



NEW YORK STATE FALCONRY ASSOCIATION

MEWS NEWS 2022

FALL ISSUE

LEARNING CURVE



Photo: Josh McKee



From The Editor

Welcome to the 2022 Mews News Fall Issue “Learning Curve”

Here it is, the second issue of 2022. At this point, you’re probably prepping your season, cleaning your dusty BCs, or the tires on your hunting vehicle. It’s an exciting time, a time to plan, and a time to consider what we can learn from each other.

This issue talks about a lot of field skills. It talks about some unique, bad luck situations, and how the falconers involved brought their hawks through them. We also look at hunting skills and medicine, always important topics to prep for a new season. Finally, we revisit the field meets of the past year, read some meet reports and talk about where that learning curve starts for new folks.

It’s a great issue, filled with good info. I hope you’ll enjoy it, and we’ll see you at fall and winter events!

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Back Cover Photo: Steve Dickson

Things NY falconers learned during 2021

Matthew Vercant, Vice President NYSFA

Boy, what did we learn from the last two years? It's been a bit of a blur, I'll tell you that. Felt like April 2020 lasted about 10 years, and then the next two years I spent catching up. I remember something about masks, and working from home, and then a hawking season came and went without a meet and with a single summer picnic to tide us over. Sort of a long blur that makes it sort of tough for me to summarize, so I asked our club to help me out, give me some pointers. What was the point of all this, and what could we take away from it? Here, with (most) of the cursing removed, is what they had to say.

- You can't strike a hood while wearing a mask.
- Related: it's amazing how much of a cloth mask can get stuck in your mouth.
- The more time you spend with your hawks, the more you start to act like your hawks. My spouse caught me trying to move my head back and forth to see around an object. Before you ask, no, no my vision does not work like that.
- When your doctor says "don't do any sports for two weeks", remember that falconry is an "art."
- What 6-feet apart is
- It's super awkward to suddenly realize you're holding someone else's gear. In your mouth. During a pandemic.
- Some hawks will tolerate Zoom meetings. Some will absolutely not put up with all those strangers inside the squawking box on your desk.
- No matter how far into my hawking woods it's chucked, your surgical mask doesn't biodegrade
- Running around in the woods with a hawk is better at keeping weight off than binge watching FRIENDS.
- Your friends will check in the mews to see if you're home, instead of the house.
- Our fellow falconers who "aren't much of a hugger" are, in fact, starved for hugs
- Refreshing the NYSFA.org website over and

over doesn't make the field meet come any faster

- Our health is the hawk's health.
- Stuck at home? Learn to make jesses. Or leashes. Or hoods. Or more hoods. Or 50 hoods. Please, your spouse might say, please stop making hoods.
- No matter how many LifeStraws I ordered in 2020, it's better to just pack water in 2021 than to drink from a puddle.
- An imprint goshawk is a mighty tough teacher.
- Suddenly being "outdoors" became really cool.
- Good friends are their own wealth. Especially if they come with a hawk.
- Just exactly what hobbies our spouses do for fun during quarantine (turns out there ARE some activities weirder than being a falconer)
- Hawk feet get only so clean, no matter how much time you have to clean them.
- Same for chambers
- ... not the same for your prep room; it is never clean.
- When your co-workers cat interrupts your zoom call, it's not nearly as cool as when you bring your falcon.
- No, there isn't about to be a COVID-related shortage of squirrels and day-old-chicks, and yes, your spouse is eventually going to want that entire "extra" chest freezer back for other things.
- Living with a falconer" is like "living with a barely house-broken racoon" – we love shiny things and there's shit everywhere.

So, that may not be the most insightful report you read, but it's a long year, in a big state. How much hawking we got to do in New York was largely impacted by where we were, and what kind of impact the pandemic was having. So, at best, we're all feeling a little silly, and a lot grateful for our community's sense of humor and comradery. Until next season, fly hard, and fly often.

HAWKING with a Dog

by Scott Krebbeks

One of the things that I most appreciate about falconry is sharing it with others. I learn something new every time I accompany another falconer into the woods, and I enjoy bringing others along when flying my bird. Before I officially started as an apprentice, I had grandiose visions of bringing my Labrador retriever, Henry, along on squirrel hunts: a falconer, his hawk, and his dog, together in the woods. What could be better? It didn't take much thinking to realize that having a dog accompany us on hunts was going to require much more planning and effort than bringing a human along!





Along with the manning process shortly after obtaining Helga, my red-tailed hawk, I knew that it would be essential for me to acclimate the dog and the hawk to one another. This process started with my wife holding the dog on a leash outdoors, while I had Helga on the fist. We would gradually decrease the distance between us each session, but did not let the two get “up close and personal”.

To help Helga become more comfortable with my family members, I would lay a tarp down on the living room floor each evening, and have her on the bow perch while we read or watched television. After several evenings doing this, I introduced the dog while Helga was on my fist in the living room. Again, he was leashed and not allowed to get too close. When the hawk remained calm, I would tidbit her and praise the dog when he showed restraint.

When both hawk and dog seemed ready for the next step, I introduced Henry off-leash while Helga was on her bow perch. I made it clear to the dog that he was not to get too close to the hawk, despite his curiosity. After a short while, he seemed to exhibit a “healthy fear” of Helga, keeping his distance while she remained calmly on the perch. It’s almost as if he knew that it wouldn’t be good to tangle with her.

The living room is one thing, but being out in the field is a completely different animal, (pun fully intended). Henry is a very excitable dog, even by Labrador retriever standards, so I needed to make sure that the whistle, tidbits, lure, and the hawk in flight wouldn’t be too much for him. After Helga was reliably coming to the glove during creance training,

I introduced Henry to the process by placing him in a sit-stay a fair distance away, gradually bringing him closer each flight. After initially whining and crying, he got the idea, and both he and Helga managed to do fine.

The next hurdle was going to be the lure. There were two concerns that I had: First, I use an excited loud, continuous whistle blast when tossing the lure. This sound, coupled with the fact that there’s food attached to the lure, would be a challenge for Henry to resist. Because of this, my second concern was that I didn’t want to ruin or diminish Helga’s response to the lure due to the dog’s behavior. Again, I enlisted the help of my wife to keep Henry on the leash the first few times that I called Helga to the lure with the dog present. When Helga was eating off the lure, I would bring Henry close, (but not too close), so that she would learn he was not a threat to her or to her meal, and he would learn to give her space when she was on the ground. We finally graduated to having the dog off-leash in a sit-stay when Helga came to the lure and ate from it.

At this point, all of the pieces were in place except for one: my confidence. As a first-year falconer, I was nowhere close to feeling that I was able to handle the hawk and dog simultaneously on my own. Luckily, my wife likes to accompany me while hawking, so we were able to share responsibilities: I would handle the hawk, she would handle the dog. This system worked exceptionally well since my mind and eyes didn’t need to be two places at once.

As the season progressed, my confidence as a falconer grew exponentially. Yes, things can always go sideways in falconry, but my bird followed pretty well and would always hit the lure like a SCUD missile every time I needed to get her down. I was ready to try hawking with the dog by myself. When the time came, I chose my site carefully, picking a spot that was close to home and knowing that I had a zero percent chance of running into anyone else while I was there. One thing that surprised me was that the dog seemed to focus on the hawk more when it was just the three of us. He also would try to pull on vines as he saw me do. Although not very effective, it was pretty adorable! I was able to go hawking, handling my dog by myself on multiple

occassios. My only regret is that the falconry season isn’t longer since it seems like we were just hitting our stride when it ended.

