

Natural History.

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THE SPORT OF HAWKING.

I.—The Peregrine Falcon.

THE peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) is well named the wanderer, for it ranges from the northern shores of the American continent to Tasmania, and from the ice bound regions of Asia to the Argentine territory. For its size it is the most powerful bird which flies, and among all his fierce congeners there is not one to equal him in dashing flight and reckless courage, and few, if any, which surpass him in destructive powers.

The plumage of the adult bird is bluish-black above; beneath cream color. The under surface, with the exception of the chin, is traversely barred with black. There is a black patch extending from the bill to the ear coverts. The young, when fully able to fly, are blackish-brown above and brownish white beneath, with brown-black bars, which are placed longitudinally instead of being transverse as in the adult. The form is compact and robust; the bill is short, very powerful and curved from base to point, near which is a distinct strong tooth. Nostrils circular, wings long and pointed. The peregrine is a "dark-eyed hawk," a true falcon, the irides being dark hazel. The total length of this hawk is about 20in., the wing often measures more than 15in. from base to tip. A full grown female weighs rather above 2½lbs., a fine male falcon but little over 1½lbs.

This falcon is not uncommon in the wild and mountainous portions of the Northern States, and breeds even in the mountains of Massachusetts. It also builds its eyrie among the cliffs of the Pennsylvania hills, and in the Adirondacks I have seen several magnificent specimens. It is commoner on the sea coast than inland, and preys largely on ducks and those birds, whence it has derived its common name of duck hawk. It kills its prey in the air, pursuing it with the swiftness of an arrow and driving its great talons deep into the body of its quarry. The stoop of a peregrine is a beautiful and spirit-stirring sight; first ascending above its victim, it flies downward for a short distance to gain impetus, then closes its wings, and coming obliquely through the air with fearful speed, rakes its hind talons through the bird aimed at, the legs being kept perfectly stiff and in one position. The quarry, unless unusually large and powerful, is generally killed at once by such lance thrusts, when the hawk seizes it in its claws. If the dead bird be not too heavy the hawk carries it off bodily to devour it unmolested, but should the prey be a heavy duck it is pushed obliquely as it falls, so as to drop in a suitable position. Snipe are one of its favorite foods, and a peregrine will wait for hours on a tall tree beside a marsh, waiting for the longbills to take flight, when it stoops upon them and seldom fails to secure a victim.

The falcons are dainty feeders. Throwing a bird on its back, it is held by the hawk's claws while the feathers are torn off by his beak; the prey is then broken up by bill and talons and swallowed in large pieces, the least inviting portions being left unless the captured bird be a small one. The flight of this species is wonderfully rapid and powerful. It rarely sails, but flies in the manner of the pigeon, and so swift of wing is it that few, if any, birds can escape it when pursued.

The nest of the peregrine is built upon the most inaccessible mountain peaks and cliffs, of twigs and grass, and is sometimes hardly more than a bunch of grass or seaweed thrown loosely into a hollow in the rocks. The birds return year after year to the same locality, and are bold and savage in the protection of their eyrie even before the eggs are laid.

The eggs are from two to four in number, almost spherical, and are reddish brown in color, marked with spots of a darker shade. They measure about two inches in length, and are deposited early in April. The young are at first thickly covered with soft, white down, which is gradually replaced by the proper plumage. They are ready to leave the nest by the latter part of May.

