

TO
THE HONORABLE LADY

and Right Worthie Baroness,
Her Excellency to the Court of Ansteorra,
Ariella d'Aille, Mistress.

Madam:

Although I am not so well experienced in the art of book-making, I cannot but know that the Author of any worke, doth by no one thing commend his judgement more to the world, than by the choice of his Patron: To particularize your honourable Titles, or here to blazon your Excellencies were needlesse, and shall rather be printed on my faithfull heart, than published by my ruderpen, especially upon the dedication of so slight a subject. Madam, I have long waited for opportunity & this great while whipt occasion on, whereby I might tender some open testimonie of my love, before I dye, which may remaine as a perpetual memoriall of my ever-devoted service. To that end I have runne backe into my younger yeares, to summon the delights of my able youth, together with the fruits of my more experienced age, (comprised within a few leaves) to attend your Excellency's leasure, and humbly to crave your Honours patronage. As for the subject it is not waighty (being but a Treatise of Sport) and to attend and to give place to your Excellency's honourable affaires, and more serious imployments.

In fine, I here dedicate to your Excellency the delights of my Child-hood, the pleasures of my youth, the experiments of my age, my faithfull (though painefull) labours, my fruitfull (though slight) indeavors, myselfe, my continual service and observance to your truly-noble Selfe, humbly requesting your Excellency not to be ashamed to Patronize that which your servant is not afraid to present: I therefore know no person of qualitie in this Kingdome, to whom I can offer these my Labours for judgement, before your selfe in fitnessse, as well for your dextentie in discerning, as place of employment, to which, when my love and observance towards you is added, you wil (I doubt not) with favour and alacritie receive him to protection.

Your Worships
true honorer,
and to be commaunded,
Eule von Haginbald, Gentleman

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The Arte of Medieval Faulconry as Practiced in a Modern World

By Eule von Haginbald,
a.k.a. Steve Hemphill, Master Falconer

Chap. I.

4,000 years ago, somewhere on the plains of Central Asia, a man captured a falcon to test her predatory spirit. He trained her, fed her and set her free. In search of prey, she soared higher and higher. From far above the clouds she spotted her quarry and made her kill. But then she did not fly away from the man, instead she shared her catch with him. On this occasion, long ago, was born the art and science of Falconry.



Little has changed in the sport of Falconry over the past 4,000 years. Although it has been the subject of shifting popularity and restrictions, interest continues. It is this relationship between Falconer and bird that has fueled my interest in the sport for over 30 years.

As a student of history, I have researched the historical aspects of Falconry and have tried, encumbered by the numerous restrictions our modern world imposes, to trap, house, train, and fly my falconry birds in the manner of a medieval falconer. It is my intention, with my practical experience as a guide, to educate the reader in the methods of practicing the medieval art of falconry in the modern world and demonstrate how they compare to the original.

I must clarify that I am licensed to practice falconry by both the state (Texas) and federal (United States) governments and to experiment with these methods without the proper permits is a violation of state and federal law.

“He who would be fully instructed in falconry must be proficient in the feeding, the attendance upon, the training, and the domestication of falcons, and in teaching them how to capture their quarry. He must also be well acquainted with numerous other responsibilities connected with these tasks, all of which are discussed in this book. Only then can he be regarded a worthy member of the guild and deserve to be called by the name Falconer.”¹

History

Falconry, one of the oldest partnerships between human and animal, dates back at least 4,000 years to the Middle East, although other experts claim the sport had its inception in Asia even earlier. In Falconry, a raptor is trained to capture and kill wild game. Other animals have been trained for hunting, most notably dogs, but Falconry is unique in that it relies on wild, rather than domesticated, animals: only the ancient use of trained cheetahs in Asia is analogous.

“Moreover, as regards other forms of hunting, which so many follow with enthusiasm, they are less noble because they depend merely upon the use of artificial implements, such as nets, snares, traps, hunting spears, javelins, bows and slings or they are carried on by means of four-footed animals, both tame and wild, such as various sorts of leopards, dogs, lynx, ferrets and other beasts.”²

Because raptors could not be bred in captivity until the 20th c., hunting hawks have never been more than a single generation from the wild.

In the centuries before firearms, a trained falcon or hawk was the best way of catching flying birds. It was not, however, the easiest way of gathering food. For this reason, Falconry was largely the sport of the idle rich, people who could afford to spend the time and money to keep, house, and train birds that brought little in the way of practical reward.

In fact, the nobility often made it illegal for the lower classes to fly hawks, at least those species that were capable of catching game worth eating. The 15th c. *Boke of St. Albans*, which sets out the hierarchy of Falconry, followed through much of the Middle Ages and plagiarized during the Renaissance, notes that raptors such as gyrfalcons and peregrines could be flown by only the highest ranking men. Servants, if they wished to participate in this sport of chivalry, could fly a kestrel, a small falcon capable of killing little more than mice and sparrows. In many countries, there were harsh penalties for overstepping class bounds with hunting hawks; in some cultures, for a peasant to take a peregrine chick from its eyrie could result in death.