If asked, I would say the reasons that I was able to successfully hawk with my dog are as follows:

- having a dog that naturally stays close when in the field. We have hiked with Henry since he was a pup. His preferred location is wherever we are, so he never wanders more than ten or fifteen yards from me when in the woods. I never have to worry about him taking off after something.
- having a dog that will reliably sit-stay on command and has excellent recall.
- having a wife that is not only understanding, but also participates in the training process. This would be tough to do alone.
- having patience with both the bird and the dog. Trying to rush this process could easily ruin it.
- I free-loft my bird and my dog is on Invisible fence.

I believe that this has helped since they see each other all of the time on a daily basis, not just when we’re hunting. From their perspectives, there is nothing novel about seeing one another, so it doesn’t affect their behavior when in the woods.

At this stage of my falconry career, I measure success in this endeavor by making it back home with my hawk and dog uninjured. When we catch game, that’s just icing on the cake!

I’ve heard (and witnessed) that every hawk is different. Despite this, I am hopeful that next season I’ll have a bird that will accept my goofy dog and be able to replicate this year’s success even sooner in the season. There truly isn’t much better than hawking with your dog in the woods.

Author’s Disclaimer:

I am not an expert in falconry, nor in dog training. I’m an apprentice falconer that managed to put the pieces together that enabled me to bring my dog squirrel hawking during my first falconry season.



Bone up on rabbit

By Doug Thornton

Getting out to hunt after days of working with my bird, Skylure, was exciting to say the least. With one knee replaced and the other needing it I am not much of a hiker, but I do my best to keep up with her. I was so disappointed in the first replacement; I thought “The 6 Million Dollar Man” was for real!

Anyway, we’d get out regularly, and got into a good routine in the evenings. Off we go, and she’d follow nicely and boom there’d go another a squirrel! Her first one of the season, I didn’t have time for Ho Ho’s, not that any were needed. She was on it, nailed it, and spiraled down just like in all those videos on YouTube. Boy was I one proud Papa! Not that I did much but climb down the bank spear the squirrel, throw the swap, hide the furball and limp my way out of the woods.

A few hunts later with friend and mentor, Andrew Schmallfuss, things are going pretty slow and Skylure has taken a pretty high perch overlooking a swampy area. She appears to be watching something and not following as usual. Maybe, I thought, it’s because there’s the second person, and she’s being funny about it. Suddenly she dives completely across the park and crashes a brush pile. Andrew is on it and sees the rabbit dive into the pile. Gimmy me finally catches up to find Skylure on a low branch by the pile intently watching it. Andrew waiting for me to catch up so I can watch when Andrew jumps on the pile.

All set, go! Out comes the rabbit down goes Skylure. She catches the hind quarters as the rabbit dives under the neighbor’s storage shed with it as it drags her. Her wings fully spread she is pinned unable to move without letting go of the rabbit. Of course, she refuses to do that, like any hawk with a big meal in her feet! We pull her and her rabbit out and she proceeds to complete the deed. As I trade her off

Andrew takes the rabbit aside and cleans it looking for worms. All clear so he cuts off a leg so that Skylure can get a snack before we head home in the dark. A typical conclusion to a successful hunt, and neither of us thought much of it.

The next day as I walked up to the mews, I could smell something putrid. Upon entering the smell was really bad. I looked in and there was Skylure anxiously waiting to go with a bone sticking out of her crop! Not out of her mouth, but out through the wall of her chest. According to the vet we consulted later, the smell was from her leaking crop bacteria, and we knew this was potentially a lethal injury – just as any GI puncture would be!



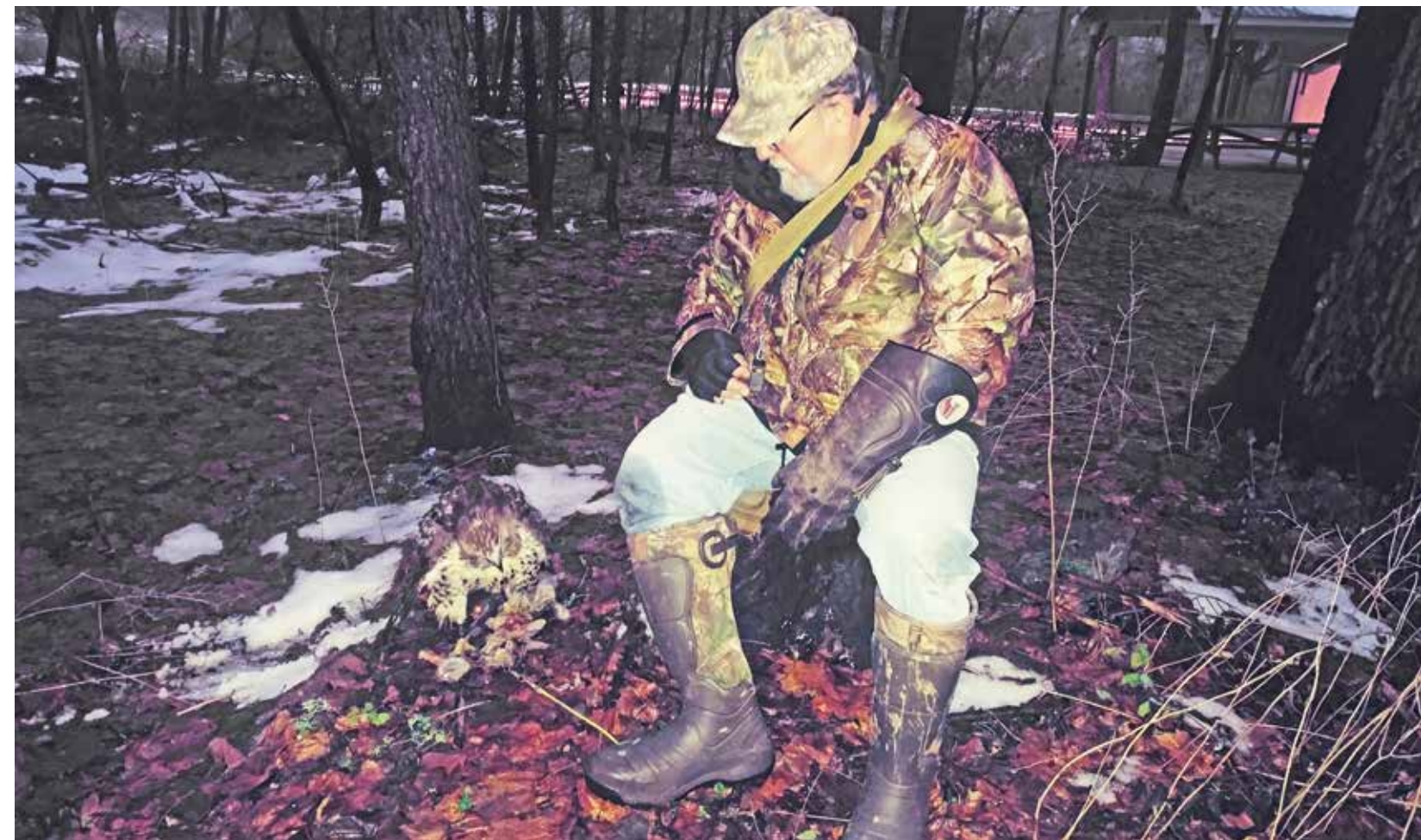
Off to Cornell we go. They were not as surprised as I was, as they had seen it many times.



Apparently, this is an incredibly common injury with hawks taking rabbits, and the level of care the facility provided is exactly why you go there.