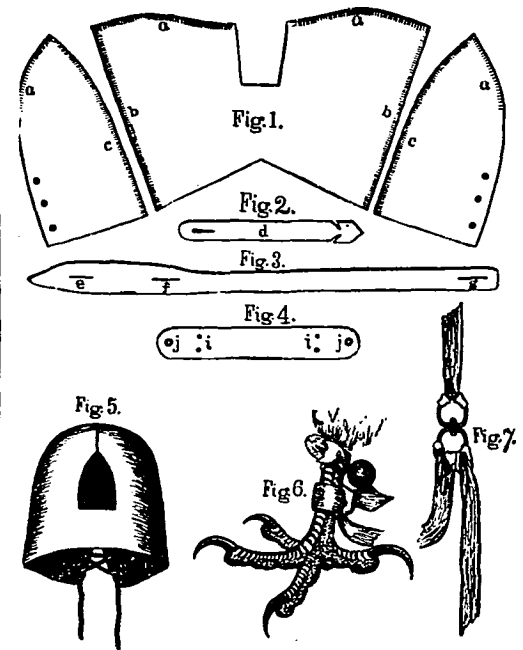
Of all the falcons, the most effective in the hawking field, the easiest to keep, and the most satisfactory for general use is the peregrine. From the earliest records of falconry this noble bird has been the idol of the falconer, and in the allotting of hunting birds to degrees and orders of men in bygone times the peregrine was given only to the earl or his superiors in rank.

Falconry is a sport of very old date, it being known in China as early as the year 2000 B. C. In Southern Asia, too, the art of hawking is a very ancient one, and is also practiced in great perfection at the present day. It was introduced into England about 860, and was for many years the national sport. It is now practiced in that country only by a very limited number of gentlemen. By falconers throughout the world the hawks are divided into two great classes: First, falcons, long-winged or dark-eyed hawks; second, short-winged or rose-eyed hawks. Of the former the peregrine is the type, while the latter class is well represented by the goshawk.

Among all hawks the female is the largest, strongest and most prized by falconers, and she alone is called a falcon by them, her smaller mate being known as a tiercel. Not only is the peregrine the most satisfactory falcon to train and hunt, but it is the most easily obtained. Either the wild adult birds (haggards) may be caught and trained or the young birds may be brought up in captivity.

In several States of the Union the duck hawk, as before stated, is moderately common, and the adult may be captured—along with many other common hawks—by the following method: First a bow net is required, it consists of a net of fine twine with sufficient "bag" to it to make sure of the hawk not being injured by its pressure when caught; the frame of the net consists of two semi-circles or bows of ½in. iron, looped together at the ends so as to form hinges. The completed net should measure 3ft. 5in. from hinge to hinge, and rather more than 4ft. the opposite way. To capture the hawks a blind is first built of branches and turf large enough to contain the falconer; a dozen yards away from this the bow net is spread upon the ground, and one bow firmly pegged thereto; to the center of the other bow is tied a piece of strong and flexible line, a soft trolling line answers admirably. The entire net is then lightly covered with grass or weeds, and in its center is tied by one leg a

pigeon, to the other leg of which is tied another line with which to "stir it up" when a hawk appears in view. Another pigeon or two near the net, each provided with a sod box to retreat into on the approach of the hawk, is not a bad thing. The mode of operation of the falcon trap is evident; the falconer keeps close watch from his blind; a hawk appears—the bait cord is twitched, and the pigeon made to flutter—the falcon will probably stoop down on the bait, and while he is killing it the net is quickly jerked over him, and he is a captive. A ruffer hood, a pair of jesses, with swivel and leash, either one or two bewits with their bells, and perhaps a brail or two should have already been prepared, and should now be at hand. The ruffer hood (Fig. 5) is a cap of stout chamois leather, lacing up the back, and provided with a triangular hole in front, through which the beak of the hawk passes. Fig. 1 shows a very good and simple pattern for the hood, the lines *a* and *a'* are stitched together, and the edges marked *b* *c* on both sides are sewn fast; three eyelet holes are then punched at the sides behind, as shown in the drawing, and a lacing string passed through them—a soft corset cord has been used by us with satisfaction. A hood before me, made for and worn by a red-tailed hawk, measures 2in. across that part which covers the eyes, and 2½in. from edge of beak opening to back of hood, measurements being made with a pair of dividers. A peregrine would not require one quite so large, but by far the best plan is to model the cap over the head of a stuffed bird of the same species for which the ruffer hood is intended. A jess (Fig. 3) is a strip of stout but soft leather (heavy dog skin is to be preferred) half an inch broad at its widest part, and 8in. long, in it are cut three longitudinal slits ¼in. in length, as shown in the cut; they should be well oiled and as soft as possible. Some of the hawks proper are so powerful and savage that they manage to tear off any ordinary jess, and for them a strap like the one represented in Fig. 4 should be used. It consists of a 2in. strap of heavy oiled leather ¼in. in breadth; *i* *i* are fourawl holes punched through the leather. The strap is brought round the hawk's leg, and a U-shaped loop of brass wire forced through the four holes and firmly



