Falconry in Saskatchewan

By Richard W. Fyfe, Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History

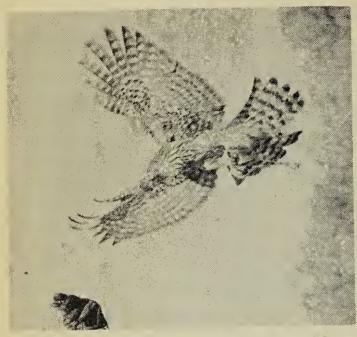


Photo by H. Meng Training a Goshawk

For many years falconry was regarded as the "Sport of Kings". Now this ancient art is being revived and a Saskatchewan Falconry Association has recently been formed. This organization is the direct result of a contact with Al Oeming and the interest inspired through his talk to the Regina Natural History Society in March, 1958. Since then, Mr. Oeming, Mr. Beebe and other qualified falconers have given assistance to this project and an active organization has developed.

Falconry appeals to those interested in the outdoors and in recreahunting, and encourages greater contact with the natural environment. Few field sports lend themselves as well to the interests of both sportsmen and naturalists as does falconry. . It is a year-round activity, taking the participants into the field through fall hunting, winter exercising, spring nest find-ing, and summer training. Close association with hawks and falcons necessarily cultivates a keener interest in birds, their identification, flight, needs and moods, as well as their relationships in the biotic community.

Predation, which is a normal part of the daily existence of game, places the falcon on relatively equal terms with its prey. Trained falcons are by no means as deadly and accurate as the shotgun and, unlike the hun ter, falcons leave no birds to die c lead poisoning or crippling. Thei prey is either taken or it escapes un harmed.

Our objectives are briefly: (1) to promote falconry as a field sport in Saskatchewan; (2) to stimulate a increased interest in hawks and owled and to conduct a continuing educational programme on these birds (3) to establish a hawk banding programme in Saskatchewan; (4) to co-operate to the fullest possible extent with the natural history societies and sportsmen's groups in this province for the conservation of our native birds of prey.

In organizing this group full co operation has been received from the Wildlife Branch, Department Natural Resources. Precautions hav been taken to protect the Falconr Association and its members from would-be falconers who, by mis treating captive birds or misusin trained hawks, might create advers public opinion. Within our own or ganization by-laws have been estab lished which prohibit this. Our hunt ing regulations permit hunting onl with the landowner's consent, an the hunting only of species consid ered harmful and not protected b the Migratory Birds Convention Ac or game species during open season Each member is required to have falconry permit issued by the Wild Branch, and anyone wit Prairie Falcons, Peregrine Falcor or Goshawks will automatically b required to obtain a hunting licens annually.

At the time of writing, eightee active members are caring for an training hawks this year. Our first year is considered primarily that capprenticeship, our main objective being the care and familiarization with birds of prey. Some training definitely planned this year, but be cause of our own inexperience everyone has been cautioned not the expect too good results. The main field of activity has been nest hunting. Several weekends in the Regina, Kindersley, and Big Mudd districts in each case involving a many members as possible, produce

the following discoveries: 5 active Prairie Falcon nest sites, 7 nests each of Pigeon Hawk, Sparrow Hawk and Ferruginous Hawk, 6 Swainson's Hawk nests and 2 each of Red-tailed Hawk and Marsh Hawk. From these we have obtained the following young: 3 Prairie Falcons, 4 Pigeon Hawks 7 Spanners III Hawks, 7 Sparrow Hawks, 2 Ferruginous Hawks. Through the co-oper-tion of Dr. S. Houston 2 Cooper's Hawks were also obtained. Here we might mention that under no circumstances will all young be taken from any one nest by our group. We do not wish to disturb nesting because, provided the parent birds can successfully raise young at any nest site, they will return annually to that location. This is of the utmost importance to us as we want to insure the presence and protection of our native hawks.

As a group we wish to co-operate in every possible way with the Natural History Societies and we welcome new members from these groups as well as any information we may receive on hawks, falcons

or eagles in Saskatchewan. Anyone interested in falconry should write to: The Saskatchewan Falconry Association, c/o Richard W. Fyfe, Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History, Regina.



Photo by R. W. Fyfe
A falconry club activity—spring nest finding
(Walter Knudsen at Cooper Hawk's nest)

Magpie Nest in Building

By Robert W. Nero, Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History

A partly-constructed nest — apparently built by Black-billed Mag-pies (Pica pica) — was found by Richard W. Fyfe, Fred W. Lahrman and myself on June 24, 1958, within a frame building at an abandoned farm six miles south-west of Kindersley. This building was formerly a barn; it had a flat roof and half of the floor was of dirt. The nest was built within the seven inch space between a rafter and the ceiling and was about six feet above the ground. It was adjacent to one wall and right next to an open door. The nest consisted of an inner shell of well-hardened mud, nearly six inches deep on one side, one-half to one and one-half inches thick and about seven inches in diameter. It was fairly smooth on the inside and was surrounded by a loose mass of dead twigs, many of which were cemented to the mud. The whole thing was about one and one-half feet in diameter and, of course, stuck out on both sides of the four inch rafter. We were rather astonished to see a

bulky nest of this sort squeezed into such a narrow space as well as within a building. A slight depression on one side of the nest would just have permitted entry to a Magpiesized bird. Many twigs, some three feet long, which lay on the floor, suggested repeated attempts to bring nest material which could not be worked into the nest. A clean white feather found on the floor nearby appeared to be from a Magpie, and we were in agreement that the nest was built by this species. There was no nest-lining and there were no indications that the nest had been used at all.

L. B. Potter reported an active Magpie nest located beneath one rail and between two ties of a railway bridge (1927. Freak nesting site of a Magpie, Condor. 29: 249). "It is supported by two intersecting braces and protected from above by the aforementioned girders. The usual 'dome' is, therefore, absent, being both unnecessary and impossible in the restricted space available. . . ."