Leaving her there, they removed the bone cleaned and disinfected her crop. The vets then sewed the crop up so tight with tiny “fairy” stitches and then the breast skin with a tiny drain hole. Amazing work that likely saved this hawk’s life and was my first contribution to the “Exotic Animal Clinic” at Cornell.

Learning how to get a hawk to drink from a syringe is a new experience. There is a lot of flicking of medicine and some time getting the dexterity and coordination to “tickle” the syringe in. After a couple times she almost seemed to like the taste enough to not fight it, and within a few days we were back on the hunt.



2021 Field Meet Report

By Gene Butta

Well, it's been a crazy two years. I hope 2022 will be better and we can say goodbye to covid, mask mandates and get on with our lives.

For those of you at the meet who asked me how Bill Deckert was doing I finally spoke with him a few weeks ago and he and Patty are doing well and Bill was in good spirits.

I would like to thank all those who worked to organize the 2021 NYSFA meet and the members who attended. I am sure it was a difficult decision for those who were unable to attend due to covid concerns and possibly for some who may have been sick from the virus or caring for their significant others. There was plenty of participation from many who attended the membership meeting, including respectful discussion of issues that the club would like to see expanded on and addressed.

Thanks to Alicia the raffle was again a success, and Al Jordan did a nice job with his lecture on the artistry of bird carving. Al no third place in the country for you. You're number one in our book. At the banquet, we also paid tribute to Geoff Ford and his family with a moment of silence – it was clear that Geoff had a major impact on this club, and he will be missed. We may have not had the largest meet turn out, but the camaraderie was evident and as far as I could tell everyone enjoyed themselves.

Future club planning and enthusiastic leadership was evident as members and the board discussed issues affecting the club. Sunday morning found the officers and board members discussing the meet and future meets and how we could make it better for next year.

I did my usual on the way up Friday and hit a couple of my sneaky fields I have found from past meets. My 18 y/o Female Harris's Widow caught an early morning breakfast Squirrel after a few near misses. Saturday, we worked hard and we had our chances but the skilled prey left us with a string of near misses and a few more great memories hunting with my hawk.

Stay well and good hawking
~ Gene



MY FIRST FALCONRY MEET: ITHACA 2022 FINGER LAKES

By Morgan Hapeman



My Mom has a thing about me not driving on ice. I guess most mothers try to keep their kids alive, despite our foolish impulses.

But, I'd been looking forward to Andrew's Finger Lakes meet since November. (I joined NYSFA one week after the state meet.) So, I decided to drive to Ithaca for the meet despite a snow storm.

When I stopped for gas and saw that the front of my car was covered in ice, I had qualms, but I somehow managed to justify continuing, at a slow speed.

Road conditions certainly kept my mind off how nervous I was to meet a group of strangers, especially falconers. (It's weird to be passionately interested in and completely ignorant about something at the same time. People had suggested books and I'd read 5. While books are no substitute for being in the field, they were super helpful to start my learning and they did help me make sense of some things I saw in the field. This summer, I'll re-read them.)

Before the meet, I had been fortunate to go hawk-ing twice with Chris Zumwalt. Eager to be helpful,

I tried to imitate her forays through thorn thickets. But I'd get hopelessly entangled and fall behind. The worst were my shoe laces; a thorn magnet. So, I asked about gear.

Thanks to Chris's guidance, I drove to Ithaca with brush pants, a Carhartt Full Swing jacket, knee high rubber boots, thick gloves, and a stick. (In his book, Liam McGranaghan tells about getting a thorn in his eye. So I also brought safety glasses, to help me get comfortable aggressively whacking thorny branches. They worked, but they fogged up. So it was on again, off again.)

Due to the generosity and hospitality of people at the meet, driving to Ithaca turned out to be the only bad part of my trip. The meet itself was awesome and amazing.

By the time I reached Ithaca, I had begun to realize that being helpful was an aspiration, rather than something I could do right away. So Friday night, I asked Andrew how to be a good guest. I did not want to upset any hawks or any falconers. How could I learn correct behavior? Andrew mentioned warm clothes and not wearing anything that looked like

fur. (I had already replaced my brown hat - which had a suspiciously rabbit like pom pom. However, my replacement hat was a dark, shaggy, synthetic. Andrew took one look and said, "Well, I wonder if these hawks have caught any black squirrels..." Whoops! Luckily, I had brought 2 backup hats.) Andrew also told me to let the falconer lead in the field and follow their directions. (This may all seem very basic to you, experienced readers, but it was super helpful to a first timer like me!)

Andrew offered to let me ride in his car to the hawking spot Saturday morning. I accepted eagerly for two reasons. For starters, after Friday's drive, I never wanted to touch a steering wheel ever again. But, more important, riding with a falconer is a great way to ask questions and learn about their falconry experience, because their bird is hooded, so they have more time to talk.



NATE WITH HIS RED-TAILED HAWK

Saturday morning in Ithaca was bright, clear, cold, delicious. There were 15 people, 4 hawks, and snow up to our knees.

The 2 apprentices went first. Andrew assigned himself and all the inexperienced people to Nate's hunt. We were trying to flush rabbits, but Nate's hawk caught a squirrel. I did not see the chase, but I did see Nate do a very slick job trading with his hawk and then sneaking the squirrel into his game bag.



STEVE SUCCESSFULLY RETURNING WITH HIS HAWK

My books talked a lot about hawks, less about how to find quarry. Throughout the Ithaca meet, I was trying to learn to find and flush quarry. "When looking at a field, where should the rabbit be?" "Which tracks are rabbit?" "Are there tunnels under the snow?" "Does no tracks mean no rabbits?" "Where and how do the experienced falconers flush?" "Oh, we ARE really going through that?" etc....

At moments when the brush was too much or I was tired, an instant of standing still, of drinking in the air and the sun and the hawk, of being in the woods in this new way, revitalized me.

Meanwhile, in the second hawking group, Steve's hawk took one look at the large group of people,



SAM WITH HER RED-TAILED HAWK

then she took off. So, when we returned to the cars, we joined a group waiting for Steve. There was a bald eagle up high. Steve emerged from the woods with his hawk, to everyone's delight.

Next up was Sam and her hawk. We beat a field for rabbits without success. Her hawk took a few low perches. When this happened, Sam would tell us to hold and wait for the hawk to move higher. This was a great introduction to thinking about where the hawk is perched and how that affects the hunt. Again, my books talked about it, but when you see it in action, it starts to make sense.

We found a huge woodpile which was quite productive. First, a red squirrel: chased and missed. Then, a vole: chased and devoured. (Falconers disapproving.) Then, we all jumped on the woodpile at once and yelled. As a result, I saw my first rabbit! Very fast! Very exciting! Chased and missed.

On the way back to the cars, Nate's Dad told a wonderful story. Someone saw a wild red-rail in the woods with her dead quarry. The hawk was being mobbed by crows, who wanted the quarry. So the hawk flew up to a high branch and dropped the

quarry beneath itself. I.e., "You want it?...Come get it!!!!" After thinking it over, the crows left. The red-tail ate.

The falconers laughed and said, "Now that was an adult hawk!" Then they gave me a few examples about stupid juveniles. It was like this throughout the meet, with people telling stories and taking time out to teach me. I really appreciated their generosity.

Last hawk of the day was Anzu, Andrew's bird. We flushed a squirrel which ran up a tree and into a hole. We beat on the bottom of the tree, but no luck. I thought that was the end of it, but Andrew climbed about 15 feet up into the tree and scared the squirrel out of its hole. It ran partway down the trunk, then changed its mind and retreated to the hole. Very exciting!



