

"In the Talons of Falconry"

I've always loved and have been interested in birds of prey, Raptors! I have always been fascinated by their fierce beauty, their incredible hunting skills, and that awesome predator stare. As an artist and animator, detail and movement is very important and these amazing animals give me plenty of both to observe and study. Never in my life did I think I was going to have such an amazement and obsession with the art of falconry. Not only will I be really close to these fantastic creatures, but now I'm going to have a chance at working with one. Hunting and practicing the ancient sport of falconry, seemed all like a dream until now.

About five years ago at a local Renaissance festival I met John Karger. I was absolutely blown away with the birds of prey demonstration Last Chance Forever was exhibiting. This particular day a whole new window opened up for me in the interest of Falconry. I introduced myself and explained my interest in the birds and their way of life. I immediately asked about volunteering at the LCF facility to be close to these creatures and to learn more. One can never learn too much about anything. Every year since that day, I have always looked forward to attending the Renaissance fair just to watch these awesome birds. The interest in Falconry led to me finding out more information on birds of prey and the practice of the sport, and as it is, I am a book addict. Let's just say, "The Birds of Prey" section grew very quick in my home. The more I read, the more the interest deepened until it got so deep, a seed was planted.

I thought about it long hours, days and years, exactly four years. I couldn't resist it any longer. I have to do it!

Last year I volunteered for LCF at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Exposition, along with my brother, Eddy. We were both very excited and were looking forward to being close to the Raptors. It's not everyday one gets to be around so many different types of these creatures, so we were really excited. As the day went by I had no idea what was in store. That day I would learn about Texas Hawking Association and also meet my future sponsor! I think John knew how passionate and interested I was about learning falconry, so he did the greatest thing he could have ever done for me in my journey to becoming a falconer, John introduced me to Steve Oleson. Meeting Steve would change my passion to an obsession, instantly! I explained to Steve I was very interested in the sport and would like to join him in flying his tiercel peregrine. He immediately said yes and we exchanged information, inside I was exploding with excitement.

Weeks went by and I finally received an e-mail from Steve saying "Emo" was ready to fly. Steve e-mailed me on a Wednesday and invited me to go on Saturday, it seemed forever, but Saturday finally arrived. I was really lucky that day because another great falconer was going. Jeff Almrud was flying a female Prairie Falcon. The day was incredible. Emo flew like a missile! That electricity I get seeing the falcons fly at the Renaissance fair was back, but this time in a real hunt.

It was absolutely everything I thought it would be, and more. I was hooked! Steve was kind enough to invite me several more times to hunt, in fact, I was fortunate enough to share just about the entire season with him, Emo and a very pretty "girl" named Lisa. Lisa was a female peregrine. Steve was rehabbing and flying. I got to see Steve fly Lisa from the creance, to the kite and then at ducks! The whole experience with Lisa was amazing. Not only did I tag along with Steve and observed and learn,

but I was assisting him when I was needed and I was proud to do so. Steve was giving Lisa another chance at life. She would one day be out on her own flying and hunting to survive. Every day was a lesson, I watched, took notes and asked questions when I needed to. The whole "Lisa" experience is something I will always hold in my heart dear to me along with memories I will never forget. I wasn't there when Lisa took her first duck, but I think Steve felt the excitement in me when we spoke on the phone. I was fortunate enough to see Lisa stoop and hit a duck on the pond so hard the guy was swimming in circles as if it was stuck on an axis. I was also there when she was set free. To see a once wounded bird, take flight, off on her own flying free is a feeling words cannot express. I am very proud of Steve. It took a lot of time and effort on his part to help Lisa and give her another chance at life, thanks Steve.

