunted quail (*Colinus virginianus*) from points produced by my Brittany. In Nebraska, both rabbits and jackrabbits were relatively prolific compared to poor cottontail numbers in Minnesota.

My second Nebraska trip produced a nice flight and kill on a black-tail. This was a moderate-distance flight that started upwind with *Kyran* gaining height and “playing” the wind to her advantage. She made a stoop from maybe ten metres, giving the jack a “love tap”. This maneuver caused it to change direction as she slammed into it. Following several unsuccessful flights, she really wanted the kill and was tough on this jack.

Overall, the season had its ups and downs. When developing a new female gos, Minnesota's low rabbit population was a real negative, especially when contrasted with the prior season's high numbers. I also found *Kyran* displayed much less agility than *Tyrion*. I'm expecting this to change with time and experience. February's substantially adverse weather also greatly affected the ability to successfully hawk during that month. For this reason, most of my hawking occurred during a three-month window from November 2018 through to January 2019. Next season, I'll change my hunting strategy and plan to hunt cottontails early with a mid-season switch to ducks and cottontails. In

Minnesota, we have a decent amount of public land available for hunting pheasants, but I'm uncomfortable hunting these areas until the gun season ends in early January. I'll also hunt Nebraska jackrabbits earlier, beginning in November, as well as Kansas jackrabbits at the upcoming North American Falconers Association meet. If the weather permits, I'll plan on additional pheasant hawking in February. Needless to say, I'm very pleased with my two Siberian goshawks!



**BENGT-ÅKE G.  
OHLANDER**

Bengt-Åke G. Ohlander (“Ben”), born in Sweden, immigrated to the United States, with his parents, aged four. As a teenager, he became enamoured by falconry and was mentored by Robert Elgin, a well-known falconer in Des Moines, Iowa. Over the subsequent 55 years, he's enjoyed hawking with a number of raptor species. Over time, he developed an appreciation and love for goshawks and obtained a number from the wild, including passagers, upon moving to Minnesota. Following 35 years with goshawks, he's recently obtained two parent-raised Siberian goshawks (*albidus ssp*) – this article's subjects.

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# BER VAN PERLO: “HOW I CAME TO DRAWING BIRDS.”

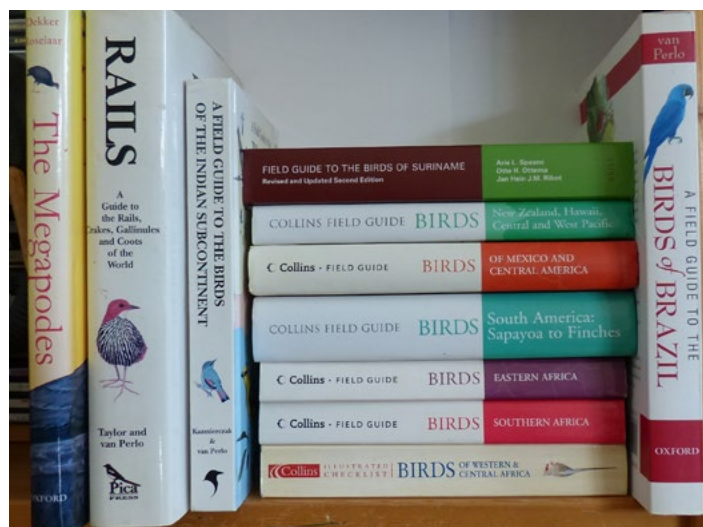
*Born: 22 June 1936 in Nijmegen,  
The Netherlands | Degree in  
Landscape Architecture from the  
University of Wageningen.*

I have painted about 7,000 of the world's 10,000 bird species. I started in 1982 when I visited my friend Peter de Leeuw, an ecologist working in Kenya at the time. In those days there was no printed bird guide that showed all the bird species of East Africa. In particular, the migrants from Europe and Asia were missing. In preparation for a second visit to Kenya, it seemed a good idea to make some 'cards' with the main diagnostic features of difficult groups like the cisticolas (brown-and-rufous, often black-streaked warblers) and larks. Shortly after my second visit I decided that I would also try to create a real field guide. The first version was illustrated in colour pencil, not a medium that is suitable for printing. In 1991 I happened to meet

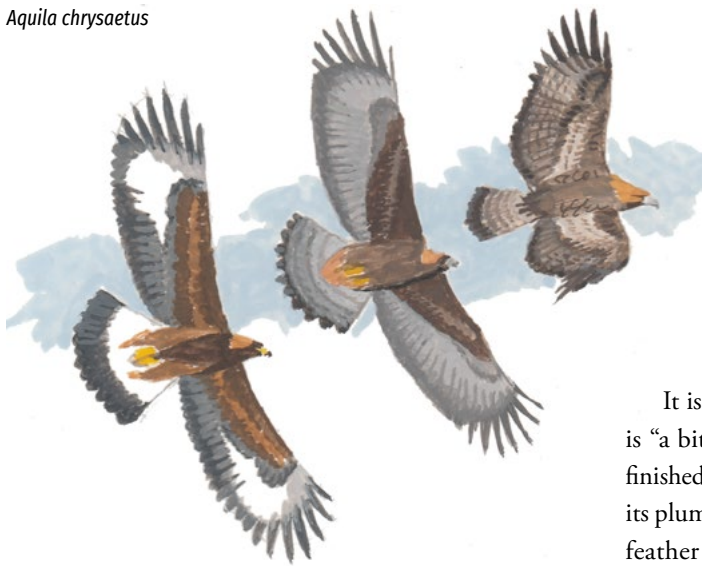
a fellow Dutchman in Nairobi, who encouraged me to seek a publisher and supported me by accompanying me to Elsevier Publishers during a visit to the Netherlands. At this meeting we were told that the book did not fit in with Elsevier's portfolio and that I should try the publisher Harper Collins in London. There I was told that they were willing to publish the field guide if I painted the 1,500 species in gouache. This I did, after which my first guide, *Collins Illustrated Checklist Birds of Eastern Africa*, was published in 1995.

I had been working as a physical planner and landscape architect for the Dutch State Forest Service since 1964, but in 1991, at the age of 55, I left the service and decided to move to Kenya. There I spent countless hours at the National Museum in Nairobi, sketching the bird skins from its large collection. (I can still remember the smell of the camphor-like substance which was used to preserve the skins and lingered on my clothes when I came home.)

So far I have written and illustrated eight field guides and illustrated four other bird books, adding up to an average of about one book every three years. In producing a book I prefer to do everything myself. For my latest published book, *Birds of South America, Vol. II: Passerines*, I did all the artwork, prepared the distribution maps on my computer, wrote the text and compiled the index. Of course, I needed people to help me and I am very grateful to the experts that have generously given substantial support and advice.







*Falco rusticolus* white  
morph & imm



*Falco novaeseelandiae*

It is sometimes said that the painting in my books is “a bit sketchy, somewhat fast and loose, not finely finished.” However, if you see a bird in the field, you see its plumage as a single surface; painting each individual feather will give too much information unless the feathers form a pattern. I also find it difficult to draw straight lines, for example when depicting the parallel primaries in a folded wing, or perfect circles when forming an eye, but this is not important as long as the species illustrated can be identified. To me it is essential that one can see that my work is hand painted; I love the magic of small spots and streaks that create the shape of something that looks quite different in reality when seen from nearby.

Currently, for the time being, I have stopped working on field guides. I prefer to work on some small, private projects related to birds, cetaceans and archaeology, about which I offer stories and lectures, illustrated by paintings and models for my children, family and friends.



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## *My Eventful Goshawking Season: 2018/2019*

*by Sébastien Gihoul*

My 2018 flying season was turning out to be a disaster. The previous season had ended in late January because of the death of my tiercel. He was mortally wounded following a collision with a bay window during a very long chase after a wild pheasant. This hawk, exceptional both in physical characteristics and in hunting skills, was bred by a good falconer and renowned breeder of short-winged hawks. Given his background and extensive experience, I asked him to reserve a hawk for me.

Unfortunately, many European breeders, particularly in the UK, went through a difficult breeding season in 2018. The terrible weather conditions, especially, greatly reduced the number of chicks raised. The breeder I contacted had only managed to raise one eyass, which was reserved for me. The chick arrived in Belgium for imprinting and an experienced falconer friend of mine agreed to take charge. I like to raise eyasses at a location other than the one where they will be flown later on. The severance experienced by the hawk when it goes to the falconer's home creates a liberating phenomenon that potentially reduces some of the behavioural disorders related to imprinting.

A few days after he arrived at my friend's house, we noticed growth problems. The eyass was unable to stand up and really struggled to properly grasp his

food. After a few weeks, we had to euthanise it as the position of the feet had become disabling and pressure sores appeared. At this point, I had no hawk for the season and I also did not want to take on a new bird without first having obtained thorough knowledge of the breeder and the lineage.

Being aware of my situation, a friend came up with a proposal. He no longer wanted to fly his female from the previous season because her aggression had become human oriented. He had encountered difficulties getting her entered and her "melodious" song was too much for him. The initial imprinting was probably responsible. Rather than selling her or placing her out of sight in an aviary, he wanted to give her another chance. I knew a bit about this hawk, having followed her training and being aware of all her antics. At the time of the offer she was moulting out but her agitation in the owner's aviary was such that it was likely to negatively affect her moult. She had shown her true colours and I know that my friend was happy that he had not suffered any serious damage.

This proposal sounded like a real challenge! In my opinion, the only way to manage and remedy the behavioural complications was to provide this hawk with extensive hawking opportunities and sufficient kills in order to properly channel her aggression.





This brings us to Belgian hawking grounds. Having hunted for more than 20 years, like many of us, I have witnessed a vertiginous drop in the quality of biotopes and animal populations, be they mammals, birds, insects or even reptiles. Regions which, formerly, were rich in game have been profoundly modified for the benefit of industrial agriculture which now exploits every square metre. This situation is alarming. Moreover, Belgium is a small country, highly populated and industrialised

to excess. It also has a high number of gun hunters. An agreement with this group generally does not always have many positive elements. The numbers of quarry taken often has priority over more nature-friendly management of the field, with the more promising territories occupied by hunting societies that often use their extensive means for rather irrational annual restocking. The mentality is often that of a previous era. Predators are killed illegally in large numbers. All means are considered good; illegal and nocturnal shooting, crow traps to trap goshawks and more worrying still, the use of poisons which our dogs have come across twice at the end of the season. In view of these circumstances it is obvious that territories under falconers' control, where hawking is possible in an acceptable way, are rare and precious, especially if they want to practice their art satisfactorily, both in terms of flight opportunities and security. On top of finding suitable hawking ground, the distribution of game has become an issue.

My region in the southeast is essentially a cattle region. Crops are rare and small game is almost absent. Some hares still roam the pastures, but these must be conserved at all costs in order to preserve the species and avoid its complete disappearance. Rabbits have been impacted heavily by waves of myxomatosis and VHD2 in the last five years. Rabbit populations, which once





allowed the taking of up to 200 a year, have now been reduced by 90 to 95%.

Despite this sad state of affairs, I have succeeded in gaining access to some interesting ground where gun hunters are no longer welcome. These are not very large but rather rich in game species. It is a disadvantage that these grounds are situated at a distance of 50 to 100 km, which complicates hawking there on a daily basis. Fortunately, however, I have the pleasure of being invited regularly to fly on more substantial territories, maintained by families who attach great value to sustainable hunting management. Although they no longer practice our art, the prestigious names of some of these families are engraved in the history of Belgian falconry. Last but not least come the trips to friends in France and England with our low flying Equipage Cochet de Corbeaumont, from the north of France. During these visits we can fly on fields that offer exceptional hawking conditions. All in all, these opportunities allow me to have satisfying seasons with my hawks. It now remained to be seen if they would suffice to offer the new hawk a better understanding of hunting and, possibly, to thrive by doing so.

Whilst her moult was not finished, with some secondaries still to fall, I took her out of the aviary on September 6th. I did not want to waste time, but hoped

to utilise the benefits of early-season game to create a new relationship from the start. The contact was good; she was quiet at home and in the field, but she was still very loud. She is a big girl, very well-armed: cut out for hares! I started the season at 1,180g, aware that a positive progression of the weight would be necessary. The first three outings were devoted to developing recall to the lure. Recall was good but her behaviour on the ground, especially, was so bad that I quickly changed to recalling her to the fist for better control.