ANDREW WITH HIS RED-TAILED HAWK

Despite the melted snow sloshing round in my boots, and the cold, and the thick snow which made walking difficult.... everything was so exciting and wonderful! The winter woods lit up in a whole

new way with the presence of hawks and falcons. Even now, 3 weeks later, when I close my eyes and think about Ithaca, I see sunlight on snow, hawks, and dazzle.

As a lifelong hiker, it surprised me how much my perception of the woods changed during hawking. Of course, there were the bursts of tremendous excitement when the chase was on, but I was also much more aware of the sky and the trees. Hawking literally added a new dimension (upward) compared to hiking.

At the end of the day, we went out for pizza and beer. It was lovely to be warm and sitting down. Better yet was the buzz of falconry stories around the table. People told me about their good and bad falconry experiences as a way of teaching. My apprehension about meeting this group was gone. Instead, here I was, hanging out with this extraordinary group of outdoors people. I thought it was awesome that each person in the group was kind, generous with their knowledge, and welcoming. Wow, you don't find that every day. And my head was stuffed completely full with all the new things I had seen and heard.

On Sunday, another sunny, sparkling day, we had 2 hawks and 7 people. We started at a farm. Andrew and Anzu went first. A pair of wild red-tails was disturbed by Anzu's presence and got very, very, close. At one point, the female landed 2 trees

away from Anzu and would not move, despite our yelling at her.

It makes me super nervous when wild birds object to the falconry hawk. I don't know how to read it. I don't know what's dangerous and what's not. But in this case, even the falcons seemed concerned. There was speculation that the wild female was a former falconry bird

because she lacked fear. She didn't leave us alone until we left the field and went into the woods.

In the woods, Anzu grabbed a squirrel about 80 feet up. Anzu and the squirrel came down together, with Anzu helicoptering. In mid-air, the two fought. Anzu dropped the squirrel about half way down,



then grabbed it again. When they hit the ground, the squirrel got away. Anzu had two squirrel bites, which bled a lot, but they were not a long term injury. WOW!

Steve was next. He took us to his in-laws house, on a hilltop above the lake. There were 4 people left. The place was gorgeous: windswept fields, sunny, cold, deep snow.

When we got to the brush, the first thing we flushed was a deer. The brush was much thicker than the other areas we had hunted and the snow was deeper, so that was a challenging combination. However, to my joy, I flushed my first quarry! A red squirrel. "HO HO HO" burst from me, without conscious thought. Steve's bird did not chase, but I was delighted with my squirrel anyway. At last I had flushed something and contributed!

Throughout the hunt, people said Steve's bird seemed torn between interest in the game we flushed and staying away from the scary strangers. At the end, after Steve called her down, he asked us to stand, not too close, and talk quietly for a while.

Then, we went for dinner. A few people from the day before joined us, as well as Andrew's family

who are highly tolerant of nonstop falconry talk. Steve taught me by sharing his story of committing to falconry and finding a sponsor. Morgan taught me about rehab work and her training in it. She prefers to work with raptors, so other rehabbers bring raptors to her. Her past work, as commercial pilot, helps her evaluate birds' flight readiness/release-ability. She can look at a bird trying to fly and see, "Oh, it's not got enough loft yet..." How cool, that plane flying skills translate to bird evaluation knowledge!

At the end of the meet, my head was stuffed full of new knowledge and experiences. I was sorry to leave Ithaca and stop hawking, but I knew that I needed some time to assimilate all the new info. I hope this story of my first meet may be a little helpful to other beginners. To the more experienced falconers, I hope this story entertained you, but mostly I want to say thank you for taking time to include and teach us beginners. You're awesome! And a huge thank you to Chris, Andrew, Brian, Matt, and team Ithaca for encouraging me, teaching me, and helping me on my journey!





FALCONRY

was something I always
wanted to do.

A dream, that for years, I thought would be unobtainable.

By Britney Morea

For most of my adult life, I was heavily focused on my career; moving across states to finally settle down in the garden state. I worked with raptors for many years in zoo environments and at multiple rehab/veterinary institutions. Rehabilitation gave me the insight to just how harsh a wild bird's life could be. Increasing a passage bird's chance at surviving is what inspired me to become a falconer; little did I know my first year as an apprentice would surely put a spin on things.

It was an early October morning, a morning that seemed like I have waited a lifetime for. Running on zero sleep and way too much coffee, we headed to our trapping spot at a ridge in Northern NJ. After hours of waiting and watching birds pass over the horizon, a small immature red tail approached our trap. A moment that would change my life and give me insight into the brutal, yet beautiful wild world these birds live in.

A small tiercel, weighing in at a whopping 880g. His cere was pale blue, his wings dark brown and his chest pure white; this was my bird. I would be lying if I said I wasn't



slightly terrified. Okay, I was totally terrified, mostly because I wanted to do everything correctly to assure this bird had the best chance for survival.

I decided to name him Klaus, small but mighty, after a character from the popular Netflix show The Umbrella Academy. I knew saving the world from an apocalypse might have been a little too ambitious as a first-year falconer, so I opted to learn and do everything I could to give this little guy the best chance at life, for he I knew would be "extra-ordinary".

Over the next month, Klaus and I got to know each other. He was a spit fire and full of zest, both of us equally as unsure of one another. We went from manning in my dark basement to flying through fields catching rabbits. He followed like a dream and was everything I could have imagined and hoped for.

It was the end of December, and we went out hunting just as we did almost every day. This was the hunt that would end our season. During a flight, Klaus collided with a small tree branch. I immediately called him to the glove and noted a small superficial abrasion on his left occipital ridge with no other injuries present. The very next day, Klaus immediately caught a rabbit five minutes into our hunt. It was then that I noticed a slight protrusion of the conjunctiva tissue at the lateral canthus. At this time, I assumed there was fur stuck in his eye, so we headed home with a rabbit in the bag.



By the next day, the swelling in his eye almost doubled. My local ER vet treated him for acute trauma without involvement of the globe. Over the next few days, the swelling continued to increase along with appreciated protuberance around the brow abrasion. A small non-healing scab was present on his left foot between the 2nd and 3rd digit. Having worked extensively in the veterinary field, I knew in my gut something was not right. I moved Klaus indoors and although I was flying him close to his initial trap weight, I slowly began to increase his food intake. The conjunctiva tissue was now a large distended and ulcerated mass encompassing half of his eye. Our daily hunts turned quickly into daily vet visits, multiple oral antibiotics, and topical eye ointments.

Over the course of a week, his eye continued to worsen, and an additional mass was now present at the dorsal aspect of his eye. Not knowing exactly what we were dealing with, my vet removed a section of the mass and submitted it for histology. A tarsorrhaphy was performed which meant suturing his eye lids partially closed to protect his eye from further trauma.

The news I was about to receive would change the course of our season and leave a profound emotional impact. Klaus was diagnosed with Avipoxvirus and epidermoid carcinoma, a highly aggressive cancer. In very rare cases, pox viruses can contribute to cancer formation but there were no reports of this documented in raptors.