The season as a whole was Awesome! It was a blast to get to a pond, take out the binoculars and look for game. Before Emo even took flight the butterflies in my stomach were already airborne. It was a fantastic experience to watch the team of Emo and Steve work. Emo, up at thousands of feet, waiting on anxiously for Steve to get the ducks to fly. One time while Emo was gaining altitude, Steve and myself were walking toward the tank, then I turned around to see Emo being pursued by another Raptor! "A Red Tail!", I thought, but Steve immediately pointed out it was a harrier, thinking Emo's jesses were probably food it was after him. I had never experienced this and I thought to myself, "what do we do?" Steve continued toward the pond looking back at Emo and the harrier as we continued walking. Emo quickly demonstrated who was faster in the air between the two birds, but by this time Emo had flown quite a distance away from us, Steve gave me the signal to run to his left and surprise the ducks, NOW! As we were running over the dike, I thought to myself, "Steve! Emo is too far away! Isn't he?" Even before I finished asking myself the question, Emo was already 15 feet passed me, smacking a duck! My jaw just fell . . . WOW. Every single flight is memorable and has its own excitement, boy I'll probably have a novel after every flight.

On one of our outings, Steve mentioned the Texas Hawking Association field meet was coming up. I had no idea what it was or what to expect, but there was no way I was missing it! I invited my father, who was in Austin temporarily on a job, to go with me. He was very excited and immediately said yes. The day comes and off I was to West Texas, to Abilene. Upon getting there I didn't know what to expect. I go to comic conventions pretty often and I imagined a hawking meet auditorium where vendors are selling hoods, perches etc . . . I found Steve and saw plenty of familiar faces, I felt welcomed immediately. People introduced themselves if I didn't know them and explained what they flew. The meet was great! Fellow falconers getting together, sharing experience and knowledge to help each other. I was very glad I attended, even happier I joined. My father was completely amazed, he explained to me that he thought it was all a mythology. He got to see Emo and Lisa fly and was blown away by Emo's speed. The winds weren't on our side that day and some lucky ducks got to live on another day. Having Jim Dawson speak about Harris hawks and seeing one the next day was a blast.

My father and I joined Paul Moore and his Harris hawk, Penrod, out in the field the next day at the "Colonels Place. This was my first time out with a Harris hawk, they're such beautiful animals and amazing hunters. It was exciting to see Penrod "work" from the perch, Paul was carrying.

After walking around beating bushes and such my father finally spooked a jack away from the party and Penrod was there in a flash! She flew past my dad and over the jack catching it by the butt, lifting it and missing the

head by a hair, no pun intended. The jack kicked Penrod off and the pursuit continued. Artie was there along with the hawk chasing jacks at full speed, forgetting he had an injured foot. The chases were awesome and Penrod finally nailed a jack. My first Harris hawk experience was great! Thanks for a great time Paul! After flying Penrod, Mr. Karger brought out his golden eagle. The flights were so majestic, as that wonderful creature flew from John to Doctor Hill. I immediately thought to myself, "It's such a big Raptor, I wondered how fast he is?" My answer came when the eagle chased a jack that had a great "head start" and in no time was right over the jack! "Oh my God! That's amazing!" I am proud to have gone to the THA meet and very proud of being a member. The meet brought my father and I closer together during a time when we needed it, so in a way I can truly say "falconry brought my relationship with my dad back to me, as father and son and as friends." I am looking forward to future THA meets and the upcoming Amarillo NAFA meet.

My mind was made up, I was going to do it! I was going to start plans and drawings for my mew as soon as I could. I haven't been this excited about anything since I discovered a pencil and began my career training as an illustrator or the time I discovered comic books. As much as I still love to draw, read comics, and watch animation, falconry was something new to me, something fresh, and an instant obsession.

I called another falconer in Austin to tag along with and learn from, Jim Guy. Jim had success with a Redtail and was now flying a Harris hawk. His Harris, "Stanley," is AWESOME! I shared part of the season with him and Stanley and the slips have been nothing short of amazing. Jim suggested since I was flying a RT next season, I should read Gary Brewer's book, "Butueos and Bushytails." Squirrels? One can hawk squirrels? Jim just looked at me and smiled . . . really big. ! "Did you meet Gary at the THA meet?" "I know who he is because I saw somebody call his name, but no, I haven't met him." He pulled out an article Gary had wrote and gave me a copy. Jim explained, "This article about RT's will get you so fired up you won't believe it! It will make you want to fly a RT exclusively! Your also going to have to go experience squirrel hawking with Gary. Your gonna have a blast!"