twisted together on the side opposite the curve of the U, so firmly binding the strap to the leg. A split ring is then passed through the eyelet holes *j* *j*, and short straps from the leash looped thereto. These straps should be placed upon both legs like the ordinary jesses. Bewits are 1½in. straps of the same leather as the jess cut, as shown in Fig. 2; at *d* is firmly sewn a light, clear sounding bell. The bewits are fastened round the legs above the jesses, and are useful in following the hawk when flown at game, or finding it when lost. They are put on at first in order that the haggard may become accustomed to them as soon as possible. The brail is a strip of soft leather with a slit in its middle long enough to admit the pinion joint of the hawk, and so confine the wing. The ends are tied together on the outer surface of the pinion after having first passed under the wing. This is not often used except to confine very violent newly-caught birds. The newly-captured hawk is removed from the net as carefully as possible, the hands being heavily gloved, and a ruffer hood is clapped over his head and laced fast behind. It is useless to give directions how we practiced on a stuffed hawk before we first attempted it on a living bird, and succeeded fairly well in our first attempt; do the best you can, look out for your fingers, and don't hurt the bird; of course, you will need an assistant gloved like yourself. This hood is never to be taken off until the falcon shows marked signs of "coming to" or becoming tame. It will usually have to be worn at least two weeks. The jesses are next put on as follows: The space between *e* and *f* (Fig. 3) is for the hawk's leg; the point and slit *h* *e* are brought round the leg and passed through the slit *f*, after which the end and slit *g*, and the whole remaining length of the jess are pulled through the cut *e* and then through *f*. The jess will then take the position shown in Fig. 6, and is perfectly firm, and by far the neatest and lightest fastening for the purpose. It is used by all European falconers. The bewits are then fastened on as shown in Fig. 6, which represents the foot of a hawk fully harnessed. The free end of each jess is then looped round one ring of the swivel—Fig. 7—to the other ring of which is then looped a well oiled strap 4ft. in length; this is the leash. The swivel should be very light though strong, and made of brass or German silver. The rings should move freely on one another, or the jesses will soon become tangled.

The hawk is now tied, with only a few inches of free leash, to a mound of earth and is left alone, protected from sun or rain, for a few hours. At the end of that time the hand or wrist, properly protected by a heavy falconry glove, is worked under his feet and he is induced

to step on to the wrist. The bird is now constantly carried about on the hand, and frequently lightly stroked with a feather. At the end of a few hours draw a piece of very tender beefsteak over his feet; he will snap at it, and as he does so slip a small piece into his beak, after several attempts it will probably be swallowed, and the first lesson will have been completed. Carry him about as much as possible and late into the night. On retiring tie the hawk to a padded pole close to the ground in a room perfectly dark at all hours, so that no gleam of light may find him in the morning. Repeat the process the next day, but now each time the hawk is fed blow on a chosen whistle—a dog call is a good thing; constantly carry him about, the hood and jesses of course being always in position. In a couple of weeks the haggard will bend down and feel for food as soon as he hears the whistle, and will feed eagerly through the hood. If he also steps quietly up on the wrist when it is placed under his claws, and sits quietly without bating or fluttering from the hand, he is "coming to" or becoming tame, and training proper may commence.

Up to this time the falcon should have perfectly lean raw meat; beef and pigeon have been found to be the best foods for the newly caught haggard. He should be fed twice daily for the first two weeks, early in the morning and again late in the afternoon. The meat should always be given in small pieces from the hand, and the whistle must be frequently sounded while the hawk is making his meal. R. W. SEISS.

OSPREY OR EAGLE.