***Social Rank & Appropriate Bird
as Delineated in The Boke of St. Albans***

<i>Emperor:</i>	<i>Golden eagle, Vulture and Merlin</i>
<i>King:</i>	<i>Gyrfalcon</i>
<i>Prince:</i>	<i>Female peregrine</i>
<i>Earl of high nobleman:</i>	<i>Peregrine</i>
<i>Baron:</i>	<i>Tiercel (male) peregrine</i>
<i>Knight:</i>	<i>Saker falcon</i>
<i>Squire:</i>	<i>Lanner falcon</i>
<i>Noblewoman:</i>	<i>Female Merlin</i>
<i>Yeoman or landed gentry:</i>	<i>Northern goshawk</i>
<i>Page or yeoman:</i>	<i>Eurasian hobby hawk</i>
<i>Priest:</i>	<i>Female Eurasian sparrowhawk</i>
<i>Holywater clerk:</i>	<i>Musket (male Eurasian sparrowhawk)</i>
<i>Knave, servant or child:</i>	<i>Eurasian kestrel³</i>



Falconry was more than a status symbol in medieval life. As a sport it was pursued with a fervor far exceeding that of any sport in the 20th c. - people even brought their hawks to church. The nobility spared no expense when it came to their falcons. One 13th c. ruler, Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II, built mews for housing his falcons that were as elaborate as castles; he also wrote the 6 volume *De Arte Venandi cum Avibus (The Art of Falconry)*, which, until the 20th c. was the definitive work on the subject. Even the clergy took part with abandon; the *Boke of St. Albans*, for instance, was written by an English prioress, Dame Juliana Barnes.

Falconry was even more extravagant in Asia. Marco Polo reported in 1276 that when Kublai Khan went hunting (carried by elephants because his gout was acting up) his contingent included more than 500 bird of prey ranging from gyrfalcons to golden eagles, tended by 10,000 falconers on horseback.



Falcons, especially gyrfalcons and peregrines, were the objects not only of sport but also of diplomacy, and even war. No self-respecting noble went on campaign without his falcons and falconers in attendance. Treaties were sealed with the gift of rare raptors, and captive princes were on occasion ransomed by payments of rare hawks. Especially prized were white-phased gyrfalcons from Greenland, a small but lucrative trade item for Viking colonists on that island.

The Birds

Many different species of raptors were available to the medieval falconer due to the favorable migration routes through Western Europe. However, only a few select species were sought as Falconry birds:

Golden Eagle

Aquila chrysaetos



“Bird of Jove” is one of the many aliases given to the king of birds, highly prized in Rome as the legendary messenger of the god Jove and thought to have thunderbolts in its talons as it sped across the heavens. Weighing approximately 7 pounds, with a wingspan of 6 feet, Golden eagles have long been considered among the premier birds of the sport, but their size and strength make them daunting - even dangerous - to work with.

“If a large eagle were actually employed in ventry and mounted into the air, the falconer’s other birds would be alarmed and from fright of the larger bird would refuse to do their duty.”⁴

The long, thick talons of the rear and inside toes are the size of grizzly bear claws and can penetrate up to three inches into its victim. A golden eagle has enough strength in their talons to pierce a man’s skull. These fierce raptors are capable of taking prey well beyond the reach of other birds, however, and in Asia teams of eagles have for centuries been flown against deer, antelope and even wolves.

Gyr Falcon

Falco rusticolus



Royal, majestic and magnificent are just a few descriptions of the largest and most northerly member of the falcon family. It was the pure white Gyr Falcon that was reserved for and flown by the kings of Europe. Even today, tremendous prices are paid by some Middle Eastern falconers (at one time up to \$100,000) for one of these birds.

“It is difficult to decide what colors are most to be desired in gerfalcons, as there exist fine specimens with all shades. In our experience the rare white varieties from remote regions are the best.”⁵

Due to its larger size, the gyrfalcon lacks the maneuverability of its smaller cousins, but it more than makes up for this with its powerful flight. In straight and level flight, the Gyr Falcon is much faster than a Peregrine. Because of this, a low-level, direct pursuit is its chosen hunting tactic. The Gyr Falcon is primarily flown at pheasant, grouse and duck.

Peregrine

Falco peregrinus



Throughout history, the Peregrine Falcon has been the bird of choice among the falconry elite and is supposedly the fastest animal on earth. This bird, in a full vertical stoop, has been clocked at speeds of over 160 miles per hour. Commonly called a “Duck Hawk”, this bird’s diet consists of birds that are usually caught on the wing.

“Peregrines are smaller falcons, but their build and superior hunting qualities allow them to rank with the best of the gerfalcons...”⁶

Peregrine falcons were flown against gray herons, an exceptionally large target, although grouse, wood pigeons and rooks were common prey.

Saker Falcon

Falco cherrug



By some accounts, the Saker Falcon is considered one of the best raptors for falconry. The Saker falcon is similar to the Gyrfalcon in wing and tail measurements but is slightly built and does not weigh as much as the large arctic falcons.