Well, after about three weeks of Jim saying, "you need to go out to Gary's place," I called Mr. Brewer. Gary was a blast to talk to. I explained I didn't have a bird, but I was going to go through the steps to become a falconer and get one. He invited me to Chandler, Texas and the timing couldn't have been better. Three other falconers were going to be flying their RT's. I was excited! Arriving at Gary's home I knocked on the door and Gary answered the door along with a Jack Russell at his feet. Gary was on the phone and explained to the person he was talking to, a falconer I presume, "I just let a total stranger in my house." I laughed and sat down while Gary finished his conversation. Gary wasted no time in giving me advice on manning, creance flying, building a mew/weathering yard, making lures, squirrel chaps, squirrel hawking etc, no rock was left unturned. In no time we were friends, I felt as if I've known Gary for years. Falconers Keith Buch, and Perry White came in later that night from the Arlington area and we all sat in Gary's office/workshop. Surrounded by photos of Harris hawks, redtails and all kinds of falconry related photos, squirrel chaps, hoods, the setting was perfect for hawking stories. We hit the "sack" about 3 or 4 in the morning, we weren't keeping time, and got up at 6 or 7. John Graham joined us that morning. We gathered equipment, birds and dog and we were off. Perry flew his tiercel RT at squirrels for the first time and I was excited and nervous for him. "Boyd" took some great stoops and chased the critters ,but never quite got one, except for talons full of fur. But with Boyd's action alone, I knew he was going to be one heck of a squirrel

hawk. On one of the chases Boyd went for a fox squirrel and the critter bailed out of the tree from the highest point. As the squirrel fell he had no idea, Trapper (JRT) was waiting. The squirrel hit the floor and Trapper hit the turbo button! The chase was on. One thing that amazes me about squirrels is their coolness, they never seem to panic, even when they're in a RT's talons. The squirrel decided to run toward "blood creek" and it darted in a hole, just big enough to fit in. Trapper was in no time digging and trying to get his 'nose' in the hole. Gary decided to give Trapper a little time to see if he could dig it out. The hole went from big enough for the squirrel, to big enough for Trapper, and in no time Trapper disappeared in the hole. He came out one time, to blow the dirt from his nose and shake it from his face, but he was back in quickly. Gary then said, "we'll either hear the squirrel growl or Trapper bark or neither. We waited and then we heard Trapper bark. We watched the side of the creek bank to see Trapper come out. Then he was out, with a squirrel in his mouth! Gary quickly got to Trapper before the RT! I had a camera, but thru all the excitement I forgot to snap away!

John flew his female RT next and she was different story. She wasn't very interested in squirrels, but was very interested in water. She always flew in the direction of lakes, swamps if there was water, she was perching near it and not coming down. It took Gary and John two hours to finally bring her down. Kieth's RT Bane, flew hard and had some great chases. Gary's RT Cleo took a squirrel in about five minutes after leaving the fist. The whole "Squirrel Hawking" adventure was as much fun as Disney Land!

Falconry as you can see has been really good to me. It's brought me new friends and awesome experiences. In no time my Mew was built and equipment gathered. My test and inspection is done and I now wait for trapping season to start. I fell falconry has some great things to offer and I can't wait for the challenge! I want to personally thank some great people who help find falconry deep inside me. John Karger and Last Chance Forever, my sponser Steve Oleson, Jim Guy, my mentor Gary Brewer, Carlos Madruga and my warrior princess, Deborah for putting up with my obsession and typing this paper for me. I love you.
God Bless and Great Hawking
Manuel Carrasco.