To say I was heartbroken would be an understatement. I was now faced with the decision on what to do with this bird's life. My vet and I spoke extensively about performing an enucleation to remove his eye, but at this point we were unsure if the cancer would or already had metastasized. The grim prognosis was disheartening



(ABOVE) IT STARTED AS A SLIGHT PROTRUSION OF THE CONJUNCTIVA TISSUE AT THE LATERAL CANTHUS. WITHIN DAYS THE CONJUNCTIVA TISSUE WAS NOW A LARGE DISTENDED AND ULCERATED MASS ENCOMPASSING HALF OF HIS EYE. (BELOW)





and with so much uncertainty for his future, I called every rehabilitation center on the East Coast. I thought, if I could potentially transfer him to a rehab facility then he could become an educational bird if he survived. I remember those moments so vividly, and the raw emotion of it still sticks with me to this very day. I always knew this bird would not be with me forever, but I was extremely overwhelmed with the amount of emotion I felt having to advocate for him. The rehab facilities I contacted were all at full capacity or unwilling to take him given the circumstances. The other alternative, one that I leaned heavily towards, was humane euthanasia. Working in the veterinary field, I can tell you sometimes this can be the kindest option.

This was an extremely unique and novel case; one that the veterinary medical field had minimal, if any, experience with. I began researching

his case endlessly, reading every case study published on pox viruses in avian species. I reached out to numerous veterinary professionals, avian pathologists, and my own colleagues across the country, to whom I am extremely thankful for their help and guidance through this whole endeavor. The consensus I got from most veterinarians and falconers alike was to euthanize. The emotional toll this took on me was unexplainable. He wasn't my pet, and I knew very well this was one example why the survival rate for wild raptors is so low. I experienced anticipatory grief and even made an appointment to euthanize him. Sitting with him in my basement, waking up throughout the night to administer medications, I remembered why I wanted to get into falconry and that was to help save these animals. With zero guarantee, I decided to do everything I could to do just that. I knew in my heart that this was my decision all along.

Working closely with my veterinarian, we started him on preventative Itraconazole along with heavy doses of anti-biotics. Initially I had to gavage him the medications as his refusal to take them was made very well known (even though I thought I did a pretty good job sneaking them in a DOC; apparently there was no fooling him). The mass in his eye continued to have marked swelling and now his blood work and radiographs were indicative of an active Aspergillosis infection. (Not surprising as Aspergillosis is notorious for arising during times of stress or when the immune system is compromised). To lessen his stress levels and to avoid having to cast him multiple times a day, I target trained him using operant conditioning techniques to allow for voluntary administration of his eye medications. He very politely would turn his head to the side while touching a small target wand, allowing me to administer the drops (we did this 5-6 times per day for several months.)

Klaus, still hunkered down in my basement, was fat, content and allowed me to handle him daily. The pox lesion on his foot began to get larger and spread to the distal aspect of his tarsus. Because of how contagious pox is and its high likelihood to spread to other areas, I could not allow Klaus to use his feet to tear or manipulate and food. I started bowl feeding him, which at first provoked some confusion for him. Over time, he was trained to station at his perch and wait for food in a very attentive fashion.

Going from a hunting bird to a rehabilitation bird that needed around the clock care was quite daunting, although I never once considered it a burden. This was my vow as a falconer and his survival was now even more dependent on that. He and I continued with our daily target training, medications, and

foot soakings. Even through all this, I was still learning so much from him. Klaus continued to demonstrate exceptional resilience, remained content, politely ambitious for food and did not display outward signs of Asper. There was no evidence on diagnostics that the cancer had spread so going forward with removing the masses in his eye was the best option. The surgery was a success with most of the mass sloughing off with clean margins. The histology report confirmed that the lesion was in fact caused from the Avipoxvirus.

With the mass in his eye now gone, he was still dealing with an active pox infection on his feet. Despite cleaning and scrubbing his feet daily, applying antibiotic ointment and disinfecting every surface he touched, the lesions continued to grow, scab over and then reopen. Given the duration of how long the lesion was present, my vet and I felt the best option would be to surgically remove it. At this point, not only was he a local celebrity at the vet's office, but I also probably single handedly funded the new addition to their building. A few hours after dropping him off, I received a very worrisome phone call from the attending veterinarian. Upon sedation Klaus' heart rate, respiratory rate and blood oxygen levels dropped to dangerously low levels. He needed to be urgently intubated to obtain a patent airway and they did not feel comfortable continuing with the surgery. They performed thoracic radiographs and found increased soft tissue opacity in the right caudal thoracic-abdominal air sac along with evidence of splenomegaly, thus leading us to suspect a relapse of Asper.

I felt defeated, again. I had every hope to hunt him one last time before the season ended. I took him home and continued our daily routine. I knew it was important for him to maintain mild exercise so we did creance flying

and jump ups a few days per week. I listened to his breathing daily with a stethoscope and overtime the audible respiratory noises improved. After 6 months, he was gradually weaned off the Itraconazole; his repeat blood work and radiographs were within normal limits. The pox lesion on his foot finally fell off and resolved around eight months later. This was the end of the long nightmare for him.

Here we are, a little over a year since Klaus entered my life, and I can say that fight was well worth it. His eye is 100% back to normal and he now has a beautiful red tail. His cere has turned yellow and his chest is now white mottled with tan feathers throughout. The standing theory is that he had an active dry pox infection, sustained a minor injury, spread the pox virus to his face and eye, and with a lowered immune system he developed Aspergillosis, a rare occurrence, but one from which we can learn so much. Klaus' case was used at a school that specializes in raptor medicine to further educate about the complications that can arise from Avipox viruses.

I never imagined my first go at falconry would transpire as it did. I will forever be grateful for this experience and will always remember how deeply I cared for an animal that I have only known for such a short period of time. Klaus has inspired me to not only become a better falconer, but to advocate for their intelligence, resilience, and survival. I am honored to have him as my hunting partner this season and I look forward to his bittersweet release in the spring, for he certainly is "extra-ordinary!"

Special thanks to my wonderful sponsor for his endless support.



Caring for Foot Injuries

By Crystal Westermeier



A hunting hawk will take all sorts of foot scrapes and injuries in the course of being flown on game. Fields are filled with hazards – old metal, rose bushes, barbed wire and so on – to say nothing of squirrel bites, which can range from minor scrapes to major injuries. Hazards at home too can cause unexpected problems if not planned for – improper substrate in mews, obesity, improper perching – even punctures from the hawk’s own talons. Proper preventative foot care from the first instance of the injury can help keep these injuries minor, and prevent long-term injury to your game hawk.

Some folks will say I baby my hawks, and this level of treatment isn’t necessary. Maybe that’s true! But if it is necessary and I don’t do it, the hawk is the only one that pays the price, so I prefer to be overzealous. The only real cost is a bit of time and money, and that’s really worthwhile if it improves the long term prospects of a raptor in my care.

SUPPLIES

First, I like to be sure I have certain items on hand before the season even begins. I encouraged everyone – particularly apprentices – to get these sorts of supplies in order prior to obtaining a new hawk. Young hawks tend to take more injuries than mature ones, due to experience among other factors, and being prepared with these supplies will put you and your hawk in a good place before an injury happens. In no particular order they are:

- F10SC Veterinary Disinfectant – good for surfaces and soaks, at different dilutions
- F10 Germicidal Barrier Ointment to Treat Open Wounds and Prevent Reinfection (Available for shipment from UK falconry suppliers).
- Chlorhexidine G, purchasable at most pharmacies as a surgical scrub, or available from farm supply stores.
- Liquid soap and soft toothbrush for general foot cleaning.
- A good triple antibiotic
- Non-stick gauze pads that can be cut into whatever shape you need
- Moleskin pads to alleviate pressure on injuries on the bottom of the foot
- Medical tape

- Styptic powder
- Vet wrap
- Hydrocolloid dressing for injuries which may involve a tendon (DuoDERM Extra Thin is a fantastic product to use. You can purchase the large squares and just cut to size)
- A bucket with a perch affixed inside for soaking your hawk’s feet, such that the perch top is at or slightly below the water level when full
- Small pair of scissors
- An emergency vet that can be consulted and visited as necessary

That’s my personal list, which is obviously not exhaustive, nor does it cover all possible issues. For most minor-to-moderate injuries that do not require surgical intervention, this list is sufficient to prevent and treat injuries and prevent long term health problems like bumblefoot.