On our first hunt, we were able to secure a kill; certainly not spectacular, but ideal for the first hunting outing of a bird that has to gain self confidence. Her behaviour on the ground was still very difficult to manage; I could not secure her while she was feeding, as she cowered and loosened her grip so she could throw herself at my legs or in my face as soon as I approached! We took six pheasants before mid-October, either trussed in the first few metres or killed in cover. She improved a lot in cover hindered by brambles but her footing technique really left something to be desired. Her aggression towards me fluctuated. As long as we concentrated on hawking regularly, it was contained. However, when we went home hungry, without success, after several outings in a row, her frustration would grow. I was the one responsible and I had to pay the







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consequences! Another important factor was added into the equation: unless I flew her in high condition, I had to deal with constant aggression and, believe me, she knew how to be dangerous! In view of a hare-hawking invitation, since she didn't yet know this quarry, I decided to introduce her to rabbit. She reacted well and, despite dense cover, the rabbits didn't get far away. Two of them were firmly taken by the head.

We left then for France, to a territory where hare is king. There was a plethora of flight opportunities as the hares, which were huge, fully-grown, ones, have not been hunted much. She bound to several of them but had to release them all. A few days after our return from France, François invited me to his field. A hare ran out right at my feet and she pursued with determination, taking it by the head and mastering it in a split second. She took four in less than a month, at this point flying at 1,250g. Her assaults directed at me became rare. A period of a month, ending in late December - early January, turned out to be bad. For various reasons, and despite a taking few rabbits with the aid of ferrets, my investment in her proved to be insufficient. The impact on the hawk was huge. She lost musculature, lacked stamina when flying at pheasants, refused hares and, thus, her frustration and aggression returned. It was a vicious circle.

January was a big month with three key events. The annual meeting of the Equipage Cochet de Corbeaumont took place in Belgium. Belgian members were responsible for the entire weekend and so, as organisers, flying was not our first priority. Still, we managed to take an old, wild, cock pheasant in the meet's last minutes. Five days later, she took another two fine roosters as they rose and had some impressive

attempts at the venerated hens. Her weight, that day, was 1,260g. Enchanted by this day's hunting and by the quality of her flights, I decided to end our season.

Afterwards, her owner suggested I might like to keep her for another year. I accepted his proposal as the potential for this hawk's further improvement seems huge. With twenty varied kills, the tableau for her second year of hunting has multiplied tenfold compared to her first season's. It's her versatility that interests me above all. In our region, we must exploit every hunting opportunity – from partridge to hare or goose – with a bird on the fist that has to put up with the usual disturbances which exist in the overly 'civilised' zones. Badly behaving imprints are particularly adapted to these situations; hardly anything frightens them.

The months spent at her side were a profound challenge but I developed a new approach to her behavioural problems. Weight information became of minor importance, whilst the vital parameters to take into account were, mainly, her level of frustration and the regularity of hawking. She considers the falconer to be the one directly responsible for her hunting failures and, likewise, I was able to remember that everything is in the falconer's hands: there are very few bad birds. It is up to us to realise each of our hunting associates' potential through the best of our art.

It is now time for the moult, and for some time to spend at home. I look forward to seeing you again next season.



SEBASTIEN  
GIHOUL

Sebastien started falconry in 1997 at the age of 15. He has flown a red-tailed hawk, a European sparrowhawk and several male Harris' hawks. Presently, he exclusively flies goshawks at rabbits, hares and pheasants in Belgium and France.

He is a member of the *Equipage Cochet de Corbeaumont* in northern France. He uses a springer spaniel, a French spaniel and a pointer for hunting. He also uses them as therapy dogs at the regional psychiatric hospital, where he has created an innovative animal therapy program.



# *Hunting the Waiting-on Golden Eagle*

*by Joe Atkinson*

Living in eagle country or, more specifically, the high desert of eastern Oregon, has its challenges for flying golden eagles at jackrabbits (what we call our hares). In the high desert the open sagebrush plains go on forever, as far as the eye can see. It's like an endless ocean. It's magical. The smell of the sage is pure and simple and clean. It draws you in and fills your senses with everything that is wild and free. For all its beauty, life in the high desert is harsh and unforgiving. Animals living out here are tough and difficult to catch because only the strong survive.

I realised that hunting jackrabbits the traditional way, off the fist, was going to be very difficult. They are hunted everyday by wild eagles and coyotes, and jackrabbits are masters at disappearing, using the sage as cover. So, then, how to hunt them? That seemingly simple question sent me on a journey that ultimately ended with my female golden eagle waiting-on over me like a giant falcon, watching for the "ground team" to flush a jackrabbit under her. The ground team, along with me and my wife Cordi, is made up of three Tazi sight hounds, *Zeva*, *Ayla* and *Khan*. Of course, "air support" is *Widow*, our 9lb female golden eagle. In the early days, I used two of our ranch dogs that, although



Earth Live Oregon, Cordi and Joe (by Christine Atkinson)



*Khan (by Cordi Atkinson)*

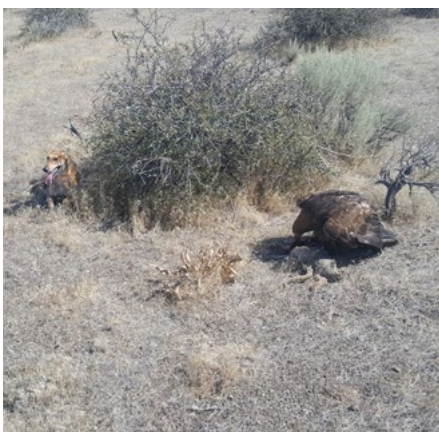




*Widow getting ready to launch (by Cordi Atkinson)*



*Widow with her jackrabbit (by Joe Atkinson)*



*Widow on a jack and Khan in the shade (by Joe Atkinson)*

very willing to give chase, just didn't have enough speed to impress the jackrabbits to stay on the move. The addition of the Tazis proved to be a game changer.

*Widow* will typically circle over us anywhere from 300-2,000 ft., the most effective height being 500-1,000 ft.; anything higher and the jackrabbits can reach thicker cover and usually escape. Now, one would think that a jackrabbit being chased by three freakishly fast dogs and an eagle coming in from above would have no chance to escape. Well, there is a good reason there; are lots of jackrabbits out there; they are masters at getting away even with my team in hot pursuit.

So, let's go hunting. Here is a flight that I recall from this season's journal:

5/10/2018

Temp: 74F, 23C

Wind: 8mph, 12kph

Clear, blue sky

I put *Widow* on the scale and she weighed in at 9 lbs., which is her best flying weight. Frankly, her weight is of little importance when she is in the hunting frame of mind, I'd fly her regardless of what the scale said. I loaded all three Tazis in the truck and Cordi and I headed up the hills to the open desert. I pulled up to what I call the launching point. Here, we wired up *Widow* with telemetry and cast her off. This sounds exciting, although what happens is she jumps off my glove and lands on a sage bush some ten feet away. Then she begins her search, looking for the warm columns of air rising up from the ground, often miles away down in the valley. For reasons unknown to us, *Widow* will suddenly launch off and fly to the spot she saw the thermal and begin her ascent into the sky. We could tell that, on this day, there was plenty of lift, as the small down feathers that *Widow* shook loose were pulled up and out of sight into the sky.

With *Widow* now up and in position over us, we jumped the Tazis out of the truck and moved out into the sage. Cordi was on my left side leading *Khan*, who we keep on a leash until a jackrabbit is flushed; otherwise he'd cover the entire area and we would lose all control of the hunt. We call him our "cheetah dog" and for good reason, he is one fast dog. *Ayla* is the advance scout, preferring to be further out in front of us and *Zeva* is the mid-range dog, mostly interested in chasing lizards and ground squirrels, which she eats. *Ayla* is the best jackrabbit finder and we all watch her every move. In typical Tazi fashion she will move in and out of the sage, stopping at times and looking for movement. The idea is to keep some sort of control of the flights; if not, we wouldn't see anything.

As we walked, the anticipation built with each step, knowing that a jackrabbit could flush and the chase would be on. *Ayla* and *Zeva* had moved in close, with one on each side of an area where the jackrabbits like to hide. Without warning, *Ayla* began to pick up speed as she saw some movement and was off. The jackrabbit bolted out from the cover, I yelled 'HO!' and Cordi released *Khan*. All three dogs accelerated





by Nancy  
Whitehead

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after the jackrabbit. With no time to hide in cover, the jackrabbit went into a full burn-out, ears pinned and powerful hind legs reaching out in front of its nose with every stride. *Khan* made up the distance and was closing on the speedy jackrabbit. Cordi and I both heard the sound, the sound of speed like the ripping of cloth. *Widow*, having been circling over our heads, was now in a full, nearly vertical, tuck. She threw out her legs for a moment or two, then back into the teardrop stoop. We watched the Tazis flanking the jackrabbit, one on each side and *Khan* coming up the middle. *Widow's* timing needed to be perfect as the jackrabbit flashed between the sage bushes, rocks and cactus at full speed.

At seventy miles per hour *Widow* came in with all the power and force that a female golden eagle can bring. We saw a cloud of dust from *Widow's* impact and the sliding stops of all three dogs; this jackrabbit did not escape. Cordi and I stood in silence, once again, at what we had just witnessed. As the dust filtered away and the Tazis looked for a shady spot to have a rest, *Widow* happily plucked fur from her prize. For this moment anyway, all was right with the world.

*Good hawking!*

Video from hunting in the high desert:

<https://youtu.be/14qW3KaNHYU>

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JOE  
ATKINSON

Joe started his falconry career as a young lad on his grandfather's cattle ranches, finding his first American kestrel nest in a eucalyptus tree in the late 60's. Building a make-shift ladder that barely held his weight, Joe climbed to the nest and removed a male kestrel. By raising this tiny falcon, Joe felt sure it would return to him once released. It didn't. However, the falconry bug was already coursing within Joe and set in motion a lifelong passion that is as strong today as ever. Joe has travelled the world training birds of prey and, most recently, had the opportunity of a lifetime when asked to train the world's rarest eagle, the Philippine eagle, for a soon-to-be released film by Cornell Lab of Ornithology, called *Bird of Prey*. "Flying the Philippine eagle free in the jungle of the Philippines was, for me, the thrill of a lifetime."

Joe has been married to his wife, Cordi, for 42 years and together they have trained and released dozens of young golden eagles, rehabilitated to return back to the wild. Their falconry eagles have been filmed by many film companies such as PBS, National Geographic, Smithsonian, Nature, BBC, Animal Planet, Nat Geo TV and the list goes on. The most recent Nature show, *The Sagebrush Sea*, can be viewed on YouTube and features their eagles throughout.

A Master Falconer, Joe has written many articles on the sport, especially on eagle falconry. He has contributed to three books on this specific branch of falconry and is rumored to have completed a novel of his own. On the subject of hunting eagles from the soar, Joe says, "Flying an eagle that waits-on like a giant falcon is, in my opinion, the highest form of eagle falconry one can achieve."

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# A HISTORY OF FALCONRY IN HUNGARY AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE HUNGARIAN FALCONERS' CLUB.

*by János Bagyura*

## **Falconry associated information from medieval times.**

Before the conquest of the homeland, Hungarians occupied the territory called Etelköz, a vast land located north of the Black Sea, between the river Don and the Lower Danube. Authors of ancient and medieval times called this land Scythia. Hungarians were mentioned in the *De administrando imperio* (On the administration of the Empire) written by Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, Emperor of the Byzantine Empire around 952 AD (Moravcsik 1950). The Hungarian nomadic horsemen arrived in the Carpathian Basin around the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. They most likely learned the art of falconry during their journey across the steppes and then it remained popular, even after they had settled and established a Christian feudal monarchy.

The oldest proof of the Hungarian's knowledge relating to falconry is the mythology of the "*turul*." This is one of our most ancient legends associated with a falcon and it tells how Álmos, father of Árpád, was born. His mother, already being pregnant with him, had a dream that a falcon impregnated her and that, from her womb, a river would come out and fork in foreign lands. Ancient dream readers explained its meaning; she would give birth to a king whose offspring would establish an empire in foreign lands (Anonymous, c.1200). Kézai Simon's chronicles, written circa 1282-1285, mentioned that a bird could be seen on Attila's shield and that it was called "*turul*." The chronicles also say that Árpád and his great-grandson, Géza, were born in the line of the "*turul*" dynasty (Császár 1901). Old Persian falconry literature mentions the "*turul*" as the best falcon to hunt with, which also supports its ancient origins (al Gitrif c.775-785). The "*turul*" was considered to be a sacred creature among the Hungarian leaders and it also became the symbol of their descendants

who established the Árpád dynasty which ruled the Kingdom of Hungary (Fig. 1). The "*turul*" is our oldest national symbol which can still be found in our traditions nowadays.