“The saker falcon ranks next in size to the gerfalcon, although it is not quite as large. The head is large and round; but the beak is relatively short, the body is proportionately more slender and longer, the wings and tail are longer, the breast is less fleshy and thick than in the gerfalcon, and the toes are shorter.”⁷

These birds not only take avian prey but ground quarry as well, making this species a very well rounded falconry bird.

Lanner Falcon

Falco biarmicus



This species, similar in size to the Peregrine falcon, is found in southern Europe and northern Africa.

“Lanner falcons are smaller than true noble falcons and they have in comparison to their bodies a thicker head and throat than other falcons. They are long, slim and not fleshy; their talons are small and their toes thick, short and golden yellow.”⁸

These falcons primarily prey on smaller avian quarry such as pigeons and upland gamebirds but have been known to take smaller sized ducks on occasion.

Merlin

Falco columbarius



Traditionally a noble lady's bird, the Merlin was also a sought after falconry bird for the upper nobility due to its blinding speed and ferocious nature. Weighing less than a pound with an 18" wingspan, the Merlin is a versatile hunter. They are as adept at high-level stoops as they are at low-level, straight-on pursuits.

*"She is a courageous and hardy Hawk, flying with greater fierceness and more hotly than any other bird of prey; so that she will venture to fly the Partridge, Heathpowl and other birds bigger than herself, and pursue them eagerly even into villages and Towns."*⁹

Merlins resemble scaled down Peregrines with large black eyes. Small birds make up almost all of the Merlin's diet with skylarks making up the falconers' favorite prey.

Goshawk

Accipiter gentilis



Although Falconry was the pastime of the idle rich, the Goshawk was the bird that put food on the gentry's table. Easily recognized by its blood-red eyes, the Goshawk is bloodthirsty, savage, ruthless and elegant, and is the largest and most powerful of the Accipiters.

*"Some Goshawks are swift of flight, which in pursuing and catching their prey trust to the swiftness of their Wings, others fly slow, and win what they get by policy: None of them but by industry may be trained up to, and made good for somewhat."*¹⁰

Famous for its tenacity in the pursuit of a wide variety of avian and ground quarry, the Goshawk was a favorite of the medieval falconer.

Common Kestrel

Falco tinnunculus



Also known as the Rock Kestrel, this petite yet colorful falcon is small and very high-strung. Flown only by the lowest class, this bird preys primarily on insects, small snakes and mice. However, they were trained to fly against larger quarry such as sparrows, starlings and songbirds.

*"The Sparhawk though a demy-creature, yet for her spirit and mettle is worthy to march in the best company; Nay, there is no better Hawk than she, if she be kept, as she out to be, lusty and strong. Besides, he that knows how to man, reclaim and fly a Sparrow-hawk, may easily know how to keep and deal with all other Hawks."*¹¹

A hunting tactic unique to Kestrels is its ability to hover in place for extended periods of time while scanning the ground, then diving for a suitable meal in a classic falcon's stoop.

Red-Tailed Hawk

Buteo jamaicensis



The Red-Tailed hawk was not a species known to the medieval falconer in Western Europe. This species is common throughout North and South America and is one of the more versatile hawks used in falconry today. Weighing approximately 2-3 pounds, with an average wingspan of 3 feet, these birds normally prey on ground quarry such as cottontail and jackrabbits, however, they can be effectively trained to take quail, pheasant and other upland gamebirds. The Red-Tailed hawk is one of three species of raptor that can be flown by an apprentice falconer in the United States today.

Baywing Hawk, a.k.a. Harris Hawk

Parabuteo unicinctus



The Harris Hawk is another species of raptor that the medieval falconer would not have had available to fly, although had it been available to him, it too would have been a prized falconry bird. First thought to be merely a scavenger, with no practical use for falconry, the Harris Hawk has enjoyed a popularity across the world that few period species would have known. The only social raptor, the Harris Hawk is arguably the easiest species to train for falconry. Capable of taking a variety of quarry including avian and mammal, this species is capable of taking 10 pound jackrabbits with ease.



Equipment

Glove



Because the talons of a falcon are the tools with which she captures and kills her prey, it is necessary for the falconer to adequately protect his hand when some type of glove. The glove has traditionally been worn on the off hand so that the dominate hand can be used for hooding, attaching the leash and other necessary tasks. The vast majority of gloves have simply been made of leather. The falconer's glove can be as simple or as decorative and elaborate as the individual chooses.

*"...it should reach to his elbow and be wide enough to be drawn off and on with ease. It must be made of stout leather of a quality that will not permit the talons of the falcon to cling to it and thus be easily pierced by the beak or claws. When the falcon is thrown from the hand, she will rise more freely from such a properly fitting glove."*¹²

For smaller species, such as the Kestrel or Merlin, almost any leather glove will offer the hand sufficient protection. For the average sized species, such as the Peregrine or Gyrfalcon, a gauntlet style glove that protects up to the middle of the forearm is used. This glove usually had a double thickness of leather along the right side of the hand and on the thumb to better protect the hand from the bird's talons. For golden Eagles, a double thick layer of horsehide from hand to shoulder is required.

