

Natural History.

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THE SPORT OF HAWKING.

II.—The Peregrine Falcon.—Concluded.

THE wild-caught hawk having now learned to sit quietly on the falconer's wrist and to know his voice and whistle, the next step in her training is to change the ruffer hood for the hood proper. The latter differs from the taming hood in being made of rather stiff, strong calf skin, and is of a somewhat different shape from the ruffer hood. Fig. 2 represents a serviceable field hood. The pattern is somewhat the same as that given for the ruffer hood, or it may be made of three pieces, as indicated in the drawing. But the orifice for the beak is square instead of triangular; the sides of the cap well bulged out over the eyes of the hawk, and the V-shaped opening behind is much wider than in the ruffer, so as to permit of the hood being easily slipped on and off. This piece of hawk harness is formed over a block cut to rudely represent the head of a falcon, but more prominent about the eyes; the leather is soaked in water after having been partly sewn together, and is then modeled over this "lay figure" to the proper shape. A loop of leather (see cut) should be sewn on the top of the hood to lift it by, or a plume of bright feathers may be substituted. The plume is generally used on hoods by European falconers, but the strap will be found much more handy and durable, if less ornamental than the feathers. The lacing is usually a strip of soft leather playing freely through four holes in the back of the hood, as shown in the illustration.

The hoods should be changed in a room made as dark as it is possible to see to work in, and if the hawk be very restless it is well to brail one of his wings, or even to soak

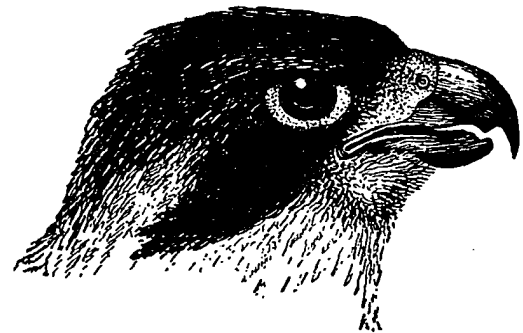


FIG. 1.—HEAD OF PEREGRINE FALCON.

the bird with water squeezed from a sponge held at a distance of a few feet above him, so as to add a slight shock to the wetting. The change should be made when the stomach of the falcon is empty, or he may be injured by his struggles. It is well to give only a slight feed in the morning, and to change the hoods in the afternoon. After the change the falcon is carried around as before, being frequently stroked with a feather, and fed through the hood. The next day feed the peregrine by dim candle light, and after he has begun to pull greedily through the cap, slip it off and allow him to continue his meal unhooded; slip the hood on again just before the meal is finished, allowing the hawk to complete eating it through the beak opening. The following day the hood may be removed twice in the above manner, a little more light being admitted; and so on until at the end of a week or so the falcon will feed in bright sunlight without the hood, and permit himself to be hooded and unhooded without opposition. The hawk is now said to be broken to the hood. The haggard must now be accustomed to

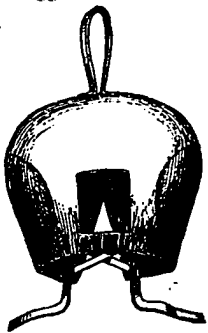


FIG. 2.—FIELD HOOD.

the presence of strangers, horses and dogs; this must be done gradually, and great care must be taken that he is not frightened or teased, or fed by any one but yourself and at regular hours.

The next lesson is to teach the falcon to jump to the wrist when called. All this while the whistle has been sounded, together with the shout you intend to use to call the hawk in the hunting field, at every meal, and the bird has been constantly fed from the hand. It is seldom difficult therefore to get the haggard to jump at first a foot or two from his perch to your wrist for a choice feed of meat held in your hand. Keep this up, gradually lengthening the distance until the hawk readily flies the length of the room to your fist when called.

The bird should now be carried into the open air by an assistant, a long light cord, called a creance, being tied to his leash. After unhooding the haggard go ten yards away and call him, displaying at the same time a tempting piece of meat; he will probably fly to you, the assistant, of course, keeping firm hold of the end of the creance for safety. If the hawk does not come to you, go nearer, and keep this up until the falcon comes readily 50yds. or more to your call.

It is now time to allow the haggard castings occasionally. A whole dead bird is given, and the hawk allowed to swallow as much bone and feather as he desires. These in the course of a few hours are cast up

from the bird's crop in an oval mass. If the falcon is healthy they have no odor, and contain no half-digested food, as is often the case with badly conditioned birds. The peregrine is now kept on a block in a shed, but which, when the hawk is perfectly trained, is to be frequently carried out on to the lawn on bright days; it is generally several months, however, before wild-caught hawks can be trusted unhooded in the open air alone.

The block is a sugarloaf-shaped block of wood, somewhat flattened at the top, where it measures about 8in. across; the base should be broad so that it may stand firm. A ring is let in flush with the top for convenience in carriage, and another ring is screwed to the side, to which the leash of the falcon is tied when at rest. The block should be surrounded by a circle of fine sand several inches deep, which will be found very cleanly and convenient to clean. Hawks must be protected from cold, damp winds at all seasons, and in the winter are best kept in a darkened room. They bate much less in a dark apartment and do not injure their feathers by fluttering against the windows, etc. Of course light is freely admitted at feeding time and the birds fed from the hand. A plain rounded perch of the diameter of a man's wrist, supported at each end by strong uprights and padded with canvas, also makes an excellent but perhaps less convenient resting place than the block.

If you intend to use an artificial lure in the field, although it is far less satisfactory in use than a living or dead pigeon, now is the time to enter the falcon at it. The artificial lure consists of a fork of hard wood, too heavy for the hawk to carry, with half a dozen pigeon wings firmly fastened to it. Cords are passed through awl holes in the wood and a fresh piece of beefsteak tied thereto. A dead pigeon lure is much to be preferred with wild-caught falcons.

