

Natural History.

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THE SPORT OF HAWKING.

IV.—The Lanier Falcon.

ON the prairies of the great Southwest, and even so far eastward as Illinois, is found a large and powerful "desert falcon," the American lanier (*Falco mexicanus*, Lichtenstein). This bold bird closely resembles the lanners of Europe and Asia (*Falco lanarius* and *Falco jugger*). The European bird was highly prized in the palmy days of falconry, and his Indian cousin is still flown at the game of that country. The American species, which is also called the prairie falcon, measures from 18 to 20in. in length, and the female above 45in. from tip to tip of her outstretched wings. The average length of the tail is 8in. The tarsus is feathered one-third of the way down. The upper parts are rich brown in color, under parts white, marked with long stripes and spots of brown. There is a narrow white frontal band and a white line over the eye. The lanier is a true "dark-eyed hawk," the iris being brown.

This falcon is, according to Coues, rather common on the prairies lying within its geographical range, and might be easily obtained with the low net and live bait or by taking the young hawks from the nest.

It is said to prefer the border of wide prairies for its home but wanders far over the treeless plains in pursuit of food. It is at least as swift a bird as the peregrine, and is much more powerful than the latter; its manner of flight is the same. The lanier is also one of the shyest of hawks, although at times apparently regardless of danger. Its food consists of quails, hares and larger game, and it frequently overpowers the very active and powerful black-tailed hare (*Lepus callotis*). The prairie

falcon has been known to snatch a large fowl from before the very door of a dwelling house, and carry it off bodily. To the smaller species of the order, *Gallinae*, it is a fierce and determined enemy. The nearly allied jaggur of India is flown mainly at crows, in the pursuit of which it shows much speed and daring, following the crow through all its twists and windings. It has even been known to kill its quarry so near to a camp-fire that the feathers of the falcon were singed by the blaze. The lanier is said to have been formerly flown at the kite in Europe; probably only very strong females could take this strong and difficult quarry.

But little is known of the breeding habits of the prairie falcon; the lanners of Asia and Europe build their nests in the tops of the tallest trees and occasionally on cliffs; and it is probable that the American species resembles them in habits. The ground color of the eggs is rich cream, which is handsomely marked with splashes of chestnut-red and purplish shadings. The extreme average length of the eggs is 2.4 in.

The lanners of the Old World are easy to train, obedient in the field and bold and enduring in the pursuit of game; there is no doubt that their American representative would at least equal, if not exceed, them in powers. A female would doubtless take buzzards, ravens and crows, as well as cranes, hares and grouse, while a tiercel would probably be a full match for any of the *Tetraonidae* or the genus *Lepus* found on the plains.

The lanier is a true falcon, a "long-winged hawk," and its training, whether taken as a haggard or as an eyas, is precisely like that proper to peregrines or gyrfalcons, described in a previous paper.

Thoroughly trained falcons of any species seldom need to wear a hood, except when being carried to the hunting field, as it is important that they should see as much as possible of horses, dogs and men, as well as become accustomed to all sorts of lights and sounds, which of course they are prevented from doing by the hood. The block of a well tamed falcon may be left out on the lawn—sheltered from the sun by being placed under a tree in very warm weather—throughout the summer on clear days, but the hawks require protection from heavy rain storms. Peregrines and gyrfalcons may be kept under an open shed throughout the winter, but must be protected carefully from wet and high winds. The lanier would probably require the protection of an outhouse during the cold months in this climate (Pennsylvania). In very severe weather all falcons require the shelter of an outhouse or stable, which is best kept nearly dark or the birds will bate very much and injure their feathers. The block wherever placed should be surrounded with a layer of fine sand, which is to be frequently removed. In moving hawks with their blocks from one position to another, call the bird to your wrist and give him the wing of a bird or a small piece of gristly meat to tear at; the block is then easily carried in the other hand by the ring let into its top to any desired position and the hawk replaced upon it without the trouble of hooding, or even untying him from the block.