We have reliable data in relation to falconry from the era of the Árpád dynasty (997-1301 AD). One of the earliest falconry related depictions can be found in the *Chronicon Pictum*. It shows Prince Álmos, younger son of Géza I, hunting for rooks with his peregrine falcon near the Castle of Csór around 1100 AD. (Kálti 1358-1370) (Fig. 2). Béla II provided four servants to



Fig1. Árpád the "landtaking" commander with a shield depicting a *turul*. Source: *Chronicon pictum*



Fig.2. Prince Álmos on a falconry excursion near Csór around 1100.  
Source: *Chronicon pictum*



the Provost of Dömös, whose task was to take care of the falcons (Csőre 1996). During this period, the rank and social status of falconry is shown clearly by the falconry scenes depicted on one of the coins of Béla III (1172-1196 AD), four coins of Béla IV (1235-1270 AD), two of István V (1270-1272 AD) and one of László IV (1272-1290 AD) (Huszár 1962). Of all the species kept for falconry purposes, falcons were most highly valued and regularly considered to be royal gifts. Based on historical documents, we know of a case when the Csanád family agreed to the ownership of a falcon nest at Sóllyom-kő near Bertény during a trial about property lines (Ballagi, 1900). In 1231, Endre II was forced by his own nobility to prohibit royal falconers from hunting on noble lands since they had caused significant damage there.

It was the custom, in those days, that the royal falconers travelled to separate municipalities in different parts of the country. Those falconers who achieved exceptional results were even given a title in some cases. King Sigismund gave Dávid Zemlényi a title of nobility in 1418. Gábor Báthory, ruler of Transylvania, offered the same to Péter Madarász in 1610 and to István Szigeti Poncz in 1612, respectively (Bástyai, 1955) (Fig. 3). We barely know anything about the existence of falconry apart from the sport of the ruling class. However, it is a well known fact that Article 18 of a 1504 law

forbade peasants to hunt. Louis II of Hungary was also a passionate falconer and items bought including falcon hoods appeared in his books of account just shortly before the Battle of Mohács in 1526. We also know lots of interesting facts relating to falconry from contemporary letters. Ferenc Zay (1498-1570), a royal advisor, spent a lot of time in Vienna in 1559 due to his work and from there he wrote a letter to his wife in which he urged the collection of the nestlings of falconry birds: *sólymokat, rárókat, ölyveket, karvalyokat most ideje kiszedni*” (Takács 1917). The interesting fact about this letter is that all four species which were the most commonly employed for falconry were mentioned in it. During that time, the peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*) was called “sóllyom”, the saker (*Falco cherrug*) was “ráró”, and the goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) was also called “ölyv” sometimes. (Schenk 1942). It is also worth mentioning that, in Hungary, the use of the golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) for falconry only appeared in the 1930s for the first time.

Falconry was widespread and popular in the royal court and among the ruling elite in Hungary, which is not only proven by the rich place name heritage, the memorabilia and the citing in legends but also by several papers, which were written in Latin in relation



Fig.3. Crest of Dávid Zemlényi (1418). Source: Bagyua János, Czerovszki Mariann és Kasza Péter(szerk.) (2017): *Pray György: Költemény a solymászatról négy könyvben*. Magyar Solymász Egyesület, Budapest.



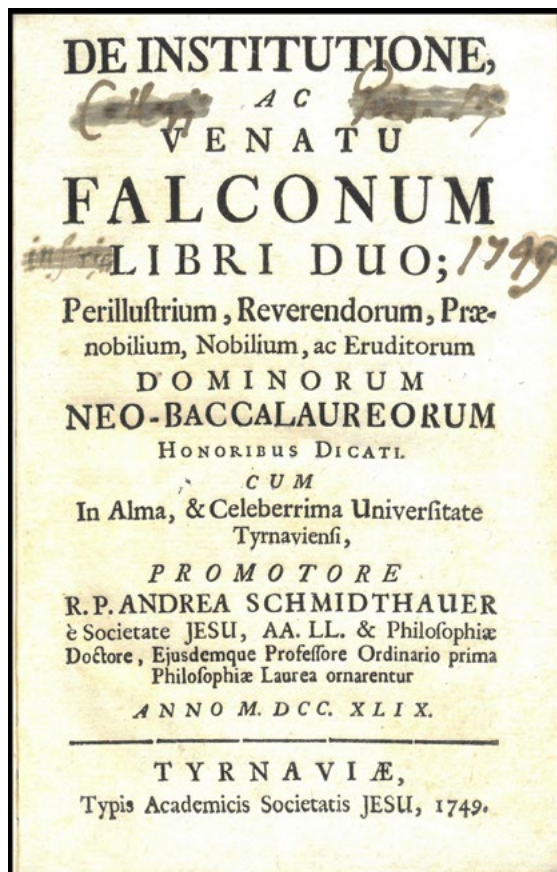


Fig.4. Title page of György Pray's book. Source: [Pray György] (1749): *De institutione ac venatu falconum libri duo*. Tyrnaviae.

Encouraged by his friends, he published a second version, supplemented with further chapters. However, it was lost and was only found by Andor Tarnai in 1982 among some anonymous manuscripts in the Nationalbibliothek in Vienna. The Hungarian Falconry Association published the book again as originally envisaged by György Pray in 2017 (Bagyura et al. 2017). Falconry became less important with the arrival of firearms and, going by the scale of the reduction of information, probably only a few people remained who kept falconry birds at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. After nearly 150 years, some new, important falconry events occurred once more in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Jenő Zoárd Odescalchi built and operated a falconry centre between 1901 and 1917 in Tuzsér. He procured some of his falcons with the help of his English friend C. E. Radclyffe. Along with the Hungarian falconers, three professional English falconers, Richard Best, Fred Lightfoot and Sam Golden, worked in Tuzsér at different times. With the tragic death of Odescalchi, the centre ceased to operate in 1917. The next significant falcon yard operated in Gödöllő. Géza Nemeskéri-Kiss, a royal master huntsman, appreciated and supported traditional hunting methods, among them falconry. He initiated the creation of a falconry centre for presentation purposes in Gödöllő in 1931. Audrey McLean and Stephen Francis Biddulph, a retired English colonel along with three Indian falconers also helped the work. (The Indian falconers arrived from the area of Lahore, which has belonged to Pakistan since 1947). Nemeskéri-Kiss asked Lajos Kálóczy to

to falconry. Falconry was highly valued by Louis the Great and he practiced it himself too. During his reign (1342-1382 AD), Ladislaus Hungarus (László Magyar), a royal falconer, wrote a book on falconry, which unfortunately was lost. However, at some later time a few chapters appeared and were therefore saved by Eberhard Hicfelt's work, *Aucupatorium herodium*. The next book in line on the subject was written by György Pray, a renowned Jesuit priest. This small format, 54 page book was published in 1749 in Trnava, in accordance with the custom of the era, in Latin and without indicating the author (Fig. 4).

Fig.5. Gödöllő 1931. Lajos Kálóczy, József Aradvári and three Indian falconers. Photo: Lajos Kálóczy.

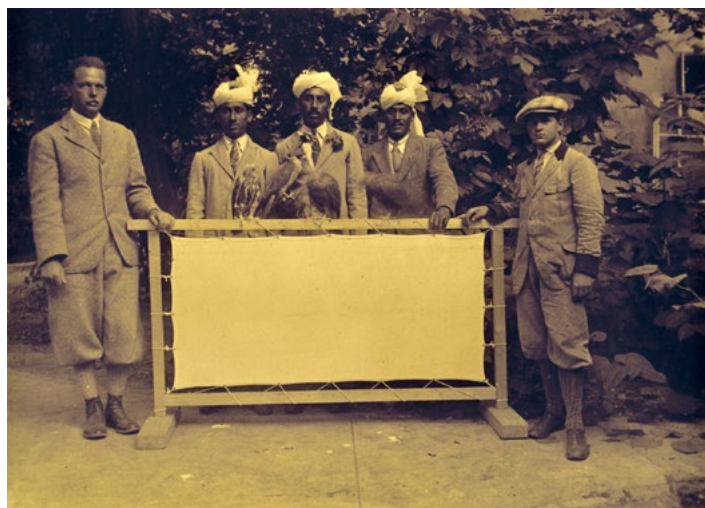


Fig.6. Falconry excursion in the Hortobágy. Géza Nemeskéri-Kiss and Audrey McLean and an Indian falconer in 1931. Source: *Nimród Vadászújság* 1931.







**Fig.7.** Gödöllő at the end of the 1930s. Lóránt Bástyai and László Fába.  
*Photo: László Fába*

be the master falconer there (Nemeskéri-Kiss 1993) (Fig. 5, 6). Those professional huntsmen who worked there, namely Gyula Tóth, József Aradvári, Vilmos Székelyhidi, Mihály Nagy and Balázs Kodó, also engaged in falconry activities if needed. Lóránt Bástyai, László Fába and László Újváry, who had just started falconry then, were frequent visitors at the centre in Gödöllő. Promotional articles had a great effect on the public and more and more interested people contacted Nemeskéri-Kiss, who, being very busy with work at that time, directed them to Lóránt Bástyai and his friends. After a hunting excursion, Lóránt Bástyai proposed to establish a falconers' association based on foreign examples (Fig. 7).

### **Comprehensive history of The Hungarian Falconers Club**

The Hungarian Falconers Club held its constituent assembly in the Hungarian Natural History Museum in Budapest on June 6th, 1939. Géza Nemeskéri-Kiss was elected to royal huntmaster, Herbert Nádler to be vice president, Dr László Tóth and Dr Gyula Fábián to be secretaries, Lóránt Bástyai to be master falconer, while László Katona was appointed to be

treasurer (Anonymous 1939) (Fig. 8). Subsequently, numerous articles appeared in *Nimród*, the magazine of the National Hunters' Association. A new chapter began in the history of falconry; the once widespread luxurious excursions ceased and, in parallel, ordinary people of cities and rural areas started to keep falconry birds. Following the Second World War, the political legislation made it difficult for associations to operate and so falconers needed to change the form of their organisation in order to survive the next fifty years. At the same time, however, despite the difficulties, falconers had limitless possibilities individually to pursue their hobby, since the authorities did not care about it. (Fig. 9). Lóránt Bástyai had exceptional connections among both nature conservationists and hunters, whose support greatly helped him come up with a plausible solution for falconry. First, they established the Hunting Association of Hungarian Falconers in Fegyvernek in 1946. Lóránt Bástyai was elected president while György Lelovich was made the master falconer. At the time, a raptor research facility operated under the auspices of the Centre for Hungarian Forestry Plants. Soon the centre was moved to Gödöllő, where it was managed by Bástyai under the auspices of the Forestry Scientific Institute until spring 1953. The hunting association was discontinued and instead the Falconry Department (within the National Association of Hungarian Hunters) was established in 1951, led by Bástyai. Between 1953 and 1957, experienced falconers could work as professional falconers at different state



**Fig.8.** Badge of the Hungarian Falconers' Club.

**Fig.9.** Falconry excursion in the Hortobágy. Aquarelle painting of György Lelovich.  
*Photo: János Bagyura*







Fig.10. Falconry trip at the beginning of the 1960s . Photo: György Lelovich



Fig.11. István Bechtold. Photo: István Bechtoldné (Ildikó Horváth)



Fig.12. Hunting with hawks near Puzstavacs 1982. Photo: László Bécsy

farms to deter fish-eating birds around fishponds and their knowledge played an important role in the development of falconry in Hungary (Bástyai 1994). After the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, Lóránt Bástyai moved to the home of his mother, who lived in England at that time. However; a young generation of falconers had grown up by then and they enthusiastically organised falconry activities (Fig. 10).