Jesses



Jesses, the leather strips attached to the falcon's legs, have always been used as a means of securing the falcon to the glove or perch.

*"Jesses are really leather snares to be placed on the legs. They are used in holding the falcon and are released when the falcon is slipped. When this is done the falcon is prevented from flying off without the consent of the bearer. The jesses also serve as an attachment for the leash."*¹³

Originally, jesses were permanently attached to the bird by means of a twisted knot or other arrangement. The modern falconer, however, is legally forbidden to use this type of jesse in favor of the "Aylmeri" style which can be removed by the falcon should it become lost to the falconer.

Leash

The leash is simply some form of tie, approximately 12" long, made of rope, leather or other suitable material, which attaches at one end to the jesses via a swivel and at the other end to the glove or perch.

*"The leash is a long leather strap, by means of which falcons are secured to a perch and held fast under all conditions. It is fashioned from strong soft material cut the same width throughout except at one end, where it is a little narrower."*¹⁴

Swivel

A small, yet highly important piece of falconry equipment is the swivel. Set between the jesses and the leash, the swivel prevents the leash and jesses from twisting to the point that the falcon becomes dangerously bound to its perch. The original medieval style swivel was a simple metal figure eight arrangement. Today, the most common swivel is a stainless steel, ball bearing swivel which is used in saltwater fishing. However, the original swivel has recently enjoyed a revival amongst modern falconers, as it is simpler in design and considerably stronger.



Hood



The falcon hood is the one piece of falconry furniture that the average person associates with the sport. Simply or tremendously extravagant, the hood is constructed of light leather and is used to easily blind the falcon from her surroundings, thus calming her down. The hood is secured to the falcon's head by a set of drawstrings, called braces, located in the back of the hood. Over the years, developments in leathers and creative techniques have truly turned hood making into an art. For hundreds of years, the craftsmen in Valkenswaard, Holland set the mark of quality for historic European hood makers. These hoods today are highly sought after and are exceedingly expensive.

The falcon hood was originally not known to the Western European falconer until Frederick II brought this technology back from his first Crusade.

“The Arabian chiefs not only presented us with many kinds of falcons but sent with them falconers expert in the use of the hood. In addition to these sources of knowledge we have imported, partly from Arabia, partly from other countries, both birds and men skilled in the art, from which whom we have acquired a knowledge of all their accomplishments.”¹⁵

Perches

The perches on which hawks and falcons rest are of several sizes, adapted to the particular needs of the birds (i.e. size, species and temperament). The block perch is generally furnished for birds while weathering outside, however they were not usually found in the mews (hawk house) where the low and high perch were normally used.



The ***block perch*** was commonly made of either wood or stone and is constructed so that when the falcon is on her block, her tail feathers do not touch the ground and become frayed or broken. The upper surface is smooth, sometimes covered in soft cloth or leather. The entire structure resembles an inverted pyramid atop an iron spike driven into the ground. Located around the spike is a ring to which the falcon's leash is attached. When the leash is pulled in any direction, it runs around the ring and does not impede the captive bird's movement.



The *high* and *low perch* are similar in design except for height. Each is constructed of wood, approximately a foot wide at the top and as long as the falconer wishes to accommodate as many birds as are in his care. The high perch was constructed on a level with the falconer's eyes so that he may inspect its surface. Although not used in period, today's high perch usually has a curtain or apron suspended from the front of the perch to the ground to allow the bating falcon to climb back easily to the top of the perch. The low perch was raised high enough from the ground that the tail feathers of the falcon would not be damaged by touching the ground.



Bells



Falconry bells, next to the hood, are easily identifiable falconry accessories. These too were an innovation brought back from the Crusades, which helped revolutionize falconry in Western Europe. With a pair of slightly discordant bells attached, the falconer could easily determine the situation of his bird.

“These bells have several uses. The falconer knows at once from their ringing that the falcon has flown down from, or fallen off, the perch and can hurry to her assistance. The bells can also be heard from a long distance wherever the bird happens to be so that she may more easily be found when lost or out of sight. From the character of the bell notes the expert knows whether his bird has sprung off the perch, is scratching herself, or is biting her jesse or the bell near it.”¹⁶

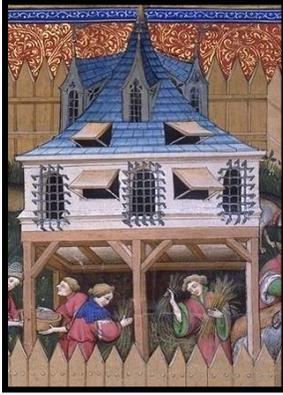
Lure



Traditionally, as today, the falcon lure was used as a means of calling a falcon back to the falconer or to exercise her. The falcon lure is a symmetrical arrangement of wings attached to a stuffed cylinder of leather roughly approximately the shape of a bird. During the early stages of training a falcon, the falconer teaches the bird to immediately return to him when he produces the lure. Although the lure resembles a prey bird, it in no way actually fools the falcon into believing it is a live animal. Instead, through extensive training and food association, the falcon knows that it will receive an adequate meal if it returns to the lure. Learning how to use the lure is an art in itself as it can be effective or useless to the extent that it is in line with and compliments the natural flight-style of the species of falcon involved in the pursuit of game.