Falcons after being properly "entered" may be flown at game three or four times a week, and when not hunted must be allowed to kill at least one strong pigeon on the wing each week. Powerful birds may even be flown six times a week, but it is difficult to keep them in fine condition and yet daily "sharp set" and in proper condition for hunting when so used.

Should a hawk be lost it may be captured with the low net and a live pigeon if very wild. A better plan is to allow it to kill a pigeon which has been pegged down with 6 or 8 yds. of free line attached to its leg. Approach when the hawk has killed; he will fly up if wild enough to have been lost; pull some long feathers from the wings of the dead pigeon, stick them in the ground around the prey in the form of a circle, and place around outside them a slip noose of soft cord. Go off with your end of the cord a dozen yards or more; the falcon will then return to the pigeon, and may be caught by jerking the noose over his feet, the pigeon quills causing it to run up freely and high on the hawk's legs, so as to catch him firmly over the bells. It is well to peg down the freshly killed pigeon, or the falcon may stoop and carry it off before you have time to jerk the snare over his legs. The live lure ought always to recover a well-trained hawk, however, if by any accident he be lost, and is too well guarded to care for the artificial lure or dead pigeon.

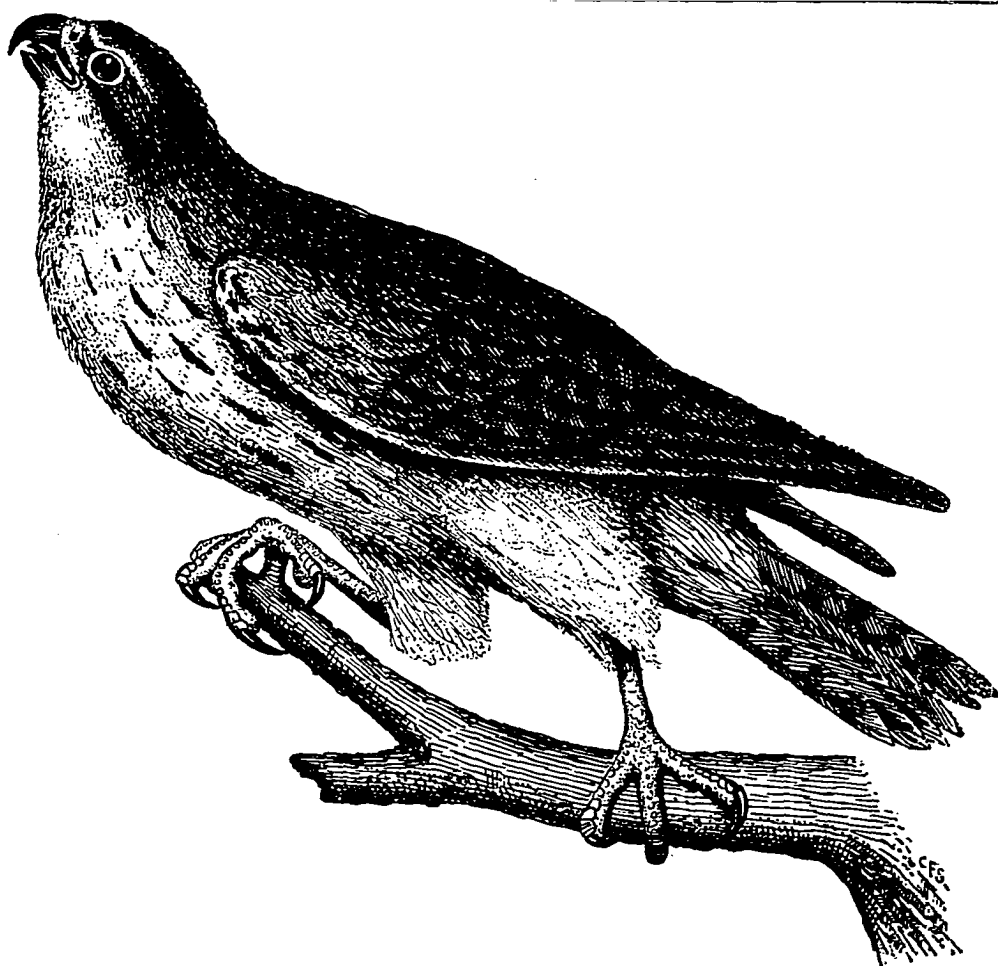
During their training hawks frequently break one or more of their pinion feathers, and these it is necessary to replace by imping before the falcon is flown at wild and difficult quarry, as the loss of even a single feather will greatly impair the bird's power of flight. Never on any account pull out a broken feather, or the one which replaces it will be certain to be weak and deformed. A number of perfect pinion feathers of the species of hawk kept should always be on hand to supply the place of broken ones on your hawks. To imp a broken feather, select a feather corresponding to the broken one from your stock; hood the falcon and have him held by an assistant. Choose a firm, pithy part of the broken feather, of course above the point of fracture, and being careful not to injure the web, cut it neatly and obliquely across with a sharp knife. Next cut the false feather at a position and angle to match the real one. An imping needle, consisting of a piece of soft iron wire rather finer than the inside diameter of the two feathers, and 1½ in. long, and filed to a point at both ends and to a triangular form, is now pushed, after having been first dipped into liquid