VICKSBURG, Miss., Oct. 8.—For two weeks past a very large bird, said by the local papers to be an eagle, has been seen at times, generally in the morning, perched upon the very top of the cross which surmounts the steeple of the Catholic church in this city. As the spire is a tall one, and the church itself is situated upon a hill 200ft. or more above the Mississippi River, the bird was visible to almost the entire population, and was an object of no little attention and curiosity. His regular daily visits to his elevated position and his protracted stay there led to the supposition that he took his breakfast there, though no one could exactly determine with the naked eye as to that, nor lay down to a certainty the character of his meal. Occasionally his highness was disturbed by the whiz of a ball, when some amateur sportsman violated the city ordinance by shooting within the city limits and took a crack at the bird. One claimed finally to have broken a leg and cited in evidence that as the bird flew a foot could be seen to hang down. The bird circled about in the air for some time, hovered over it without lighting, and finally went away and was seen no more up there that day. The next day he was back in his usual position, but only for a brief time. The next day he was absent altogether, and it was regretted by some that the bird had been shot at and frightened from his choice perch, but others suggested that he was off foraging and would return as soon as a morsel could be had. To determine something more definitely an engineer's transit with a good telescope was obtained and placed at a favorable window in Mr. Dorsey's store. But it was not until this morning that the bird deigned to return. The window was lowered at once and just as the instrument was focused on him, he took wing for other parts. He was not in trim for inspection just then. An hour later he returned in full dress, his chief embellishment being a good-sized fish which was held securely in his left talon. The fish was not dead, as a lively shanking of its tail indicated; and it evidenced not the same relish in the performance that the bird did. The bird began at the head, tearing it off and eating it by pieces, and worked his way slowly back toward the tail. The top of the cross being round one way, considerable trouble seemed to be had keeping the fish in place. The perch became slippery and the fish would keep slipping down the side of the cross, but the talons seemed equal to the emergency and the fish was promptly hauled back each time. The bird was occupied some twenty minutes over his breakfast, when the crack of a rifle rang out and he stopped to think awhile. Then another crack of the rifle, and he concluded he had eaten enough for the time being and flew away in considerable haste. A Creedmore shot of distinction was here and was desirous of a shot, but failed to get a rifle. We are unable to call the bird by name. We take him to be a hawk of a very large species. His back and head are quite dark while all the under feathers are nearly white. Could you suggest his name? W. L. P.

BURROW OF STRIPED SQUIRREL.

TODAY I saw something that reminded me of the erroneous idea that many people entertain in regard to the burrow of the striped squirrel. Most people think that the squirrel while digging its burrow carries the dirt, which it excavates while digging, away from the entrance, and thus they account for the absence of a bank of dirt. At the present time there are two burrows, one finished and one unfinished, in sight of my house; and to-day I saw the tenant of the completed one taking home a load of provisions in his cheeks for use after the dormant season. The entrance is about 18in. north of the trunk of an apple tree, which stands about 12in. from a stone wall, and there are some hazelnut bushes by the side of the wall, so that in approaching his dwelling the squirrel climbs a bush that almost touches a limb of the apple tree, jumps upon the limb and follows it to the trunk of the tree; descending this he is within a few inches of his burrow, which he enters to deposit his load. On leaving he does not take the precaution to climb the tree and run along the limb and descend the bush, but runs upon the ground. But I started to write you something about the method of constructing the burrow instead of telling how careful its occupant is in getting to it so that his enemies cannot track him there. The squirrel digs a hole into the ground, leaving the dirt which he digs out at the mouth or entrance, until he has got his subterranean channel long enough, then he stops up the mouth of the burrow so nicely with dirt that the inexperienced will not know where that little pile (a bushel or more) of dirt came from. The squirrel now digs up to the surface at the other end of the burrow. This leaves his new house completed without any dirt about the front door. I have said there is an unfinished burrow in sight of my house, and my reason for calling it unfinished is because the end of the hole where the dirt is dug out is not stopped up. FORGUS.

TYNGBOROUGH, Mass., Oct. 12.