At the beginning of the 1960s, the attitude towards falconry became more unfavourable, mainly because of the disappearance of wild peregrines (*Falco peregrinus*) from Hungary. At that time, the causes were unknown and were attributed to falconry. The species recolonised the country only 32 years later, in 1997 (Bagyura 1997). Numerous articles were published in the 1960's stating that there was no room for this ancient hunting method any more in the newly developed socialist game management regimen. During those years, however, seminars and clubs still could be organised in youth clubs. In 1962, as a result of József Galambász's initiative, the Ottó Herman Falconry Club was established in Vác, while in 1963, the László Magyar Falconry Club was formed in the Kiskunfélegyházi Youth Centre. Members of these two clubs organised an international falconry meeting in autumn of 1963. Former leaders of the club in Vác initiated the creation of an independent national association, however, in vain. Eventually, in 1968, the Falconry Department was re-established within the National Association of Hungarian Hunters. Dr Győző Tusnádi was elected president. The Hungarian Ornithological and Nature Conservation Society was established in 1974 and the Falconry Department was moved to that organisation. István Bechtold was appointed as the president. He was the first person to breed peregrines in captivity in 1991 (Fig. 11, 12). Members participated in ornithological programmes, which created a positive attitude towards falconry. Following the Revolutions of 1989, the Hungarian Falconers' Club was formed once more on June 29, 1996 (Bagyura 1999). The Hungarian National Committee for the Intangible Cultural Heritage added falconry to the National Inventory of ICH (Tóth 2010). On December 6, 2012, falconry (including Hungarian falconry) was registered in UNESCO's ICH list. Hungary undertook to preserve and maintain falconry under the contract with UNESCO. The Committee for Hungarikums accepted falconry as *hungaricum* on January 31, 2013. (Fig. 13)





Fig.13. General assembly of the Hungarian Falconers' Club in Tarján 2018. Photo: János Bagyura

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Fig.14. Joint hunt, Fegyvernek 1990. (György Medgyesi, László Vér, György Wrabel, József Berkesi, Károly Szarka, István Bagyura)  
Photo: János Bagyura.





JÁNOS  
BAGYURA

#### How it all started

I have been interested in birds ever since I was a child. We used to live in a neighborhood on the outskirts of Budapest surrounded by forests, wetlands and agricultural land. There, together with my older brother and friends, I spent a lot of time watching birds. In order to study their behaviour, we often reared corvids and kestrels around the house where they lived free. I was particularly fond of jackdaws since they were very friendly and always followed me everywhere and usually perched on my shoulders or arms. However, keeping birds at home had its downsides. For example; it occurred that my jackdaws removed the clothes pegs from the clothes hanging on the line. So; they all fell off and got dirty which my parents were not happy with at all. I was 16 when I got my first falconry bird, a young male goshawk, from my brother in 1971. I joined the Falconry Department of the Hungarian Ornithological and Nature Conservation Society in 1974 and have been a member ever since. I passed the exams on both the identification of raptors and falconry successfully in 1975. In the past few decades, I have kept goshawks primarily but when falcon breeding emerged, I also had peregrines as well. In parallel, I have been collecting falconry related materials. In the beginning, we spent a great deal of time training our goshawks, since we flew them for hours on a daily basis and we travelled by mass transit. Being exhausted, sometimes our birds fell asleep on our gloves on the way back home. In the meantime, we learned that each goshawk had its individual behaviour and, in order to train them successfully, they needed to be

carried around a lot. Recently, I have kept goshawks and peregrines but I primarily use the former to hunt with. The Hungarian Ornithological and Nature Conservation Society, of which I'm a founding member, was established in 1974. At that time, there was no ornithological class to take so we were practically self-taught and also learnt a lot from each other. Since I was very interested in raptor biology, behaviour and basically anything related to them, I have participated in numerous volunteer activities in raptor conservation, since the formation of the society. At first, we had neither a car nor a phone, and we only had a limited availability of books. Therefore, the implementation of our programmes was quite difficult compared to how it goes nowadays. Yet in spite of the difficulties, those years were quite exciting and fruitful for me because I got to meet some outstanding experts and also had a chance to visit some interesting habitats and get to know numerous rare raptor species as well.

When I was offered a position at The Hungarian Ornithological and Nature Conservation Society in 1986, I willingly accepted it since it was a childhood dream for me to work as a professional birder. Following the Revolutions of 1989, our technical and financial possibilities changed significantly and nowadays we can organise the conservation work under much better conditions and with the involvement of the neighbouring countries. I worked primarily in the electrocution prevention scheme and with the eagle owl, lesser spotted eagle, eastern imperial eagle, red-footed falcon and saker falcon conservation programmes over the past decades. I also actively participate in the editing of our yearbook called *Heliaca*, which presents the results of our conservation work. Recently, my main task has been to coordinate the conservation work of the saker. We have a nationwide database of detailed breeding results and other data of the species since 1980. The field work (since the most important things happen there) is especially close to my heart. Up to 2018, I have rung 1478 saker chicks.



Fig.15. János Bagyura with a young female goshawk, Budapest, August 1973. Photo: István Bagyura



Fig.16. János Bagyura.

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# The New World of Falconry: Bat Falcons (*Falco rufigularis*) in Paraguay

by Dr. Vet. Raul German Palacios Princigalli

5000 years ago, shepherds were amazed by witnessing raptors taking prey which sheep accidentally flushed from the pastures. They asked themselves what benefits forging a bond with these winged creatures might bring: the rest of the story you know.

Falconry originated from humans' most basic need for food, back when weapons were rudimentary and a winged hunting partner was a much better choice than any arrow. This continued for centuries until the middle ages, when falconry became more than just a sport but an indicator of status and hierarchy. The development of firearms almost saw the loss of this ancient bond in many countries. However, others kept it alive: an intangible treasure and true heritage of humankind.

Thanks to those who preserved this magnificent art, falconry saw a strong resurgence. However, it was also discovered in places where it was never previously practiced. Today, an art rather than a mere sport, it has made one of the greatest contributions to conservation by preserving the peregrine, the fastest animal alive, from extinction. It also maintains airport safety by reducing the risk of bird strikes.

Having witnessed the discovery of this precious art in my country, located in the heart of South America, I understand the amazement of those early shepherds, stunned by the stoops of wild falcons in their ignorance of falconry. I had a powerful attraction to falcons, as if in my DNA, since I was a little boy, until at 12 years old I learned of falconry's existence in a local encyclopedia. Since then, throughout the long story which followed, I have felt one of the strongest sensations in my life.

My birth into falconry was a long, tough and hard road on which I was completely alone. Years later, I met two falconers that visited my country: Fernando Feas

from Spain and Dave Jones from England (who came here by accident). When Dave visited my home, he might have been reminded of medieval falconers: my falcon's perch was a flexible guava branch, secured into shape with a rope and terminating in sharp tips, formed with a knife, by which it was set in the ground. Other items were fabricated by my imagination.

Author having  
taken a bat  
with his bat  
falcon







Female bat falcon in flight

It eventually took me six months, flying her daily for an average of one and a half hour per day, to be able to hunt my first quarry, following the example of wild bat falcons' hunting strategies. I believe that the best way to learn how to fly falcons is watching what they do in nature: the ultimate falconry school. To me, falconry is not just an art but a language that you use to establish the relationship between hawk and human. This is exactly what I did with *Aratiri*. Her second season ended with 163 head of quarry, of which 24 were bats and the rest featured 16 different species of birds.

Many people compare bat falcons with merlins, but they are very different. Of similar weight, both have a similar wingbeat but their respective wing and tail configurations differ, adapted to their natural hunting strategies. An open country pursuit specialist, the merlin's long tail and little rounded wings make it easy

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Just as there are traditional falcons for falconry, there are others almost unknown to it: a new world! In 2008, after flying and hunting with other raptors, I encountered a very small black falcon with a white throat. He used to perch on a high metallic structure, part of a meteorological station at the National University of Asunción's School of Veterinary Science where I had started to study. I was compelled to miss classes to keep watching him: a bat falcon.

Driven to make his presence felt by other birds that attempted to traverse his territory, in flight he seemed like a scaled-down peregrine. He had very pronounced feet, a short tail and an indescribably beautiful wingbeat. His stoops skimmed the trees as he tried to strike his targets, and definitely had an impact on me. Capturing my full attention, I thought that this falcon would be ideal for falconry.

That same year, I acquired an imprint female, naming her *Aratiri* which means "Flash" in the Guarani language. People on internet falconry forums told me that it wasn't a viable species for falconry, though assured me that I could teach her to go up and fly to the lure. However, my great desire to hunt saw me persist. Her behaviour was very different to that of the American kestrel and aplomado falcon I had handled before. She had a restless urge to fly, but not in a focused way, and couldn't concentrate on me.

Close up on the glove consuming a saffron finch (*Sicalis flaveola*)





Playfully chasing an American kestrel  
(*F. sparverius*) which was 'hanging around'

for them easy to change direction and give them more speed from the glove in ascending flight. The bat falcon, however, has a shorter tail and long, sharp wings (not as long as those of a hobby since it is more of a glider). They prefer to hunt from high above, attacking in forest clearings, flying through the branches and making very abrupt turns. Both they, and their very hard feathers, are able to handle G force as they suddenly change of direction in their stoop. *Falco rufigularis*, and indeed *Falco deiroleucus*, seem exceptions to the rule with falcons since, whilst both have a very similar structure to the peregrine, they hunt, accipiter-like, in the forest. Without doubt, the merlin takes advantage of its rapid climbing ability in direct pursuit flights, whilst the bat falcon relies on height advantage with its ability to turn rapidly during its stoop.

Deforestation has led *Falco rufigularis* to adapt to the cities, frequently nesting in suitable cavities on high buildings in Paraguay. They can hunt successfully because our cities have a lot of trees and, if there are few small birds available, they always have a failsafe backup plan – hunting bats.



I hope that good falconers may perpetuate this ancient art by good falconry practice, and can have access to other species like this one. Having now flown some of these acrobatic missiles, I have come to admire them and hence adopted the bat falcon as the symbol of my association, “Asociación de Cetrería y Conservación de Aves de Presa del Paraguay” (Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey) ACCAPP.



Dr. Vet.  
RAÚL GERMAN PALACIOS PRINCIGALLI

Since handling his first American kestrel at the age of 16, Raul has handled, and hunted with species including the aplomado falcon, bat falcon, Harris' hawk, rufous-thighed hawk, black-chested buzzard-eagle and ornate hawk eagle. He also imported the first peregrines into Paraguay for falconry, realising his dream of flying these at a wide range of quarry.

He represented Paraguay at the International Festivals of Falconry in England, 2009 (after which he completed an internship at Nick Fox's breeding centre), and the United Arab Emirates in 2011. That same year, he founded RAPTOR, a bird control company, publishing his thesis on its application of falconry methods at the Silvio Pettirossi International Airport in 2012.

2014 saw him represent Paraguay once again at the International Falconry Festival in Abu Dhabi, this time with Tatiana Rivarola, who was then the only other Paraguayan falconer. Along with other falconry apprentices in 2016, they went on to found *Asociación de Cetrería y Conservación de Aves de Presa del Paraguay* with Raul as President. In 2017, he imported the first golden eagle into Central and South America.





# The 2018-2019 Snipe Hawking Season in Ireland

*by Martin Brereton*



My bird  
on snipe  
on typical  
hunting  
ground

This past winter gave us another good snipe hawking season for many reasons. The weather was generally mild and, with light winds often blowing, the conditions were often perfect for high flying. I don't remember Ireland ever being so calm and so mild over such a long period of the winter.

We had the pleasure too of seeing a new member of the snipe hawking fraternity, Keith Barker, kill his first snipe in lovely style on one of the midland bogs. It was a great joy to see the delight on his face and we all knew well of the work he had put in to get that great reward.

We had some good field meets around the country this season, in Sneem County Kerry and Glencorrib County Galway in November and in the new year in Moate County Westmeath. We had some overseas guests at all three meets, which is always nice to see but especially when the meets produced some of the best flying I have ever seen. For many years, it had been mostly just myself snipe hawking here in Ireland but now we have some exceptional snipe hawkers and what a pleasure it was to stand back and watch their falcons fly.

There was time when I knew everyone that had flown snipe with success but now the list is getting



longer and if I were to try and name them all I would be bound to forget someone. This to me is a heart warming fact and shows just how successful snipe hawking has become. As in all sports, there are always the few “die hard” falconers who are out on the bog every day perfecting their art and their falcons always seem to perform that bit better. Every year some new snipe hawkers come on board and this year was no different with Maurice Nicholson and Keith Barker added to the list.

This season I had some fantastic flights, all late in the year as my tiercel was injured in November when he should have been hitting the mark. In December and January he managed some good heights and great speed. I also moved on to using a GPS system this season which, for someone who used to fly with a bell only, was a complete game changer. My tiercel's best height of the season was over nine hundred feet, best speed was one hundred and twenty nine miles per hour and the longest stoop lasted fourteen seconds.... all fantastic information I was able to get from my system.