Fig. 2.

glue, half way (see Fig. 2) into the pith of each feather. The needle is next pushed up until the oblique edges of the two feathers are neatly approximated, and the feather is impaled, and is nearly as strong as the original one. Should the falcon's feather be simply broken clean across and the plume not lost or injured, the feather may be impinged with its own plume in the same manner as above described.

When flying hawks, either at pigeons or wild game, the neighborhood of wild fences must be avoided, else the falcon will likely enough be killed by dashing against them when in pursuit of quarry, especially running game. Of course, it will also be necessary to take precautions



AMERICAN LANIER FALCON.

that your birds are not killed by strange dogs or shot while on quarry, when they have killed at a long distance from you. Of course, also, you will always get in as rapidly as possible after the kill, or the hawk will first gorge itself and then fly off, and you may have difficulty in recovering it.

The falcon, whether taken as haggard or as eyas, having now been properly tamed, trained and "entered" at her quarry, is now ready for the field and the chase of wild game. There are two methods of using falcons for the capture of wild game: when they will "wait on" well they are only carried hooded to the field, and as soon as a game region is reached are unhooded and allowed to take wing and sail over the falconer's head, following him and his dogs from field to field until game is flushed. Hawks which will not "wait on" satisfactorily, and indeed all falcons when flown at certain quarry, are flown "out of the hood," the cap being worn either until game is actually flushed, or until the dogs point, or the quarry is seen. For game hawking proper, dogs are always used, and the birds soon learn to recognize a "point" as well as the sportsman himself, and know what is coming. Hawks which have been regularly hunted for several years become very cunning, and follow with wonderful sagacity the movements of the dogs and hunters, and instead of being frightened by, are only encouraged by the noise of the field. Of course, the dogs used must be familiar with the hawks, and the birds with them, and be carefully trained not to run in when the falcon has killed. It is always discouraging to a hawk to be driven from its quarry, and is apt to cause sulkiness and disobedience. The falcon, of course, stoops as soon as the bird or hare is flushed by the dogs or beaters.

For game hawking eyases are to be preferred, as they are more tractable and "wait on" better, and are but seldom lost. For the chase of heavy or difficult quarry, such as herons, ducks or crows, haggards should be used, as their strength and power of flight is greater. Sometimes a cast or pair of hawks are flown at such powerful prey as the larger herons; the falcons mutually assisting each other and stooping in turn as the quarry dodges.