Housing

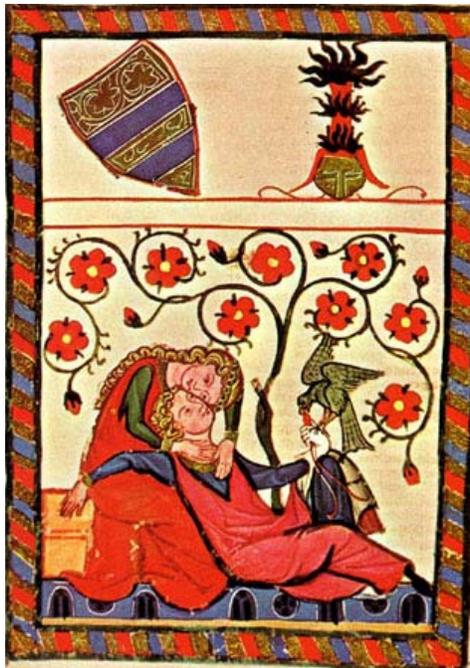
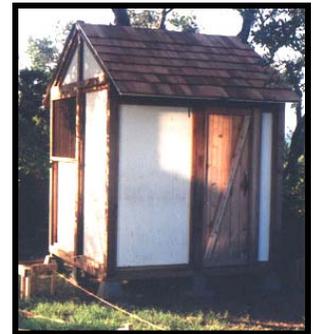
Mews



The traditional housing for falconry birds is the *mews*. Usually a multi-bird facility, the mews could sometimes be as elaborate as castles. The basic requirements for the mews were to provide shelter for the falconry birds away from harsh weather, predators and unwanted human intervention. Much more than simple cages, the mews allowed the birds not only enough room to stretch their wings but also were large enough to allow the bird to fly.

*Its chief utility has always been that of a refuge for hawks during their moulting season – a shelter where they can be properly cared for while undergoing the annual change of their plumage. Although commonly employed for this purpose, it is also used as a day and night roosting place for these captives, fledglings or adults, wild or trained, hooded or sighted, sick or well.*²⁴⁷

Modern law contains very strict guidelines on the construction of these facilities and must be inspected by a government representative before a falconry permit is granted. Although period mews were built using a variety of materials and architectural styles, I chose to construct my mews using period timber framing techniques. In timber framing, massive timbers are cut and framed together using time-tested mortise and tenon joints. Due to the restrictions placed upon this sport, however, I was required to construct the facility based on specific guidelines set forth by the State and Federal governments. This, unfortunately, precluded me from constructing the mews using completely period materials and techniques. However it did offer the challenge of designing and constructing a facility that met both the regulatory requirements as well as my historical and aesthetic interests.



Trapping

Eyass



There are two times during the year that falcons and hawks are taken for falconry training. During the late spring months, when the chicks are being raised by their parents, a suitable bird is taken from the nest. This type of bird is referred to as an eyass. The falconer must teach this bird to fly and to hunt so the eyass becomes imprinted to the falconer and can never be released back to the wild. This type of bird will have a closer bond with the falconer but can manifest a variety of bad habits such as screaming, mantling and other aggressive behavior.

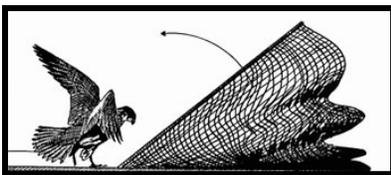
Passager



The other time of year is the fall when the birds are migrating south for the winter. These birds are called passagers. Each fall, falconers from the courts of every feudal lord and king in Europe would travel to a small village in Brabant (today, the Netherlands), named Valkenswaard, to attend a spirited medieval auction, bidding against each other for the best specimens caught that year. The falconer ideally traps a juvenile bird, which is much more susceptible to falconry training than a mature bird. The passage bird is more likely to leave a falconer, however these birds already possess adequate hunting and flying skills as they have survived several months in the wild on their own. As I have only trapped and trained passage birds, I will limit this paper to discussion on acquiring this type of bird.

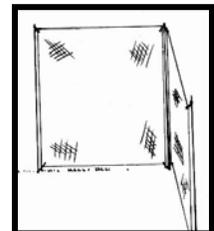
Traps

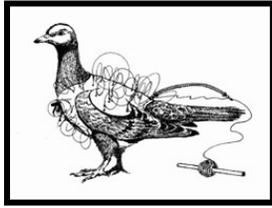
Attempts to capture raptors for use in falconry have led to ingenuity through many centuries. Simply capturing a hawk or falcon is not enough to serve the purpose of the sport. The bird must be caught without damage to even a single feather. The individual conducting the trapping must also have at least a fundamental knowledge of the steps of a bird of prey as well as thoroughly understanding the nature and habits of every species sought. There were several types of traps and methods used in period for trapping wild raptors. Several of these are still the preferred methods of the modern falconer.