There was one day on the bog this season that I will remember forever. My three year old tiercel had just killed a snipe from a perfect pitch and carried it off to a small wood by the bog. As I was moving in to try and pick him up, my good friend Jim George shouted across to me and pointed up “he's above you” thinking that the tiercel had lost the snipe and remounted. My two pointers were rock solidly on point ahead of me. I sent the dogs in and the snipe flushed. The falcon stooped and missed and then came back around and mounted

high over the dogs as they came on point again. This time when the snipe broke, the falcon stooped hard and bound to it and then carried it off effortlessly high into the wide blue sky. It was at this moment that I realised that my tiercel was indeed probably eating his snipe in the wood and that I had been hunting with a wild tiercel. I should have trusted my GPS. Anyway, I moved in and picked up my tiercel as he was finishing off his meal of snipe and just as I was coming out of the wood Jim shouted to me saying the tiercel was back again, this time with his mate. When I looked up, I saw that it was a pair of merlins that were above and, when I lowered my eyes, I saw that the pointers were again locked on point. What followed was as good a ringing flight as anyone has ever seen. I flushed the snipe and the attacks began. The snipe tried to break away but the pair of little falcons, working as a team, kept cutting him off forcing him to climb up higher and higher. Their stoops were so fast that the throw ups were immense and it seemed to go on for ever, higher and higher into the sky until eventually one of the pair snagged the snipe and then they disappeared across the sky with their prize. Later that afternoon I flew my younger tiercel and after hitting a snipe and tail chasing it he flew it down on the bog. Four snipe killed in one afternoon, all taken in different styles, two of them killed by wild falcons... this was a hawking day I will never forget.

I have made some great friends from all over the world because of snipe hawking and I look forward to next season's hawking and the old friendships it will renew and the new friendships it will bring.

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Relaxing  
at the end  
of a day





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From left to right: Martin Brereton, Gary Brereton and the new apprentice Damian Maloney who is getting his first peregrine this year. My young tiercel is on snipe.



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John O Leary. A friend of mine who bred my birds



With my student Damian Maloney



With my tiercel and pointer





MARTIN  
BRERETON

three times at the Woodhall Spa international meet and many other times at some of the Welsh Hawking Club meets.

Over the last thirty years I have used the advantage of being self-employed to hunt with my birds on virtually every day of the season for five months of the year and there are very few species of quarry that I haven't taken with a hawk or a falcon. I have been a member of the British Falconers' Club, the Welsh Hawking Club and I am presently the president of the Irish Hawking Club. I had been an amateur boxer as well and competed in the Moscow Olympic Games in 1980. When I finally decided to finish my boxing career, I began to put more and more time into trying to hunt snipe successfully with peregrines on the midland bogs all around my home. So it was that I went on to specialize in a branch of falconry that has now become very popular here in Ireland... snipe hawking. My success in this endeavour, I must confess, gives me a great amount of pride and satisfaction. I have to mention here three other falconers who were there in the early days of snipe hawking and who inspired me to really put the time and effort into it: Robert Hutchinson, Grant Hagger and Greg Liebenhals.

I have now been flying tiercel peregrines at snipe for eighteen seasons using English pointers to hunt the ground and point these marvellous little game birds. I have always loved the easy temperament of the pointer breed and their speed running over the bogs is so important when a tiercel is waiting on patiently. Their white markings too make them easy to spot on point.

I am often asked: what is the secret of developing a high flying successful snipe hawk? Suitable open bogland with plenty of snipe over the winter months is of prime consideration. A good steady dog is vital of course. Having the time to fly the falcon as much as possible right throughout the season is very important too along with having a partner who understands the demands that this passion makes on your life and her's.

Angela, my wife of thirty seven years, used to beat the hedgerows for me when she was just eighteen years old to help produce slips for the sparrowhawk I was flying back then and she has welcomed many falconers over the years into our home and always been there to help me pursue my passions. I have, over the years, done a lot of horse riding including racing, eventing, show jumping and hunting with hounds. Fishing too has a place in my life and as I write this I am looking forward to a month of May fly fishing and hopefully a few wild brown trout. After that; I usually have a couple of months of salmon fishing which, in some years, has proved very fruitful indeed for me with some nice scores of fish caught. My biggest one was a twenty one pound fish. I really believe that in life it is important to follow your dreams as much as you can. We only go around this way once and we should enjoy it all.

The group photo has all the hardcore Irish snipe hawkers in it, including Eric Witkowski, Kevin Marron, Trevor Roche and Don Ryan.

#### My falconry life and the evolution of snipe hawking in Ireland.

My interest in falconry started when I was just thirteen years old and a first cousin of mine from London, who was of similar age, came and stayed with us over the summer holidays. When he informed me one day that there were wild hawks in the woods and that you could catch and train them my interest was piqued. We ended up that summer with a collection of kestrels and sparrowhawks that we tried to handle and train but, without the necessary guidance of an experienced older hand and unaware of much of the falconry literature that existed, we had little success and so we let all the birds go free.

The following year my young cousin returned and this time brought with him a book on birds of prey published by Ladybird Books which had plenty of pictures and at least some information for us. Having learned from our experience of the previous year of the work and time that training even one bird entails, we limited our numbers and trained our first sparrowhawk and had our first hunting successes. From then on hawks and hawking became the absorbing interest of my life and I flew sparrow hawks for many years after and still do from time to time, even though the mainstay of my sport has changed over the years. I was lucky because, from an early age, I was always self-employed being a furniture maker. Even in the early days I always tried to work from 8 am to 1 pm only so that the rest of the day was mine to enjoy. I now run my own bespoke furniture business with my son and employ a few others as well so that I still have every afternoon free for hawking.

When I was twenty eight, I decided to move on from sparrowhawks and got a female redtailed hawk to fly at rabbits. A year later, I travelled to the UK to buy an eyass female goshawk. Goshawks were very hard to come by in Ireland and I flew her for two seasons. I then got a little male goshawk, again from the UK, that was quite brilliant flying at feather. I flew him on nearly every day of the season and he kept my table well supplied with pheasant and duck year after year. I flew him

From left to right: Pat Dooly dog trainer, Xavier Morel, Martin Brereton. Trevor Roach, Vincent Flannelly dog trainer, Kevin Marron, Don Ryan, Eric Witkowski



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# A BRIEF HISTORY OF FALCONRY AND HAWKING WITH HARRIERS IN NEW ZEALAND

*by Noel Hyde*

The earliest record of falconry practiced in New Zealand is from the 1920s when a Mr E.V. Corry brought a sparrowhawk from the UK, and “flew it at a few slow flying birds, mainly water rails (*Pukekos*) in the swamps.”<sup>(1)</sup> Then there are the early recollections of 1960s falconry and photographs, from ‘Geordie’ Ken Bennet, in the book written by his brother George; *Geordie: Down Among The Kiwis*.<sup>(2)</sup>

There are anecdotal records of two falconers flying birds in the Mackenzie country of the South Island in the early 1970s, along with Jerry Andrews who flew “bush falcons” (New Zealand falcons) in the hills behind Palmerston North.

In 1974, UK falconer and raptor biologist Dr Nick Fox came to New Zealand and founded the Raptor Association of New Zealand (RANZ), while completing a PhD study on New Zealand falcons. The aim of the Raptor Association was to encompass everyone’s interest, be it research, rehabilitation, or falconry.

During this time the New Zealand Wildlife Service allowed falconry with harriers: indeed, the founding



The late Jerry Andrews with his New Zealand falcon Varda. Photo by John Powell

Inaugural meeting of the Raptor Association of New Zealand, Waihopai Valley, Marlborough, New Zealand, Nick Fox 3<sup>rd</sup> from left back row.  
Photo John Powell



meeting of RANZ was at a falconry meet in the Waihopai Valley in Marlborough. Several members had “harrier hawks” (Australasian harriers), and Nick Fox took quarry with falcons he had trained for his studies investigating their hunting behaviour.

As RANZ evolved, a permit system was put in place for those wanting to fly hawks, including a written and practical test. Several keen falconers emerged at this time and into the 1980s: these included Norman McKenzie,





The late Norman McKenzie with leucistic Australasian harrier. Photo by John Powell

Albie Wilson, John Powell, Pat Malone, Lex Hedley, Andrew Tollen, Debbie Stewart, Noel Hyde, Laurence Barea, Dean Thomas and Matt Wong. The 1980s saw many of these falconers flying hawks, with members holding mini meets, hawking rabbits with ferrets and dogs, as well as others enjoying recreational falconry on their own.

1985 saw the Australasian harrier become partially protected, meaning they could be killed by landowners

if causing damage to stock, e.g. killing poultry. The disestablishment of the Wildlife Service was replaced by the newly formed Department of Conservation (DOC), who also wanted to control harriers around endangered species programs. At this time and into the '90s, although falconry was not illegal, (not mentioned in law) it was not allowed, and the situation was being governed by the personal views of various individuals within the department. However, regardless of these views, and that harriers could be killed, dedicated falconers continued flying them.

In 1987 falcons were flown at Wellington airport as a trial into their effectiveness as a bird control measure, but the coastal proximity of the airport and nearby sewage outfall meant the ever-present gulls were persistent and the trials were abandoned. The trials were more successful when falcons were flown over more inland airfields.

In the early 1990s, the closing of the Department of Conservation raptor facility, at the National Wildlife Centre in the Wairarapa, gave the opportunity for more people to work with falcons, as the occasional bird became available to train and fly during the course of rehabilitation. From the early days of the New Zealand Wildlife Service, the use of falconry techniques has always been approved as necessary in the rehabilitation of birds of prey. The flying of falcons quickly built up a larger resource of falconry expertise. While getting birds fit for release, falconers enjoyed great success, taking a variety of quarry including *pukeko* (or purple swamphen), mallard duck, spur wing plover (masked

Noel Hyde's Australasian harrier *Fran* on mallard. Photo Noel Hyde



Debbie Stewart MNZM, with female New Zealand falcon *Diamond* and mallard. Photo Noel Hyde





The author's  
haggard  
female harrier  
Fran. Photo  
Noel Hyde



lapwing), Australian magpie, rabbit, pheasant and sundry other species – even a ferret.

In 1992 Debbie Stewart, then New Zealand's only woman falconer, became the founding Director of the Wingspan Birds of Prey Trust, dedicated to the research, captive management and public awareness of New Zealand's birds of prey (see [www.wingspan.co.nz](http://www.wingspan.co.nz)).

Wingspan now manages New Zealand's National Bird of Prey Centre in Rotorua, where visitors can see all five of New Zealand's endemic, native and introduced birds of prey, watch daily flying displays and enjoy a close interactive experience with the hawks.

The centre has a small museum showcasing falconry around the world, including the biology and conservation of raptors. Wingspan also houses the archives of New Zealand falconry and the five board members include three falconers and a PhD scientist: all have published and authored scientific papers on NZ raptors. Wingspan remains a corresponding member of the International Association of Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey.

In 2007 the Department of Conservation reviewed the Level of Protection of some New Zealand Wildlife which included the partial protected status of the Australasian harrier. This resulted in the removal of the need for all persons, including DOC, to obtain a permit to control problem birds.

Because the public, including landowners, farmers, game farmers and DOC, could now kill hawks without a permit, Wingspan believed this policy discriminated

against other stakeholders like falconers, who would like to train healthy harriers and fly them. After submissions by Wingspan and Dr Nick Fox of the Falcons for Grapes project, in August 2010, the same year UNESCO inscribed falconry as an intangible cultural heritage of humanity, the first permits for legal falconry with harriers were issued in New Zealand.

In December 2011, at the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Festival of Falconry in Al Ain, the author, along with falconers Debbie Stewart, Dean Thomas and Shane McPherson, held the founding meeting of the New Zealand Falconers Association with the drafting of a constitution and code of ethics. On returning to New Zealand the first NZFA committee was formed, and then President Laurence Barea and Vice President Noel Hyde assisted the New Zealand Department of Conservation with a legal definition of falconry and the drafting of falconry regulations that included wild take.

New Zealand is divided into twelve Fish and Game regions: their councils are the statutory managers of fish and game resources and their sustainable and recreational use by anglers and hunters. Because of this, applications were made to the Fish and Game department to enable falconers' access to the gamebird resources available to shooters. The hunting of rabbits and hares in New Zealand requires no authority other than the landowner's permission, but to hawk gamebirds requires an appropriate hawking permit from DOC and to obtain and be in possession of a valid gamebird habitat stamp from the Department of Fish and Game.