FIELD DRESSING

As with any wound, the sooner you address and clean it, the better it is. With foot and toe injuries, the first issue to assess is bleeding. In general, a bit of bleeding from a wound is desirable, as it helps flush debris and indicates the wound is in an area of good circulation. Good

circulation helps promote healing. Too much bleeding and styptic powder should be applied, taking care not to accidentally get any into the hawk's airway.

Once the bleeding is under control, I typically flush wounds with a diluted solution of F10 or Chlorhexidine, kept in my vehicle for this express purpose. Flushing the wound not only helps push any remaining debris out, using a good surgical antiseptic will keep bacteria and act as a prophylactic against fungal growth and secondary infection. Hawks heal very fast, so the first 72 hours after an injury are key – get it clean as soon as you can!

SHORT-TERM CARE

The location of the wound dictates the kind of care most likely to be given. Wounds on the tops or sides of the feet may do with simple field dressing and some ointment, with no dressing needed. In fact, this is frequently all that is necessary for wounds in those positions. An exception is an exposed tendon or drooping toe. In those cases, no matter how small the cut or puncture, I seek immediate veterinary consultation. Severed tendons can cripple a bird, and if surgery is needed, doing it sooner instead of later is often easier on the hawk.

Wounds on the bottom of the foot are tricky. Minor scraps and abrasions can generally heal on their own,

but carry an increased risk of bumblefoot. To combat this passively, I know a couple falconers that swear by moleskin pads cut out to cushion the wound – just like I might use on a blister. I have also seen and used myself a foot soaking bucket, intended to immerse and sanitize the bottom of the hawk's feet. Basically, a perch is fixed inside a bucket by means of brackets or glue (see photographs), and the hawk placed on the perch, with her feet submerged. The bottoms soak, which will have the effect of sanitizing the wound. As an added benefit, soaking will soften the outer portions of the talons, which will let you keep your hawks' talons needle sharp without mechanical coping.

Soaking feet in diluted Chlorhexidine can be effective in preventing and treating infection. Generally, I soak the feet in warm water for 30-45 minutes or until the water turns cold. I do this the day the hawk takes an injury to the foot and with a squirt or two of liquid soap (without the Chlohexidine) just as a foot/talon maintenance regime once every week or two. The hawks I have had in my care take to it rather willingly, often tucking in to rest while they are soaking. You may have to shift the hawk if they tuck one foot up to get both the feet a little soak time. If you are able to get away with gently brushing the feet with a soft toothbrush now would be a good time to do it as debris is easy to lift away after soaking. After the feet are dry I also like to use a product called Hawaiian

Moon Aloe, to keep the hawk's feet from drying out. A&D ointment is also excellent and prevents friction on perches if a foot is injured.

Often wounds on the bottom of the feet need to be wrapped by an experienced falconer or veterinary. If you're not familiar with wrapping techniques, have your vet or an experienced falconer demonstrate how to do it in a way that doesn't risk cutting off circulation. My hawks have all tolerated wrapping of their feet very well, though a few require little "happy tabs" of tape be placed on their toes so that any inquisitive tugging from the bird doesn't remove the wrapping. For at-home care of tendon injuries, your vet may recommend a good hydrocolloid dressing, so I generally keep this on hand just in case a wound like this arises, but I wouldn't deploy it without consulting a vet first.

LONG TERM CARE

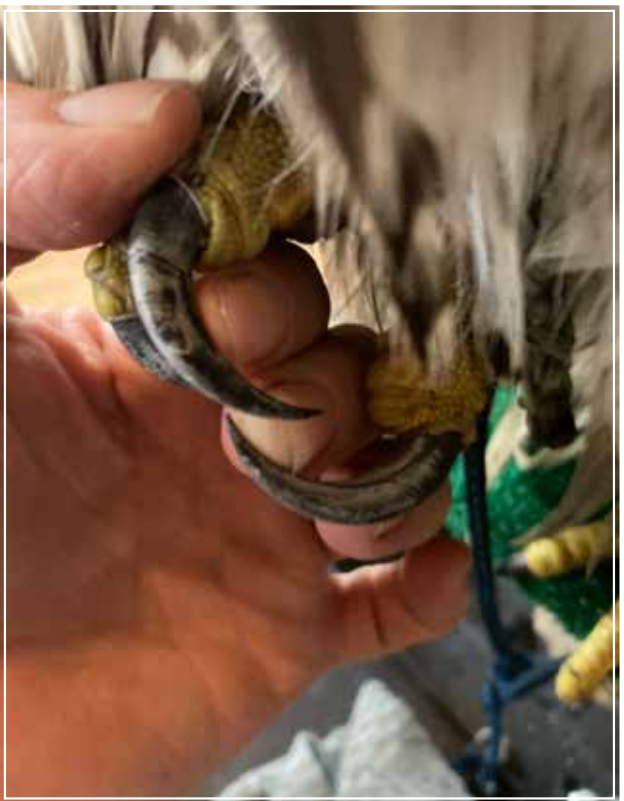
The number one thing I have had vets tell me, is that your hawk has a huge advantage if you're inspecting their feet and feathers every single day, in detail. This is part of why it's critical to get your hawk used to having all parts of her handled from the first days of training – I've had hawk get stitches from a vet without general anesthesia while perched, a feat only accomplished because she was so accustomed to having her feet touched!

I make it a habit to look at her feet on the glove, on the scales, and in the weathering yard whenever I handle her. That way, if any husbandry issues have arisen from failed equipment or similar, I catch them right away. If she grabbed something in the field and scraped up a foot, I know the same day and can start treatment immediately.

Being aware of this has saved me so many injuries. My last hawk learned to "spiral" around tree trunks to catch squirrels. Unfortunately, she didn't learn the technique perfectly, and the first few times she "peeled" the bottoms of her feet in a couple places. The injuries weren't bad – just some scrapes to the first layer of tissue – but left to fester or get dirty they could have lead to bumblefoot.

SUMMING UP

Over time, my goal has moved to being prepared for any field injury I can imagine. On a long enough timeline, with enough hawks, each injury is going to come up. When it does, having the supplies on hand can give the hawk the "leg up" she needs on recovery to keep the falconer from losing large chunks of their season, or even the hawk's life. Take great care of your hawk's feet, and she'll be taking game with them for many years to come! Taking the time to be prepared for injury, inspecting



TALONS AFTER SOAKING HAVE A DULL GRAYISH COLOR TO THEM. THIS IS THE OUTER LAYER SLOUGHING OFF AND IS NORMAL AFTER PROLONGED PERIODS IN WATER.

hawks daily, and providing quality veterinarian care when necessary is certainly a fair trade for what we get in return from them, and increases the familiarity of the falconer with the hawk's anatomy and general condition.



SIMPLE SOAK BUCKET. FLAT BACK BUCKET OBTAINED FROM FARM STORE, PERCH MADE OF 3/4" PVC PIPE WRAPPED WITH ASTROTURF AND SEALED WITH SILICONE AROUND THE HOLES



A VERY COMFORTABLE SOAKING HAWK

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Sponsors

Compiled by Matthew Vercant

Every so often, I hear folks with a lot of experience chatting about the requirements they set for apprentices. There's typically a lot of smart people in that conversation, with a lot of great ideas for how falconry should be done, what's best for the hawks, and how to go about teaching it. I'm far from an expert in falconry, but I have had some experience in teaching and motivating people. It seems to me that the thing the best falconry mentors in NY have a lot of techniques in common. I'm also not just talking about formal sponsorship – but about the way that we approach each other as mentors and community members, and how we help each other through the learning process of falconry.