The ***bownet*** is made up of two, spring loaded, half circle bows which are covered in a fine net. The bait animal is secured in the center of the open net. Once a raptor stoops the prey and bends its head to eat, the bownet is triggered remotely by the hidden falconer.

The ***Dho-gazza*** is a finely woven net suspended between suitable poles. The object is to have a stooping falcon fly into it while intent on the bait animal located on the ground midway between the upright poles. When hit the net collapses and falls to the ground with the falcon completely snared in the mesh. This type of trap has changed little in the last five hundred years except for the introduction of nylon as the material for the netting itself.





The *pigeon harness* is simply a fitted leather corset, covered with properly tied nooses, placed on a strong, well-conditioned pigeon liberated somewhere near a hungry raptor. The harness is placed on the bait bird and is tethered to a weighted object. The bait bird is then free to attempt flight, which will attract the attention of any raptors in the area. The raptor will stoop at the bait animal and its talons will become ensnared in

the nooses.

Post Trap Treatment



Once trapped, the next steps are crucial for the falcon's safety and first impression of the falconer. The falcon will do everything in her power to escape the device that is ensnaring her as she is helpless and vulnerable on the ground, so the falconer should approach slowly and carefully to minimize the stress on the bird. First, she is removed from the snare, her feet and talons are bound and then she is placed within a sock to secure her wings. The freshly caught falcon is now gently restrained.

The falcon is then transported to her training area where she is inspected, treated for any conditions that may need attention and fitted with her new clothes. At this point, the medieval falconer would seel the falcon, which temporarily blinds her to her surroundings. *Seeling* is performed by sewing the lower, outer eyelid to the upper lid. Although seldom used by the modern falconer, seeling helps minimize stress on the freshly trapper bird and allows her to be more easily trained.



Next, the medieval falconer would feel the bird's keel, or breastbone, to determine what condition, high or low, she is in. If the keel is sharp, she is in a low condition and may be suffering from some unknown malady or simply hasn't eaten for a while and may be more receptive to feeding. If the keel is hard to define, then she is in a high condition and may not respond to food for a few days. The modern falconer will also feel the bird's keel and weigh her several times a day for the first several weeks. Next, her anklets and jesses are placed around her legs and a leash is attached.

Training

Manning

Upon researching the literature of the period, I've discovered that the techniques used in training a wild raptor for use as a Falconry bird have changed little over the past 1000 years. In a translation of the Old English poem, "Fates of Men", in the Exeter book from the late tenth century, can be found a description of the falconer training a bird:



*“Another shall tame the proud wild bird:
The hawk on the hand, until that fierce swallow
Becomes gentle; He puts foot-rings upon it,
And so feeds the fettered bird, proud of its plumage,
Weakens the swift flyer with small pieces of food,
Until the Welsh falcon in its garb and deeds
Becomes humble towards its feeder
And trained to the young man’s hand.”*

Manning is a gradual process that accustoms the bird to her surroundings and the methods I use follow the same techniques as those of the medieval falconer.

The hooded and jessed falcon sits upon the glove in a dimly lit room. Using a feather, the falconer gently strokes and touches the bird while softly speaking to her. Because the bird cannot see any threat, she comes to accept the falconer's touch and becomes accustomed to the sound of his voice. Once the bird is sufficiently calm, the hood is removed. As expected, the bird will start at the sight of the threats around her and will bate furiously to escape them. The bird is gently placed back on the glove and the training continues until the bating stops. Bating actually aides in the training process as it exhausts the bird and makes it more susceptible to continued training.

Following several hours of placing and removing the hood, thereby training the bird to accept the hood, the bird is taken unhooded and on the fist for an introduction to her new surroundings. This introduction could last several days and continues until she can sit calmly, unhooded, on the glove or perch with all manner of activity surrounding her.

Feeding



The next step is to train the falcon to overcome her fear of the falconer and accept food from him. As food is used to teach her what is required of her, no real progress toward the creation of a hunting bird is made until the pair can communicate via food. This step simulates how its mother fed her while she was a chick, thereby making it much easier to bridge the predator gap.

The meat is placed before the falcon so that the food can be smelled; then her beak, breast and feet are touched with it. This is done to rouse the falcon so that she will snap at the object that has rubbed against her. She will, as she bites the offering, be attracted by its taste and will eat part or all of it. She will then be so eager to feed that she will not be distracted by unfamiliar sounds; and for that reason also now is the time for the falconer to make some caressing vocal appeal, encouraging her to eat.”¹⁸

These small tidbits are placed on the glove where you entice her to bend her head forward to eat. This means death in the wild and therefore she is quite afraid to bend over and expose the back of her head to the falconer. Eventually she will comply and the first great milestone in trust between the falconer and his charge has occurred. During the next step, the bird is placed on her perch and the tidbits are offered, on the glove, a few inches away. Within a short period of time, the falcon realizes that she can hop to the glove and receive a reward for it. From this point forward, the training will progress rapidly. The falconer gradually increases the distance until the falcon is making short flights to the glove every time it is offered. At this point, the falconer may introduce the use of a whistle to associate food with an easily recognizable sound.