### The Australasian Harrier

New Zealand has only two diurnal species of raptors: the endemic, absolutely protected, and threatened New Zealand falcon (*Falco novaeseelandiae*) and the partially protected, native, and common Australasian harrier (*Circus approximans*), sometimes called the swamp harrier or *Kahu* by Maori.

This harrier is the largest of the world's 16 species, with adult males up to 660g and females up to 890g. In New Zealand harriers are opportunistic and often take carrion, but apparently less so in Australia. Indeed, many New Zealanders still think they are strictly carrion eaters as they're commonly seen feeding on roadkill. However, this is mainly in the winter months and, come spring and summer, they move back to a mainly live prey diet. They are very aerial birds, often seen lazily soaring over the countryside with their wings held in a shallow V or in a thermal high in the sky. Like all harriers they have long broad wings and typically hunt by slow quartering. They have been recorded taking a wide variety of prey from rats, mice and insects to larger prey including rabbits, European brown hare, domestic fowl, heron, pheasant, coot and ducks.



Laurence Barea, Vice President of NZFA with his imprint female harrier Bramble on pukeko. Photo Noel Hyde

### The Harrier as a gamehawk

Unlike other harrier species, the Australasian harrier is quite robust in stature, with thicker tarsi and larger, more powerful, feet, toes and talons. They have proved themselves a very capable gamehawk, especially when hawking *pukeko* (purple swamphen) and ducks.

While the New Zealand falcon is a bold and fearless bird, and presently unavailable for falconry, Australasian harriers are a very shy and nervous species (probably due to years of continuous persecution). Haggards in particular can require a good deal of manning. Males fly around 580-640g and females fly around 660-700g.

On the wing these hawks can show impressive speed when necessary, and are spectacularly manoeuvrable, readily taking prey either in the air or on the ground. A haggard female in full flight, wings bent back, pumping hard, twisting and turning and following every move, a metre behind a rabbit, is a sight to behold. A more typical flight is the hawk in a direct flying attack, closing the distance on its quarry with deep powerful wingbeats and often a final glide. They can either slam into it or pull up vertically, doing a wingover, and power-diving into the quarry. We have often remarked how harrier hawking can often be reminiscent of eagle hawking, only in miniature.

### Hawking

Harriers can be slipped from car windows but are usually flown out of the hood from the glove, slips can be long, sometimes well over 100 metres. Their light wing loading also enables them to easily wait on, circling overhead while attempts are made to flush quarry beneath them.

Most of the author's experience has been flying haggards, particularly my nine times intermewed female called *Fran*, after Dr Francis Hamerstrom. I was fortunate to stay with Fran and Fred on three trips to the United States in the mid 80s and 90s. Fran, as we all know, loved harriers and we talked at length about their potential as a trained hawk. She was very encouraging, telling me excitedly about American falconer Alan Beske catching a green winged teal in fair flight with a northern harrier. Fran would be proud of her namesake. She took her first mallard quite unexpectedly while out for a short flight to her stretch her wings. She pulled up at about 20m after harrying a flock of greenfinches which flew up from the field beneath her. She suddenly did a wingover and dived

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Laurence Barea's imprint juvenile female harrier *Bramble* taking a pukeko in flight. Photo Michael Williams

vertically down, slamming into a hen mallard standing unseen by me in the shadow of a water trough. The drake jumped and flapped at her but she wasn't about to let go of her prize.

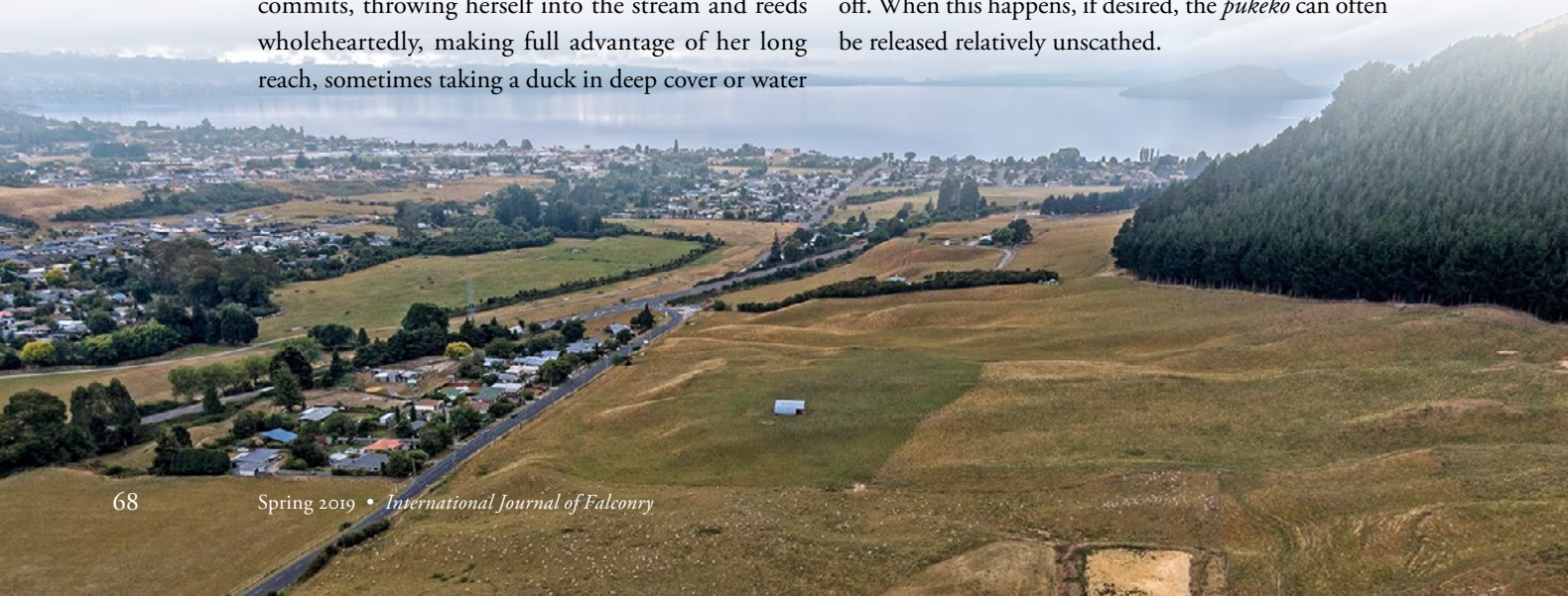
I've flown *Fran* very successfully at mallards on the stream that runs through our property, but because of their speed, the harrier needs the advantage of height. I stealthily approach along, and slightly below the top of, a raised embankment until within 25-30m and then raise her enough until she sees them, at which she's off in a flash. Sometimes she takes them on the water before they're airborne, or on the rise if they're below her. If she misses, she quickly gets left behind. Sometimes the ducks are caught out in the open, unaware and, with the hawk suddenly above them, they panic, quacking loudly, flapping and running across the water for cover. When this happens, they're very vulnerable. I'm impressed how she always totally commits, throwing herself into the stream and reeds wholeheartedly, making full advantage of her long reach, sometimes taking a duck in deep cover or water

and floating downstream on it soaked to the shoulders. Because one is usually close to the action, duck flights, although short, are always very exciting.

Although mallards can be taken by harriers, perhaps the *pukeko* (*Porphyrio melanotus*), which is sometimes called the purple swamphen, is potentially the ideal quarry for hawking with harriers in New Zealand. They are common, very widespread and offer a very challenging quarry. Often regarded as a pest and classified as a gamebird species, they're able to be hunted in the duck shooting season.

An attractive bird, they are a large rail with a bright red beak and frontal plate, black head, back, wings and tail, an indigo blue neck, breast and belly and vivid white undertail coverts, with long red legs and long toes. *Pukeko* weigh 800-1000g. They are surprisingly strong, tough-skinned birds, with a sharp, stout beak which they readily use. They live in large, complex, social groups and will not hesitate to rush in and help one of their stricken number when attacked, leaping at the hawk, hammering it repeatedly with their beaks and raking it with their long toes. Flights have to be chosen carefully, preferably at single birds, otherwise the falconer has to be fit to get to, and make in quickly to assist, the hawk. Any delays and the hawk can suffer feather damage or otherwise be beaten up and possibly lose confidence.

Harriers readily take *pukekos* on the ground, either in a direct flying attack or from a wingover and dive from above. With the advantage of speed and surprise, they will also take them in flight. They very quickly learn to grab the pukeko's head, but until then, often the hawk's long outstretched legs can help prevent the hawk from being bitten. It is not unusual to make in and find both hawk and *pukeko* on the ground, both with their long legs extended, trying to hold each other off. When this happens, if desired, the *pukeko* can often be released relatively unscathed.







*Fran on the wing. This harrier is the largest of the world's 16 species. Photo by Rod Mueller*

The New Zealand Falconers' Association has approximately seven practising falconers, many choosing to fly imprints, which fly with an almost manic intensity and aggression. In New Zealand, the Australasian harrier offers the only choice for legal falconry but hopefully one day we will see access to captive bred falcons. In the meantime, harriers are proving themselves a very capable trained hawk, offering excellent sport as well as unique challenges and an interesting and totally new species to the world of falconry.

### Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Debbie Stewart for helpful comments and to Michael Williams for his spectacular hawking photo.

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*The author with Fran, a haggard, nine times intermewed, female Australasian harrier and mallard. Photo Debbie Stewart*



NOEL  
HYDE

Noel Hyde has been a falconer for thirty-seven years, and at the forefront of New Zealand falconry legalisation. He established the New Zealand falconry archives and is a founding member and past Vice President of the New Zealand Falconers' Association.

A lifelong advocate for bird of prey conservation, he is a key contributor to the development of the Wingspan National Bird of Prey Trust. He is a researcher and published author on recently colonised barn owls, and New Zealand falcons on the sub Antarctic islands and in mainland pine forests.

In 2017 Noel was recognised and honoured by the Queen for his contributions to bird of prey conservation and falconry and made a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit, NZ Government House.





## REST IN PEACE SI SAÏD SADOK

Falconry has just lost one of its respected senior masters.

We have just learned with great sadness that, on Tuesday 12th February, 2019, the falconers of Morocco's Doukkala Region lost one of the sport's stalwart masters and a fervent guardian of this universal heritage, in the person of his Mokaddem Haj Si Saïd Sadok. He lived in Douar Smala near Ouled Frej, where the Lekouassem tribe had the knowledge to keep this ancestral tradition alive and restore its grandeur and aura of antiquity in this modern era.

The late Haj Saïd never failed in the call of duty, relegating all his family concerns to the background in order to focus all his ardour on his experiences in, and passion for the promotion of, falconry, whether in his homeland or when travelling abroad with Mohammed El Ghazouani who chairs the Ouled Frej Association of Lekouassem Falconers.

In these sad and painful circumstances we offer our condolences to the family of the deceased as well as to Mohammed El Ghazouani and, through him, to all falconers of the Lekouassem tribe of Douar Smala.

Rest in peace Si Saïd: we will miss you.

We are all of God and to God we will return.

## REPOSE EN PAIX SI SAÏD SADOK

La FAUCONNERIE vient de perdre l'un de ses maîtres et grand doyen

On vient d'apprendre avec tristesse et grande affliction, que la FAUCONNERIE de Doukkala vient perdre en ce Mardi 12 Février 2019, l'un de ses inconditionnels maîtres et fervent gardien de ce patrimoine Universel, en la personne de son Mokaddem Haj Si Saïd Sadok au Douar Smâala d'Ouled Frej, là où la tribu Lekouassem a su comment garder vivante cette tradition ancestrale pour lui restituer aujourd'hui ses grandeurs et son aura d'autrefois.

Feu Haj Saïd n'avait jamais manqué à l'appel du devoir, reléguant au second plan toutes ses préoccupations familiales pour focaliser toute son ardeur ses expériences et sa passion à la promotion de la FAUCONNERIE, que ce soit dans son fief, à travers le pays où à l'étranger en compagnie de Mohammed El Ghazouani qui préside l'Association des Fauconniers Lekouassem d'Ouled Frej.

En ces tristes et pénibles circonstances nous présentons toutes nos condoléances à la famille du défunt ainsi qu'à Mohammed El Ghazouani et travers lui à tous les Fauconniers de la tribu Lekouassem de Douar Smâala.