Game birds lie very close when a falcon is waiting on over them, and give the hawk a good chance when they are flushed, as he has been watching directly over the dog. It is a gallant sight; the setter at a dead point, the falcon at her point high in the air, but just above him, both trembling with eagerness. The game is flushed, and awish! those great wings are closed and the bird has stooped like a flash of light. So tremendous is the power of the stoop that I have seen the roof of the skull of an adult bluejay torn completely off by a wild peregrine in a single swoop, and trained peregrines have been known to amputate the head of a Scotch grouse at a single blow with their terrible hind talons. A grouse will often give a long chase, foiling a dozen stoops, and "putting in" or dashing into cover several times. In the latter case the falcon must be "served"—or the quarry flushed—as soon as possible and encouraged by shouts, as falcons are unable to kill prey among trees or brush, and soon become discouraged if their quarry is not speedily flushed. For this reason the most open country accessible should always be chosen for the hunting field. When the hawk kills, at once approach and call her to the lure, or, better still, lift her on the quarry to the wrist and feed the falcon from the head and neck of the bird. Hood up when the slight meal is finished and he is ready for another flight. The hawk must be always "fed up" from your hand from the body of the last bird killed when the hunt is over; it is not well to hood him until the meal is finished, as the experience of being carried through the fields—perhaps among prancing horses and barking dogs—is very valuable, training the falcon to be regardless of any sight or

sounds. The bird if well trained will not bate while you feed him.

A powerful falcon will fly—and this is especially true of the dashing peregrine and lanier—three, four or even six times in an afternoon if the individual flights be not very fatiguing, and a pair of hawks used alternately will afford from eight to eleven flights at slow quarry in a day before being fed up. If a hawk lose his prey, immediately swing the well known lure round your head and sound your whistle, and when he "comes in" be sure to reward him with some fresh and tender pieces of beef. It will never do to allow haggards to be upon the wing flying aimlessly around when not waiting on for game.

Herons, crows, and heavy prey generally is captured by stalking with the falcon on your wrist, hooded of course. As the game takes to flight, unhood, and toss off the hawk. The trained birds are "served" and "taken up" after the kill precisely as in game hawking, but only the strongest and boldest of females are able to fly more than once or twice at such prey as geese, gulls, ravens or cranes. Should a falcon kill a mile or so away from you, and you are unable to "get in" before he has gorged himself, he will generally be found in some tall tree or on some wall of rocks near the remains of the quarry. If the lure will not bring him to your call, try the live pigeon in a creance, or a dead one, with string attached, thrown up to his feet; hawk and pigeon may then be pulled down together, for if the falcon once grasps it he will not relax his hold. Magpie hawking was and still is, with a few gentlemen, a great favorite in England; the cunning and alertness of the quarry giving the best possible sport. A field is required armed with light whips to put up mag when she takes refuge in bushes and hedges; to escape the stoops of the peregrine, which she does again and again. The chase often lasts twenty minutes and covers a mile or more of ground, and often gives plenty of hard riding and running for that time. The American bluejay might yield similar sport. Woodcock also give good sport with peregrines, the hawks being particularly keen after this quarry. Such a chase would hardly be possible in this country, however, save in the rare instances when the longbills are found in open country which can be run or ridden over. Duck hawking can only be practiced in cornfields or open country where there are no bodies of water of any considerable size—too large to be beaten by a dog—otherwise the falcon will always be foiled by the quarry taking to water. Almost all game hawking can be conducted on foot, but for crow, heron, or haggard hawking the falconer should be mounted, and, of course, a rideable country must be selected for the hunt.

All falcons have a highly scientific knowledge of where the life lies—in which they differ markedly from the more clumsy true hawks—and lose no time in killing quarry outright when brought down. Their point of attack is usually the head, and grasping a bird by the head and neck, they rip open its throat or split its skull at once before beginning to tear the prey to pieces. This habit gives them an immense advantage, the short-winged hawks often being injured by strong-beaked quarry, and always wasting their energies in holding down prey which they are fully able to kill at once. Wild short-winged hawks must put their prey to terrible torture, as they generally begin to drag out feathers and tear their victim without any attempt to kill it outright.

Fig. 1 is a portrait of an American lanier falcon in the adult plumage; the peculiar markings and the general form of the bird are well shown.

Fig. 2 illustrates the manner of imping a broken feather above described; the imping needle is cross lined, and is shown in position ready to be pushed up into the two quills. RALPH W. SEISE.