

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 recreational hunting, 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 finding, 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 hunter, falcons leave no birds to die of lead poisoning or crippling. Their prey is either taken or it escapes unharmed.

Our objectives are briefly: (1) to promote falconry as a field sport in Saskatchewan; (2) to stimulate an increased interest in hawks and owls 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 of Natural Resources. Precautions have been taken to protect the Falconry Association and its members from would-be falconers who, by mistreating captive birds or misusing trained hawks, might create adverse public opinion. Within our own organization by-laws have been established which prohibit this. Our hunting regulations permit hunting only with the landowner's consent, and the hunting only of species considered harmful and not protected by the Migratory Birds Convention Act or game species during open season. Each member is required to have a falconry permit issued by the Wildlife Branch, and anyone with Prairie Falcons, Peregrine Falcon or Goshawks will automatically be required to obtain a hunting license annually.

At the time of writing, eighteen active members are caring for and training hawks this year. Our first year is considered primarily that of apprenticeship, our main objective being the care and familiarization with birds of prey. Some training is definitely planned this year, but because of our own inexperience everyone has been cautioned not to expect too good results. The main field of activity has been nest hunting. Several weekends in the Regina, Kindersley, and Big Muddy 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 Sparrow Hawks, 2 Ferruginous Hawks. Through the co-operation 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 Magpies (*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 Kinderley. 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 Magpie-sized 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. . . ."