Repose en paix Si Saïd, tu nous manqueras.

Nous sommes tous à Dieu et à Dieu nous retournerons.



# SAÏD

*In* the eighties of the previous century, my family and I lived during three wonderful years in Morocco, just south of Casablanca. We had a house in Ain Diab overlooking the Atlantic Ocean and in walking distance of beach and dunes and a deserted stone quarry where kestrels could always be found. This was an ideal location for my daily runs to compensate for an unhealthy, sedentary office life and for training and flying of raptors.

Accompanied by Moroccan friends, we gradually got in touch with a group of local falconers who were in fact farmers in an irrigated area near Had Ouled Frej. In this group, Saïd became our main anchor point and to his farm we went during our numerous visits. We also got to know his wife Miriam and his sons and daughters who also visited us at home in Casablanca several times. Many cups of sweet mint tea were drunk and delightful tagines with couscous consumed in those days. After a few years, my career took to me to another country on another continent where I was able to continue my

falconry in my limited spare time. Through a friend in my old office, we were able to stay in touch with Saïd and his family for a few more years before contact gradually ceased.

Early 2019 I happened to notice on Facebook a message of the Moroccan Falconer Society announcing the passing of Si Saïd Sadok. To my surprise, I recognized my old friend Saïd from Morocco of 30 years earlier in the deceased. The notice of the club is part of this article.

I add my condolences to his family to those of Saïd's falconry colleagues and friends in Morocco.

I was very pleased when I found a box with slightly faded photos of those early Moroccan days. Saïd figures in most of them. As an illustration of days gone by, when falconry in Morocco was mainly a local activity, I enclose some of them.

*Dick ten Bosch*

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The Lady and  
the Unicorn  
(detail)



## Hawks' Varvels

*by Patrick Morel*

*Varvels*, or *vervelles* in French, are artefacts classified in the same category as harnesses or horse pendants. Found either in the form of a ring on which a name is engraved or, alternatively, as a shield decorated with a coat of arms, varvels allow the identification of an owner. According to James Parker's *A Glossary of Terms Used in Heraldry* (1894) a varvel is: "A metal ring bearing the owner's name or coat of arms, attached to a hawk's jess, or jesses, for identifying birds."

### **Pendants, escutcheons and varvels**

**Pendants** The first pendants with coats of arms appeared in the 12th century and were circular in shape. They were suspended along the chest of the horse, then later on the head or the rump. The pendant consisted of two parts: a suspension loop riveted to the leather of the lanyard and a ring or a plate, sometimes enamelled. Horse pendants are generally anonymous and more of a decorative nature (embellished with images of flowers, animals or birds).

**Escutcheons** Ostensibly a similar type of indication of property, these were carried by hunting dogs.

**Varvels** Genuine varvels were property labels worn by hunting birds. At first, they were small flat rings or *flying ringlets*, bearing the owner's name and attached to the end of the jesses. In a later period they consisted of small plates with the owner's coat of arms, attached to the legs of the hawks.

Varvels were fixed in place by a leather strap or by a small ring rather than by a riveted suspension, which would have been too large and cumbersome for a bird to carry. It is therefore the size, the weight and the means of fixation which determines whether an artefact is a varvel, an escutcheon or a harness pendant. A hawk's varvel does not weigh more than a few grams and is not more than 30-35 mm in length.

### **Varvels through the centuries**

In the 11th and 12th centuries, hawks' jesses appear to have been finished with acorns or ornaments whose shape and utility are difficult to define. It is the Bayeux Tapestry, embroidered between 1066 and 1077, which allows us to make the first observations on early falconry equipment. We notice that the hawks' jesses seem to be finished with a pompom ornament or a button.



The appearance of varvels seems to date back to the end of the 13th century: small tags in the form of a shield appear to hang from the ends of trained hawks' jesses. These were, however, soon replaced by metal plates, often shield-shaped and often enamelled, on which the arms of the hawk's owner were engraved.

One of the earliest manuscripts on falconry, Frederick II's treatise *De Arte Venandi cum Avibus*, written between 1241 and 1245, does not yet specifically name the small rings (*annulos*) at the end of hawks' jesses as *varvels*.

The first references to varvels being named as such are to be found in accounting acts of 1350, as Cazalis de Fondouce points out, in his *Les vervelles à chien et à Faucon*.<sup>1</sup>

### Evolution of the shape of varvels

Varvels evolved over time, becoming, morphologically, very differently shaped objects from the oldest known varvels of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Initially, varvels were simply small rings attached to the ends of the jesses. From the middle of the 13th century to the beginning of the 16th century, however, varvels became small plates of metal on which the coat of arms of the lord were engraved. These plates were often enamelled except when made of precious metal. Certain varvels were in fact in gilded silver or even in gold.

These small, emblazoned plaques take different forms depending on their country of origin. In France, they follow the evolution of the coat of arms over the centuries: round or a lengthened oval in the 12th, a rounded shield in the 13th, a regular shield in the 14th and then a shield in a diamond in the 15th. Other countries like England adopted different shapes for varvels as they did for heraldic shields: shield-shape, round, oval, square, rectangular, clover or even quatrefoil.

### Fastening of varvels

Very often, the specimens of varvels found do not allow a clear deduction of how they were affixed. It seems that those in the form of a coat of arms were fixed directly onto the hawk's tarsus by means of a small leather strap (a so-called *bewit*) attached above the jesses and ending with a looped knot, as is used for the bell.

<sup>1</sup> Cazalis de Fondouce, *Les vervelles à chien et à faucon* (Grenoble: Imprimerie Générale du Midi, 1910)



Varvel of Charles Brandon 1st Duke of Suffolk 1520-1540

Charles d'Arcussia specifies that "*varvels are metal plates placed around the tarsi of the flying birds on which are engraved the arms and the name of the owner of the hawk.*" This evokes a ring as used in ornithology for identifying individual wild birds.

The varvels evolved again (approximately from the middle of the 16th century, if we refer to the writings and drawings of Charles d'Arcussia) and finally became finely engraved flat rings fixed at the end of the jesses. On these rings were engraved the names of the hawk's owner or sometimes that of the hawk itself. The varvels of the royal hawks bore the motto "*au Roy*" ("*To the King*" or "*I belong to the King*") and sometimes bore the name of the Grand Falconer. A nice example of a flat engraved ring is shown with the motto '*sum regis anglie*' ("*I belong to the King of England*").

Several tapestries represent hawks equipped with varvels such as the famous Devonshire Hunting Tapestries which originated in Arras or Tournai around 1430 and are now preserved in London. A pair of varvels,

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probably of gold or silver-gilt, appear on an armed hunting bird which is a decoration in the tapestry known as the Lady with the Unicorn (1484) which may be seen in the Musée de Cluny (the National Museum of the Middle Ages) in Paris. These varvels are represented in the form of simple rings of rather large diameter.

It therefore appears that, from the 17th century on, varvels move in the direction of simplicity and we see a return to an engraved ring, fixed to the end of the jesses.<sup>2</sup> An oil painting by David Teniers the Younger, representing *Heron Hunting with the Archduke Leopold-Guillaume* about 1652-1656, hangs in the Museum of the Louvre. In it, the varvels are perfectly visible at the ends of the jesses. The same is true of paintings by Philipp Ferdinand of Hamilton (1664-1731).

### Varvels in the form of a ring

The varvel, according to various foreign documents from the 17th century, can also be fashioned in the form of a large ring bearing a shield (like an emblazoned ring reminiscent of a jewel).

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps as, by this period, a greater majority of people were literate, the need for visual images on coats of arms was reduced. This may have made simpler, lighter and less bulky varvels with falconers' details written upon them more practical.

It may be that, attached like this, the varvels functioned as a means of attaching the leash to the jesses but they could also have facilitated the rapid slipping of a hawk when quarry was sighted. This would have allowed the leash to keep the hawk secure on the fist (especially important when on horseback) but still be capable of being pulled through when the hawk was allowed to leave the fist. The leash is looped around the varvels and this suggests, perhaps, that it was then passed through a slit in itself, as the images in Frederick II's *De Arte Venandi cum Avibus* (and indeed those in the *Traite de Fauconnerie* of Schlegel and Wulverhorst) suggest. This would imply that, in the past, the leash was tied double in a loop, certainly when on the screen perch and perhaps when on the block too. This may have had the effect of keeping the varvels close together, though possibly causing tangling, which may have ultimately led to the later use of the swivel alone.

The title page of Symon Latham's book *Latham's Falconry or The Faulcons Lure, and Cure* (1633) depicts, in the middle of a representation of falconry equipment, a pair of varvels.

### The end of the use of varvels

That varvels were fixed to the ends of the jesses was perhaps the main factor that led to the decline in their use for, when a hawk had missed her prey and gone to perch, the presence of the varvels at the end of the jesses was likely to cause these leather straps to get hooked on branches, leading to an irremediable accident.

A final, major, element that was probably decisive in the abandonment of varvels was that, from the 19th century, hawking gradually evolved from the grand and beautiful high flights to hunting with hawks using low flight methods. Varvels were thus used chiefly for the high-value falcons. Shortwinged hawks, being far more liable to take stand in trees and remain entangled in the branches, would be trapped by their varvels too often.

Anklets bearing identity plates – a modern form of varvel, by Fran Bolinches.





### The modern identity plate

The modern form of the varvel is a ring placed around the hawk's tarsus, or a small plate of plastic, aluminum or light metal attached to the tarsus with a bewit, which is engraved with the owner's details.

Another option is the placement of a light metal identity plate (brass or copper) over the anklet as our friend Fran Bolinches does. This method allows the jesses to be removed for safety in flight whilst retaining perfectly the ability to identify a stray hawk. It is astonishing to note that this system was born some centuries ago under other names such as 'corrigia' (protective cuff) or 'garter'.

The use of a kind of protective sleeve also recalls that described by Sir Thomas Sherley in *A Short Discourse of Hawking to the Field* (1603). He speaks of a 'garter' engraved to slip over the jess.

Finally, another means of identification is the placement on a chick's tarsus of a closed ring, again bearing the owner's telephone number. Some rings can even be equipped with micro-chips making their reading possible in case the engraving is illegible.

In any case, I would like to emphasize the usefulness of varvels or identity plates. How many hawks have been saved and returned quickly to their owner thanks to them? It would be unthinkable today to fly a hawk without a transmitter, yet no transmitter is infallible, so, let's not forget to equip our precious hawking companion with a varvel or identity plate, a small, inexpensive and indispensable accessory!



Tramontane equipped with Fran Bolinches' identity anklets



Varvel of Henry IV (sum regis anglie-I am the King of England)





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Varvel of Henry Frederick Prince of Wales (son of James 1st 1566-1625)



Varvel of Earl of Pembroke



Varvel of Duke of Lancaster



Varvel of Francis Vaghan



Varvel of Prince Edward, Buckingham



PATRICK MOREL

A hunting enthusiast since childhood, Patrick began hawking in 1965, aged 15, and is celebrating his 54<sup>th</sup> consecutive hawking season this year. He first became aware of the art through an encyclopaedia entry written by famous French falconer Pierre Amédée Pichot. This inspired early successes with eyass sparrowhawks, undertaken without realising that they are among the most delicate and difficult hawks in falconry. Subsequent contact with a trader in Pakistan led to the acquisition, training and entering of two passage shaheens: a real initiation for a young aspiring falconer. Every year since then has seen him hawking with peregrines and gyrfalcons, both waiting-on at grouse and partridge and out-of-the-hood at crows, unable to cease practicing the art. In 1971 Patrick went to Scotland for red grouse hawking with his friends Gilles Lafosse and Gilles Nortier – the beginning of an annual pilgrimage which continues to this day.

### Falconry associations.

A founding member of the Belgian Falconers' Association, *Mary of Burgundy* (1967) Patrick has served as its secretary from 1970 to 1987 before being elected vice president. He became president of the association in 2002, a position he still holds. In 1984, he was appointed secretary of the IAF, a position he held for 14 years. He became vice president in 1998 and president in 2000 and served in that role for two terms until 2006. He is also an honorary member of a number of falconry associations including the Association des Fauconniers et Autoursiers Français, the British Falconers' Club, the Deutscher Falkenorden and the North American Falconers' Association.

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- Co-author. *Sky Hunters: The Passion of Falconry* (2008) by Amirsadeghi Hossein and Mark Allen.
- L'Art de la Fauconnerie* (2013).
- The Art of Falconry* (2016).
- Hawks' varvels* (2017) with David Horobin as co-author
- Les vervelles à faucon* (2019)
- Le bouton de fauconnerie*
- Hawking and Heraldry*.