Here are seven of the most common techniques I've observed folks using that seem to produce great results with apprentices.

1 - Be clear what kind of routine you expect

Do you fly your hawks on game every day of the season? What sorts of injuries mean your hawk is put up until it heals? What sort of weather is "too dangerous?" How do you handle trips or vacations or holidays? Letting your apprentice know what those expectations are will help them plan – which will in turn help usher them into a lifestyle that will lead to falconry success.

2 - Find ways to ensure integrity and build trust

Show your apprentice when things go poorly for you. By the same token, require absolute honesty

from them about their falconry – it will improve their self-reflection, and help them learn more quickly. That may mean spending some time getting to know them outside of hawking – that's probably a good thing! It's extremely helpful to have a sponsor you can connect with personally, as it just makes it easier to have this trust.

3 - Plan for hands on training time for your apprentice

Maybe you don't live right in the same town – that's okay! But it's far easier to learn a lot of falconry skills in person. Ideally, an apprentice is in the field with you every day – but it's not the Middle Ages

any more, and your apprentice probably doesn't live in a loft above the mews chamber, so this may not be feasible. Schedule a time. Even if it's just, say, 2 hours a week of field time, or whatever your schedules can cross over. But make it consistent.

4 - Be prepared to give constructive feedback

That doesn't mean "be mean" or "be rude." In fact, for sure don't do that! It means say it like it is – tell your mentee or apprentice where you think they're going wrong. Sparing their ego and harming the hawk is never a shortcut to success but putting them back on the right track as soon as possible is. Give feedback consistently, throughout the season. Be available when questions come up – maybe only by text or phone but answer as soon as you can. So many great sponsors with great apprentices use this method, I've got it underlined in my notebooks.

5 - Model the behavior you want your apprentice to learn

The best falconers I know don't say one thing, and then do another. They don't act like there's an "apprentice's table" that somehow separates the apprentice from good learning – they do exactly what they expect the apprentice to do, from day one of the season on through. When things go sideways, I've seen some great sponsors model

exactly how to manage terrifying field situations – that level of self-discipline will really help your apprentice.

6 - Have your apprentice write their thoughts down

Or record them. Or take a video journal. Helping them process what's happening in their falconry will help them correct mistakes, and learn faster. The DEC is also going to require written reports from them, so this is a great way to produce content that is interesting, fresh and accurate for the DEC. It's also been the start of a lot of Mews News articles (you may email those to editor@NYSFA.org, care of Matt Vercant...)

7 - Communicate your expectations in writing

This one is maybe the most important. I see so many falconers doing this, and I've read so many great apprenticeship contracts, curriculums, and lists of goals. That said, we're not all writers. If you think this sounds good, the club website has a sample agreement, the 2020 Mews News has a great article from Jason Borrelli on the topic, and I can recommend a half dozen great falconers who advise me whom I know have written documents for their apprentices.



Beyond Crepuscular: other considerations while squirrel hawking

By Jason Borelli

At the field meet in 2021, I had a couple conversations about the timing of hunts. You know the sort of thing; when is the best time of day for squirrels? My knee-jerk response for squirrels is “morning and evening.” As has been noted in this magazine before, squirrels are “crepuscular,” which means that they’re most active just after dawn and before dusk. While this is both scientifically accurate, and serves well as a general rule for those looking to improve their number of chases per day, I realized that my technique extends considerably beyond just “morning and evening.” So, for those looking to improve their number of chases – and note I won’t say “kills” because that factor is going to depend on the experience level of the hawk, and your familiarity with the woods, the terrain, the prey and so many other factors. But in doing all those things, I deploy many – if not all – of the considerations below in a given day’s hunt.

First, I want to note that I can’t do everything I’m describing every day. I work, I’m not yet retired, and I’m not independently wealthy (unless wishes count?), so I’m forced to work around my existing schedule and responsibilities – like a lot of us. I do have stretches of time off running several days in a row, and when I do I try to deploy as many of these techniques as I can. I can’t always sit around and wait for perfect weather, for example, but on days I can, I do.

The considerations beyond time of day that I look at are population density, favorable weather, sunlight, and native predator presence. Let’s go through those one by one.

Population Density

This is a fairly straightforward extension of “go where the game is.” Before putting my hawk up in a squirrel woodlot, I scout out the nests and activity from the wood line. I might even go to the woods on a day I’m not hawking, sit down for 20 or 30 minutes, and count how many squirrels I see. One has to sit fair-

ly still, but just like hunting with a shotgun, eventually the squirrels move and you can start to get a sense of them. The more squirrels, the better the odds of chases.

Native trees are a huge factor here. Years ago I was talking with an apprentice of a friend who said “boy I never see any squirrels.” I offered to go hunting with them, and pointed out that in their woods, while most factors were very good, there weren’t many nut bearing trees. Therefore while there were squirrels, they were concentrated in particular areas of the woods, instead of being spread densely over the entire lot. That meant that chases were limited, with stretches in between where the hawk was merely following – or worse, skipping ahead to the next dense region on her own. Of course that wood lot can be hawked, but if the goal is more chases, you’ll need more than a couple of spots in a lot that have a nest.

Terrain

This is both a factor for the squirrels and the hawk, but also the falconer. My prior apprentice has several lots that are amazing for rodent population, but they’re virtually all hills. I don’t know about you, but hoofing it uphill is a ton of effort, and I tend to arrive slower at the squirrels because my speed is impaired. Every second counts in a squirrel hunt, and if you’re to provide distraction for your hawk, ideally you want something a little bit flatter.

So flat is good. A mix of tree heights is also good – shorter trees will help a young hawk and an experienced hawk, by creating terrain that the squirrels must cross that is likely lower than the hawk’s favored

perches. That will create more range of vision for the hawk, and a downward trajectory for her to take shots. An open under story is also hugely helpful for squirrels – the opposite of what you’d ideally find bunnies in! And along with that, I suggest avoiding mudholes, ponds, deep rivers, and swamps as much as you can – squirrels will run across them, but unless it’s frozen and deep winter, you can’t. Worse, if your hawk takes a big gray on the other side of a 6-foot deep mudhole, you will take much longer getting to her if she requires assistance.

Consider what else might live in a region too. Chipmunks, for example, love rock piles. If you don’t want your hawk plunging down onto a chipmunk every five minutes, avoid extended periods of rock – I’ve found that glacial rocks can be some of the most productive chipmunk havens, and so I’ll try to ‘steer around them’ unless I’m alright with the hawk taking a chipmunk. And you know, red-tails are opportunistic hunters, so if you fly her over an area like that, you can’t be upset with her when she catches and eats whatever small rodent is running around on the ground.

Favorable Weather

Things squirrels tend to dislike: wind, hard rain, sleet, heavy snow and a hard cold snap can all conspire to reduce the number of squirrels in the field. The corollary is that after weather moves through, squirrels (all wildlife really) will be hungry, and out in greater numbers. I know at least two falconers that keep a bird feeder because it attracts squirrels look out into the yard and see if there are squirrels at the feeder. If there are, there’s a good chance there are squirrels in nearby woodlots eating too. Note which days your local squirrels are visible and what kind of weather it is in your falconry journal. Doing that will help you learn what kind of weather favors you. One of my apprentices, for example, lives in a valley. On days where the wind is keeping me in, it cuts across the top of his valley, and his squirrels will often be out eating while mine on the lake plane are tucked away. Learning these regional differences where terrain interacts with weather will also improve your odds.