Flying on Creance

The falcon is then taken outside and is attached to the creance to fly in her natural environment while following the new lessons she has learned. Using the whistle, the falconer offers the falcon tidbits on the glove as before or offers her the lure. This training continues until she responds each time she is called.

“The best means for securing the falcon is a slender cord of suitable length. While its chief value is to prevent the bird from flying away during her first flights from the fist, it must be long enough to permit her to reach the lure. The creance is used because in her first flights from the falconer’s hand and in her initial trips to the lure (while she is being taught not to fly away from her master) she is not allowed to fly free but is “entrusted” to the line, lest in her lean and wild condition she prefer the freedom of the skies to settling on the lure.”¹⁹

Finally, after sufficient time has past and the falconer feels the falcon is ready, the creance is removed, her bells attached and she is released to fly free. If the falconer has properly done his job, she will respond as trained and follow all of the commands she has learned from her new human companion.

Chap. VIII.

Hunting Falcons



There are two basic styles of hunting which reflect the natural styles of the two different types of raptors. With falcons, the bird is carried, hooded, on the fist to the field where quarry can be found. She is then unhooded, she rouses (shakes and fluffs her feathers), takes a look around and then flies from the glove. She then spirals up to a great height and “waits on” while the hunting party and their dogs work the field below. Once the quarry is pointed and flushed, the falcon will fold her wings and plummet earthward at speeds of over 100 miles per hour, striking her intended target from the sky. She then glides down to collect her highly earned prize at which point she will await her human companion. Slowly, the falconer approaches the pair and offers his falcon a trade. If the falcon chooses, she will relinquish her kill in favor of the tidbit offered by the falconer, at which point he hides the kill in his bag, hoods his charge and moves on to hunt at a different location.

Hawks



Hawks, on the other hand, being natural perch hunters, are usually flown from the fist. Again, the hunting party and their dogs search for suitable prey and once it flushes, the hawk takes flight and tail chases his prey, flying close to the ground. In the case of large rabbits and hares, it is important that the falconer approach quickly to help his hawk dispatch his quarry as the rabbit is quite capable of severely hurting or even killing the bird with its strong hind legs.

Noble Quarry



During the late 15th and early 16th centuries, a favorite sport amongst the noble elite was the hunting of cranes with Peregrine falcons. Cranes, being much larger than the Peregrine, were a difficult prey, however these flights were not intended to kill the crane. The falcon was cast off once a crane was spotted and she would attempt to fly the crane lower and lower until it would crash to the ground. At which point, the noble would attach a small golden ring, inscribed with his mark, to the crane’s leg. It was considered a great accomplishment to capture a crane with several rings attached.

According to Hywel the Good, a leading Welsh prince who is found attesting charters of the English King Athelstan (925-39), notes that the royal falconer was to be especially honored by the King when his hawk killed one of the three sought-after birds: a bittern, a heron or a curlew (crane). The King would hold his falconer’s horse while the falconer dismounted to separate the hawks from the captured birds and hold his stirrup again while he remounted.

Dogs



Since the earliest attempts of human beings to form cooperative hunting teams such as man, dog and hawk, in the taking of game birds or mammals, every possible variety of dog has been utilized. The dog has been a keystone of the hunting team since the days prior to recorded history and certainly pre-dates falconry, as we know it. Bas-reliefs found

in Babylon, created more than 2500 years ago, show us the oldest pictorial history we have to falconry as it existed showing dogs that were on hand to help the falconer and his hawk locate and take game. The first recognizable breeds were the Saluki and Greyhound used by the people of the Middle East to hunt large hare with Saker falcons. When falconry advances were brought home with the returning Crusaders, dogs were employed to help locate and flush quarry. In most period hawking pictorials, a number of dogs of all varieties are shown engaged in supporting falconry activities.

One breed that has enjoyed many centuries as a treasured falconry companion, and is the breed I own, is the Vizsla. This sleek, short-haired, rusty gold pointer can trace its ancestry to the Magyar warriors who, around the eighth century, overran and settled the area that later became the Hungarian nation. In 1375 a group of Carmelite friars, under the direction of Hungarian King Lajos the Great, wrote the *Illustrated Chronicle*, which includes information about the breed. From then to the present, Hungarian literature offers a reasonably complete history of this breed. A versatile breed, meaning they will track, point, flush and retrieve, the Vizsla was jealously guarded by the Hungarian nobility, refusing to export the breed.

Ferrets

Another often used hunting companion to the falconer was the ferret. A slender carnivore derived from the wild European Polecat (*Mustela putoris*), its use in falconry covers many centuries. Ferreting rabbits is one of the oldest European hunting and sporting techniques. However, hawking with ferrets was not the sport of Kings. In earlier Western European history, ferreting was not a sport but the work of full time warreners whose living depended on producing rabbit meat and fur. The basics of working a ferret and hawk together, for the purpose of increasing the number of rabbits flushed under the hawk, is similar today as in period. The falconer simply locates a rabbit hole, places the ferret in the hole, the rabbit bolts out of the hole and is pursued by the hawk.