We will suppose the lure is a pigeon; carry the haggard into the open air, kneel with her on the wrist, unhood her and cast out the lure a few feet. When she jumps to it let her eat a portion from it, at the same time giving her choice morsels of beef from your hand. Before the lure is devoured decoy her to your wrist again by calling and presenting a tempting morsel, and rehood her. Continue this each day until the hawk feeds freely on the lure and is not disturbed by the presence of strangers or dogs. She is now trained to fly to the lure as well as to your wrist from the arm of an assistant. This practice is kept up daily, until the lately wild and savage falcon comes at once to your call when held more than 50yds. away from you. Leash and creance are now removed, the jesses and swivel alone remaining on the hawk's legs, together with the bells, and she is called and lured until she will dart to you or the lure from the wrist of an attendant 1,000yds. distant, always being rewarded with the most tempting piece of meat obtainable for her obedience. Do not compel the hawk to make more than three or four flights during a single meal, and when it is finished rehood and slip the leash on to the jesses.

The haggard is now taught to stoop at the lure and to "wait on." As she flies at the swinging lure snatch it away and immediately throw it out again, and allow her to seize it as she turns to look for it after its disappearance. At first this should be done only once, but later it may be kept up until the hawk will stoop backward and forward as often as desired.

Now tie the haggard by the usual long creance and offer her a living pigeon, one of whose wings has been brailed. It is highly probable that the fierce peregrine, who only a month before killed perhaps a dozen ducks in a day only for the sport of killing, may refuse it, and if so a string must be tied to the leg of the pigeon, and it must be pulled up by passing the cord through an eye pin to within a foot of the hawk's block. If she still refuse it she must first be entered at some sparrows treated in the same manner as the pigeon, and the pigeon must be tried again after she has killed several sparrows.

Soon she may be allowed to take the brailed pigeons at liberty, all her harness being removed save the bewits and jesses, and finally she is flown at a strong, unbrailed pigeon, to whose leg is tied a strong light cord. When the hawk kills the pigeon run in and seize the trailing end of this line. The falcon is thus trained not to "carry" her quarry—a most tiresome habit in the field—as of course you have it fast. Keep at creanced birds for several weeks, in order that the hawk may be perfectly trained not to carry, a habit to which all falconers have found wild-caught hawks especially prone.

The hawk is now ready to be entered at her quarry proper, and haggards are best used for heavy game, too weighty for them to lift. Ducks, grouse, and shore birds, crows and herons are suitable game for an adult peregrine. A powerful female might even take geese, swans or wild turkeys. A few living birds of the species at which it is intended to first fly the falcon should be procured and turned out before her, the first from the hand of the falconer, with one of its wings securely brailed; and finally the falcon must kill a strong, unhampered bird. As soon as the first bird is killed—indeed it is well to begin this practice while flying at creanced pigeons—the falconer must approach and make much of the hawk while he allows her to feast on the first wild quarry, at the same time giving her choice pieces of beef from the hand. From her second and subsequent flights she must be lured, and then called to the roost and given some juicy mouthfuls. If she is not to be flown again that day she should be fed up or given as much tender beef as she cares to eat. The hawk is thus taught to believe that you take nothing from her, and also that she obtains from you much more savory food than she can kill for herself, all falcons preferring tender beef to the flesh of any bird. The haggard is now ready to be entered at wild game, the methods generally pursued by falconers will be fully described in a future paper.

When the peregrine is first flown, either at the lure or at pigeons, it is hardly necessary to say that she must be sharp set, i. e., very hungry, or she will certainly indulge in the luxury of a sail before coming to you, and you may lose her altogether. If properly handled there is little or no danger of losing a hawk during its training, as it will assuredly come to you when hungry if properly trained.

While the haggard is flying at pigeons it will frequently happen that the quarry dashes into a clump of bushes or a hedge just in time to escape the stoop of the hawk. Make haste to serve the falcon, i. e., to drive the pigeon out of cover, making a great noise and hullabaloo over it. Have a pigeon in a bag net at your belt, from one of whose wings three or four of the long feathers have been pulled

and if the one first flown is not at once flushed, release your jamed bird when the haggard is not observing you; this the falcon will kill with ease, and she will not fail to be impressed with the conviction that "waiting on" when men below are flushing game is a most profitable proceeding. Hawks of all species, but especially falcons, must never be teased, rated, struck or otherwise punished under any circumstances whatever; a moment's anger on the part of the falconer will spoil the work of months. Falcons are not in any way like dogs or horses; they never forget nor forgive an injury, and never again show any attachment or obedience toward those who have offended them. Neither must a hawk be starved in order to tame it, or the spirit and health of the bird will both be broken, and its plumage will show hunger marks, causing the feathers to break, spoiling both the appearance and the flight of the falcon.

All hawks require a bath at least every other day in warm weather. A good-sized tub some 8in. deep, sunk almost flush with the surface of the ground, makes an excellent bath. The block of the hawk should be set near it, and the bird given plenty of leash. After the hawk has been entered at living birds she should be given but one full meal a day, and that from your hand early in the morning. Saturday night should be "gorge night," and the hawk should then be allowed as much warm bird or good beefsteak as she will eat. Perfectly lean raw meat, preferably beef, pigeons, the necks and heads of game and poultry, and any small birds which have not been shot, should constitute the diet of the trained peregrine.

Fig. 1 represents the head of an adult female peregrine falcon, and shows well the powerful and strongly-toothed beak, and the general character of this magnificent bird, the type of warlike nobility and strength. The rearing and training of young hawks taken from the nest will be considered in my next paper.

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