# A Historical Account of the Origins of Falconry in Gilgit-Baltistan to the Present Day.

*by Shahid Ali*

According to researchers, the earliest origins of falconry can be traced back to the tribes of western Mongolia and to other far eastern dynasties (IAF, 2013). This area is geographically connected with the Gilgit-Baltistan region of Pakistan. How and when falconry started here is a matter of conjecture based on oral tradition. The early written texts about the sport can be traced back to the British colonial era, when imperial social geographers and ethnographers mentioned it in their writings. There were also two books by residents of Hunza (Ehd-e-ateeq Hunza and an autobiography by Mir Muhammad Nazim Khan<sup>1</sup>) which gave an account of the practice. These historical narratives, however, do not give any details of its exact inception.

I have tried to establish a link between the inception of falconry in Gilgit-Baltistan and the presence of the sport in adjoining areas of Central Asia and China. I also examined how much later the sport went into decline. The primary data of this research were collected through in-depth interviews and purposive sampling in order to gain a thorough appreciation of the topic under consideration. I consulted only with those who had either experienced falconry in their lives as part of a family tradition or who personally had practiced the sport. Additionally, secondary data from books was gathered.

## **The princely state of Yasin. (Ghizer district)**

According to Numberdar Badshahi Khan, falconry in the Yasin valley of the Ghizer District was introduced by Mir Ali Shah, who ruled the area and originated from the Badakhshan province of Afghanistan. It has been said that he took with him trained falcons and falconers. After his return to Badakhshan, Khushwaqt Ist and Shah Burush came to the area from Chitral and ruled the principality. They also brought falcons



Raja Shah Abdur Rehman, of Yasin valley, holding a goshawk on his fist. Photo taken in the year 1890



Elders of Baltit village Hunza, with Khan Bahadur Wazir Hamayoon Baig and Faraj Muhammad Reza Baig, standing left to right, and Mr. Dikhan a very passionate falconer holding a peregrine. Photo taken in year 1906

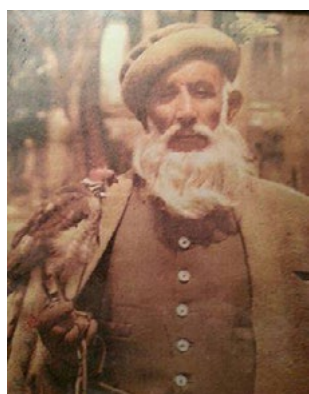




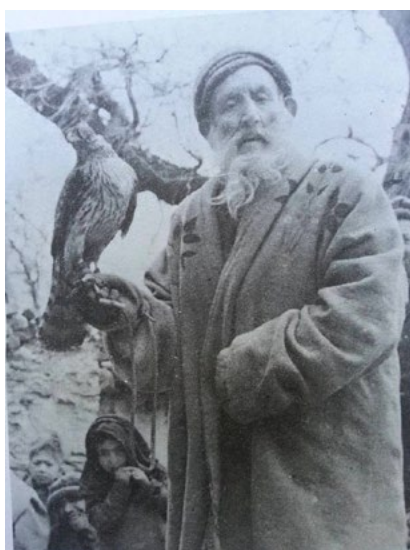
Raja Mehboob Ali Khan of Yasin valley, standing left to right Pir Shah Salamat, Buloo and Trangfa Rehman Ali Khan. Photo taken in year 1939



Wazir Sarwar Khan, Prime Minister of Nagar State, holding a goshawk. Photo taken in the year 1960



Wazir Sarwar Khan with a sparrowhawk. Photo taken in the year 1955



Besides being Prime Minister of Nagar State, Wazir Sarwar Khan, seen here with a goshawk in 1965, was a very passionate falconer

and hawks and carried forward the art of falconry in the area. Another interviewee traced the origin of falconry to Sayed Shah Karim Haider, a preacher of Ismaili Islam. He was said to have introduced the sport in Yasin when he came to the area from Shugnan in Tajikistan and settled in Barandas some 400 years ago. Abdullah Jan Hunzai, the author of *History of the Ismailis in the Northern Areas*, mentions the names of two preachers and dates their arrival to the 18th century. The respondent added that, in the beginning, practicing falconry was the privilege of the royal class and religious elites (Pir/Sayeds<sup>2</sup>) However, with the passage of time, it spread amongst other social elites like the village headmen and high officials of the principality. The office of falconer was of great importance in the princely states. Those who served in this capacity were exempt from certain types of general taxes. This was the start in the area of falconry by officials which remained in place till the devolution of the state system in the Yasin valley.

Raja Sultan Ghazi Khan, of Ishkoman valley, seen here in 1970 with his goshawk and spaniel



Raja Sultan Ghazi Khan holding a goshawk. Photo taken in the year 1975





Goshawk, belonging to Syed Pir Shah Salamat, resting on a perch in 1980



Left to right: Shahzada Fazal Hassan, Shahzada Sahib Jan and, standing (left to right), Syed Altaf, Purkhatar and an unknown assistant falconer, 1982



Syed Pir Shah Salamat of Yasin Valley with goshawk, 1981



Mr Issa Khan with a goshawk. Photo taken in the year 1982

### **The princely states of Hunza and Nagar. (Hunza and Nagar districts)**

According to an interviewee's narrative, falconry first came to this area from the adjacent lands of Central Asia and the Wakhan Corridor when falcons were presented by a neighbouring country.

According to Wazir Mujahid Ullah Baig, who is the eldest son of the last Prime Minister of Hunza, falconry in Hunza came from Sariqol. The rulers of Hunza were related by blood to the Mir of Sariqol and he introduced the Mir of Hunza to this art. This account must be questioned when we consider the text of *Ehd-e-Ateeq Hunza*, according to which, the first gift of a falcon to the Mir of Hunza was by the Mehtar Gohar Aman of Yasin, when he met Wazir Zeenat Shah at Chilbishdaas near Gilgit. It also mentions that, along with the falcons, he provided some falconers to train the Mir's people in this art. Wazir Mohabbat-Ullah



Mr Sifat Jan holding goshawk along with his father, Mr Issa Khan



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Mr Issa Khan, falconer, from Gilgit City. Photo taken by Mr. Ghazi Ghulam Raza in the year 1985



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Mr Issa Khan, a notable from Gilgit City, with a peregrine falcon in 1985



Raja Sultan Ghazi Khan holding a sparrowhawk along with a Japanese tourist



Trangfa Rehman Ali Khan, a very passionate falconer, served the sport with the Royal Office of State in Yasin valley.

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Baig provides details of a letter from Sir Aga Khan the Third, to Mir Safdar Ali Khan of Hunza, asking him to acquire for him a high-grade hawk, a *Baz-e-Taighoon*. The author further writes that the Mir of Hunza sent his hunters with a letter to the Mir of Sariqol, requesting permission for his men to go to Khoqand in Russia to acquire the hawk for his highness. All of this shows that the practice of falconry came to the area from the adjoining lands of Central Asia.

In the Nagar valley, falconry started approximately at the same time as in Hunza because the two kingdoms shared common boundaries and the relationship between the two states was based on affectionate ties between the royal families. Additionally, bartering of products was the main economic activity which existed throughout the era of the independent states. The close ties and this trade system aided the diffusion of new practices like falconry.

Since childhood, Wazir Ghulam Abbass has practiced the art which he learned from his father, Wazir Sarwar Khan, who was Prime Minister of Nagar State. He tells a story of how his father acquired a hawk from China. He had gone there to trade and bought two horses. On his way back, he stayed at a friend's house where he saw two white goshawks (*Taighoon Baaz*) and golden eagles. He asked the owner to trade him one of the goshawks but his offer was rejected at first. However, his father persisted and he traded a horse for one of the hawks but unfortunately it died on the way home.

While collecting data in the field, I met Mr Shah Zawar of Nagar valley who is the grandson of a famous falconer, Trangfa (village headman) Inayat Ali Khan. He gave me some old books about falconry, written in the Persian language, together with equipment used in the sport. The princely state of Hunza was a gateway for three empires: China, the USSR and Afghanistan.



## Falconry in the present day.

### Smuggling and poaching

In the early 1990's, the smuggling of falcons through the Khunjerab pass stood at its highest level in this region of Pakistan because of the relaxation of travel restrictions to neighbouring China for the local population. Thankfully, this practice has decreased considerably since the issue was brought to the attention of the Chinese government who took action.

The Indus Zone 4 is the main migratory route for many rare species of falcons and hawks. The migration from north to south starts early September. From the early 1990's onwards, illegal trappers have come to this region from time to time to trap falcons. They usually camp in the semi-desert areas alongside the Karakoram highway or in high pastures in the more distant valleys of Gilgit-Baltistan. Initially the local people did not understand the ramifications of this trapping and in line with local traditions of hospitality, took these visitors into their homes and regularly hosted them for months. In some cases poachers were caught red-handed by the regional Wildlife Department.

1 Both books were written in Persian, though later translated into English and Urdu, and are available in the local markets.

2 The preachings of Ismaili Islam in the area started from saints/pirs who came to the area from Central Asia. The word 'pir' is the official term for religious saints (PBUH)



Wazir Ghulam Abbas, a well-known personality of the whole region, is famous for being a free style polo legend. Noted as the most senior local falconer, he is the last in the area who is still enjoying the art.



SHAHID  
ALI

I come from Hunza, a mountainous valley between the mighty ranges of the Karakoram and the Himalaya mountains, and I grew up in Gilgit, a city which is just 100 kilometres away. Ever since my childhood, I have had a keen interest in birds which I also reared as pets at my home. It was an incident in my childhood which ignited my specific interest in falconry.

After returning home from school, it was a routine task for me each day to go up on our roof and fly the pigeons. These had been given to me by my parents. I was not the only child in the neighbourhood who had this passion. In fact rather a lot of my neighbours shared the same interest. One day when I was enjoying the flight of my pigeons, I saw a rapidly flying bird strike a pigeon in mid-air and take it away. I still have a vivid memory of that fearsome sight. When I shared this with my elders, they told me that it was a 'shaheen', a falcon in our native language. This was a turning point for me, drawing my interest away from pigeons to a new vista: the world of raptors.

After that incident, flying the pigeons high into the sky became a means to an end for me: to catch a glance of that rapidly flying bird again, which at times proved to be a real test for my eyesight. I also kept asking questions about this bird to my elders but showing interest in something other than my studies often elicited discouragement. However, at my insistence, they began to share their knowledge and told stories of how, in the past, when it was still a princely state, my great grandfathers trapped and tamed these raptors for the Mir of Hunza. After completing my college program, I ended up getting a job in a bank, which was based on the quota of demised parents, as my father had passed away when I was in kindergarten. Even in the hectic routine

of a bank, I never lost my interest in falconry and falcons and kept on searching for them in the wild range lands at weekends. Another factor which helped with my pursuit of this interest was the installation of an internet facility in Gilgit City. This gave rise to internet cafes, where I spent hours and hours searching for articles on falconry.

I learned about the falconers of the past and of others who were still practicing it in remote corners of Gilgit-Baltistan. I started contacting them and we shared our experiences. I got to know about the Pakistan Falconry Association (PFA) and got in contact with its president, Mr. Kamran Khan Yousaf Zai. He helped me to get in contact with the International Association for Falconry & Conservation of Birds of Prey (IAF) and supported me in getting my falconry license.

To be specific about my falconry practices and experiences: I have flown four sparrowhawks at house sparrows, starlings and partridge and two passage goshawks at partridge, hare and migratory ducks. The main prey for a goshawk here is chukar partridge and snowcock. Thus far I haven't yet flown a goshawk at snowcock. Of the falcons, the red-naped shaheen is a permanent resident of the area and I have also flown two of them at waterfowl and chukar with little success due to the narrow and hilly terrain. I have learnt most about the art of falconry from Wazir Ghulam Abbas, a senior citizen and a very famous personality of the region, who still practices the sport. He has educated me thoroughly in the traditional art of falconry in this part of the world. One of my best friends, Raja Fareed Ahmed, a falconer from the Ghizer district, has also shared his experiences with me. With the passage of time, my circle of falconry acquaintances has kept on growing and, although we have very few members here, we hope that our passion will encourage others to practice the art and to protect it from sinking into oblivion.

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## GERMANY











Photo credit: Nirav Bhatt