Chap. IX.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, the Golden Age of Falconry came to an end with the invention of the firearm. The leisure class now had a new toy with which they could continue to hunt. For the modern falconer, it is good that the sport never completely died out.

Falconry is a unique pastime in that the technology of the sport has changed very little. As a modern falconer reads through copies of the period falconry masters (i.e. Frederick II, Dame Julyans Barnes, Latham, Turbervile, etc.) he is struck with the fact that this Sport of Kings is practiced today much as it has been since this subject was first written about. My experiences as a modern falconer are much the same. However, I have the unique opportunity, through my interest in researching history, to pursue and learn my beloved art in the same way as a falconer of the Middle Ages and Renaissance.



Terminology

<i>Aerie:</i>	the nest of a raptor.
<i>Austringer:</i>	to purists, someone who flies hawks, eagles, and owls.
<i>Aylmeri:</i>	short leather anklet and jesse combination used to secure the falcon to the perch or fist. A modern piece of equipment.
<i>Bate:</i>	when the bird attempts to fly, while leashed, away from the glove or perch.
<i>Bewit:</i>	short piece of leather that fastens the bells to the falcon's leg.
<i>Block:</i>	perch for falcons.
<i>Brancher:</i>	young bird taken just as it was beginning to stray from the nest, but before it learned how to make extended flights.
<i>Cadger:</i>	a person who carried falcons to the field on a perch, or cadge, hanging from the neck.
<i> Casting:</i>	a pellet of undigested material consisting of bone, fur, feathers, etc.
<i>Cast off:</i>	letting the falcon fly from the fist.
<i>Cere:</i>	the soft skin around the bird's beak.
<i>Creance:</i>	a long, leash that is used in training to prevent the bird from flying off.
<i>Crop:</i>	the small pocket at the top of the breast where the falcon stores food before digesting it.
<i>Deck Feathers:</i>	the two center tail feathers.
<i>Eyass:</i>	a chick taken from a wild nest or aerie and raised in captivity.
<i>Falcon:</i>	strictly speaking, a female peregrine falcon.
<i>Falconer</i>	a person whom a falcon has concluded is its best meal ticket and a good guide to where to search for prey.
<i>Gerkin:</i>	a male gyrfalcon.
<i>Gyrfalcon:</i>	a female gyrfalcon.
<i>Hack:</i>	a training technique where the young eyass is allowed to fly free but trained to return home to get food.
<i>Haggard:</i>	a mature bird that has reached its full plumage.
<i>Hawking:</i>	hunting with hawks and eagles instead of falcons.
<i>Hood:</i>	equipment that covers the falcon's head preventing her from seeing her surroundings.
<i>Imping:</i>	a method of repairing damaged feathers by splicing healthy ones together
<i>Intermewed:</i>	term applied to a bird that has been held in captivity through the molt.
<i>Jesses:</i>	leather straps attached to birds' legs.
<i>Manning:</i>	to accustom a falcon to man and his surroundings.
<i>Mantling:</i>	attitude when bird protectively huddles on kill with wings and tail spread and defies being touched.
<i>Mews:</i>	a multi-unit housing facility for falcons, hawks, etc.
<i>Molt:</i>	the period in which a bird drops its feathers and grows in new ones.
<i>Mutes:</i>	a raptor's droppings.
<i>Nares:</i>	a raptor's nostrils.
<i>Passager:</i>	a young bird taken into captivity during its first migration.
<i>Rouse:</i>	when a raptor shakes her feathers. Usually done after removing the hood and after preening.
<i>Stoop:</i>	a swift dive from high altitudes by a falcon intent on capturing prey.
<i>Tiercel:</i>	a male peregrine falcon.
<i>Waiting on:</i>	circling high above the falconer's head while searching for quarry.

- ¹ Frederick II, *de Arte Venandi cum Avibus* (Stanford University Press, 1943) p. 5
- ² Ibid p.150
- ³ Juliana Berners, *The Booke of St. Albans*, (St. Albans, 1486) pp. 54-55
- ⁴ Frederick II, *de Arte Venandi cum Avibus* (Stanford University Press, 1943) p. 109
- ⁵ Ibid p. 121
- ⁶ Ibid p. 122
- ⁷ Ibid p. 121
- ⁸ Ibid p. 127
- ⁹ Francis Wellughby, *A Summary of Falconry* (London, 1678) p. 421
- ¹⁰ Ibid p. 422
- ¹¹ Ibid p. 429
- ¹² Frederick II, *de Arte Venandi cum Avibus* (Stanford University Press, 1943) p. 151
- ¹³ Ibid pp. 138,139
- ¹⁴ Ibid pp. 139-140
- ¹⁵ Ibid pp. 205-206
- ¹⁶ Ibid p. 143
- ¹⁷ Ibid p. 419
- ¹⁸ Ibid pp. 158-159
- ¹⁹ Ibid p. 230

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