Sunlight

I can’t over emphasize the difference in a sunny wood lot vs an overcast one. Squirrels - like me! – love the sun. Ever seen one sitting in the crook of a

tree, munching away on a nut in the last rays of sunlight in the evening? Gorgeous photo, and also absolutely what hundreds of other squirrels are doing under similar circumstances. I’ll check the weather in the morning, and if I see it’s cloudy and no squirrels are active on my lawn, I’ll see if the forecast shows it clearing by afternoon. If so, I wait if I can, to make the odds of multiple relaxed, warm, fed squirrels being out in the trees.

Native Predator Presence

This one can be hard to control for, but ideally you don’t want to be hawking above a fox, or running into native eagles, hawks, owls and so on. Particularly if you’re flying in an area with eagles, you’re increasing your risk of your hawk being food for someone else. However, even if you’re flying a red-tail, other native red-tails can move through a woodlot and shut all the game down before you ever arrive. So, if I pull up to a favorable hunting spot and see a couple of local hawks circling or moving through the tree line, I’ll often put the truck back in gear and head somewhere else. First off, it’s their woods, and they need to eat. Second, I avoid a potential confrontation. And third – and the subject of this article – the locals have likely already pushed the squirrels in that lot into nests. That will make it that much harder for me to produce slips and chases for my hawk.

So those are my areas beyond time of day. Obviously, it’s not an exhaustive list, and you may have other techniques or factors you or your group has found working well for you. Some of these, like waiting for weather, aren’t always going to be possible. Some, like population density, will vary annually. All of this together underscores the importance of examining the whole of the activity of hawking – the hawk is only one factor we can control for. When I began considering how many other small things I take into account every day, this list practically wrote itself! What are your factors that go beyond time of day? Talk to me about them online at the website forums, or pull me aside at the next meet and we can follow up on our conversation now that I’ve had time to mull it over.

What's In It For The BIRD?

By Chris Zumwalt

// The benefit is more for the person than the bird, how does this benefit the bird?"

This was a comment left in a Zoom chat recently during a presentation Thunder (my 2x intermewed Red-tail) and I did for a local Audubon. I have to admit, this was probably the most direct anti-falconry sentiment I've encountered in my short time as a falconer. I'm used to the more subtle "So, when do you release your bird?" after I've just spent an hour enthralling said audience with epic hunting stories, or relaying the conservation value of falconry, both historically, and proximally, as in the case of an individual bird. I mean, one could argue that birdwatching is also more for the benefit of the person than the bird, but that's a discussion for another day.

I'm not sure if the fixation with the bird returning to "freedom" is just a reflection of our own values put on an animal, or if it's cultural, the association with raptors being "majestic and free", as is ingrained in us since childhood by our own country's national symbol. Well, we all know the majestic part wears off proportional to how many mews/tarps you have to clean, and how many mummified rodent parts you find laundered into your pockets. And if you've been a falconer for any amount of time, you've probably observed that freedom for the bird doesn't always mean happily ever after. They get hit by cars, fly into buildings, get eaten by other birds, and unfortunately still get shot by people.



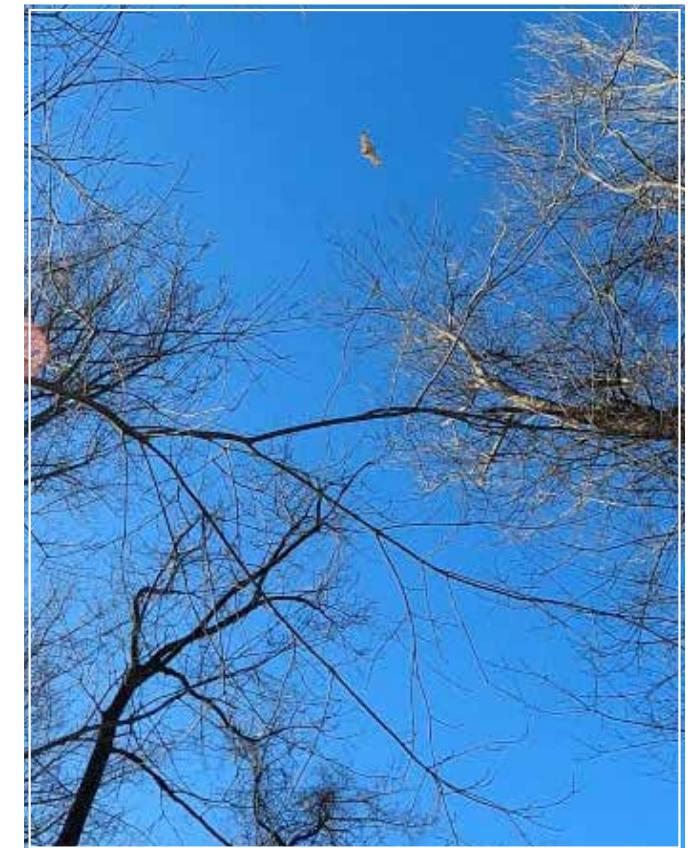
Many non-falconers seem to wrestle with the idea that the “point” of falconry is not to simply rescue passage birds from the hardship and death of winter. And that because it’s captive, a bird isn’t inherently unhappy. Or that tethering a bird can be the best/ safest option, and often bothers the bird less than the people looking at the bird. The fact that falconry is full of blood and cruelty, but also full of adventure, friendships, and even affection. It doesn’t fit well into an algorithm (as evidence by FB struggling to peg me as a dog owner- I’m not, an ivermectin conspiracy theorist, or someone who needs brush pants with velcro pee holes for women), and is ancient to the modern polarized choices we are given for how to feel about things.

I do have a strong desire to see my hawk out thriving and making endless murder babies. I don’t want to deny her that opportunity. Perhaps that’s just a fantasy version of what happens when you release a bird. I’m not sure how much of this is just a reflection of our own society’s valuing and pushing marriage and reproduction, (while many of us know one can



be perfectly happy or even happier without those things) versus what the bird actually wants. On a more practical level, it seems a lot easier to go out hunting with an intermewed bird. You can go to spots you wouldn’t take a new bird, not worry as much about wind or whether you are going to be late for work tracking down a wayward hawk. So, keeping a bird may allow one to continue to participate in falconry during other stressful life events such as change of job, pregnancy, moving etc. But who wants to explain these things to strangers, or even feel like they need to.

So, what’s in it for the bird? Getting back to the question at hand, what I could come up with in the moment was first and foremost the fact that 70-80% of those first-year birds won’t make it through their first winter. As a falconry bird, they get the opportunity to hone their skills. If you are doing what you are supposed to be doing as a falconer, you’re putting game under the bird, and they’re getting better every time. The bird is allowed to miss the squirrel or rabbit, and will still eat. That’s not the case in the wild. So, they get better and better, and





when you do finally release them, they should be able to catch anything.

In hindsight, I'd probably add that the bird does choose to follow me back to the car, and come down at the end of a hunt. If she doesn't want to, there's only so much I can do about it. On any given day during hunting season, she has the option to fly off wearing hundreds of dollars' worth of equipment. She's choosing the easy meal, the same way she did the day she was trapped, although back then she didn't know what she was getting into. It's also probably nice to have one's intestines free of worms, and feathers free of flat flies. If the general public only knew about the flat flies....



