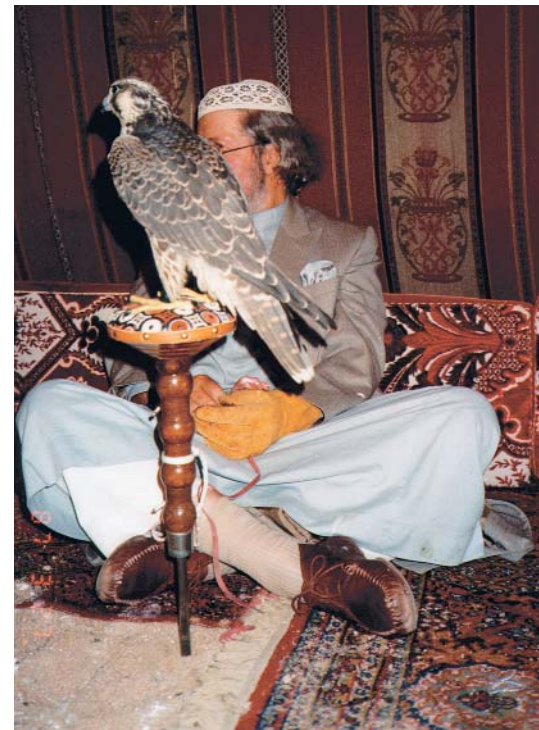




## Training

**I**n October and November of each year, Arab falconers bring their newly trapped hawks to the *majlises* (reception rooms) of their respective sheikhs and princes. Many of the falconers are from tribes and families who for generations have looked after, trained and flown the falcons of certain princes and their immediate family. The falconers arrive, like the passing falcons, and stay throughout the hawking season, caring for two, three or four falcons to each man. Each hawk is appraised, measured and discussed. As each is passed from falconer to falconer, it is felt for condition under the wing butts and about the neck. It is unhooded, rehooded and then passed on again, amid much discussion of its qualities, weight, size and worth.



The new falcon, a present for the author.

Suddenly hawks are everywhere—in the bazaars, in cars, at airports and at many of the sheikhs' and princes' houses and palaces. As new hawks are brought in from trapping camps, a team of carefully selected falcons is built up. New hawks are bought, sold and given as gifts. As better hawks are acquired, the princes and sheikhs give away some of the less promising to relatives and friends. Often falconers are sent to distant places—Damascus, Lahore or Cairo—to buy selected hawks; they return full of stories of how successful the trapping season has been, of some outstanding hawk beyond price, and of who has bought what, from whom and at what cost.

A practice that has been observed traditionally, at least in the Gulf States, is the marking of new hawks by clipping some feathers, perhaps the end of the moustache on the left cheek or a piece in the hollow of the back. These marks are unique to particular princes or sheikhs so a lost hawk can be easily recognized.



**Abu Dhabi, November 3, 1965:** *New hawks still coming in; a big lot of sakers expected. Few peregrines are about as yet but it's still early in the season for them. Some of the hawks already manned and coming well to the fist were introduced to a pigeon. A long line, some 50 yd. [45.5 m] or so, was tied to the pigeon, the other end to the hawks' leash. Some of the hawks were surprisingly uninterested in the pigeon; others killed theirs immediately. If they did so they were given some blood from the neck. The hawks were then called again, using the dead pigeon as a lure, sometimes two or three times, as if to excite them.*

Meanwhile, the hawks' training, begun in the trapping camps, continues at home. When I first traveled in Arabia, a falconer usually looked after only a single hawk. Today some may be responsible for four or five. The division of hawks among the falconers is the cause of much discussion, and great diplomacy, on the part of the sheikh or emir. As new arrivals come in, the hawks are shuffled about between the falconers, who are all eager to train those that show the greatest promise.

## Early training

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During training, the first priority is to get the falcons to feed. Some may already feed freely through the hood or unhooded, others arrive almost untouched, straight from the trapper's nets. To train them to feed, falconers hold some meat at the hawks' feet as they stroke or tap them; hawks are continually handled during training. If the hawks put their heads down to bite at the nuisance, sooner or later they will bite off a snippet of the meat. The hawks

may throw away these snippets, but hopefully they will eventually swallow one. Once they start to feed, most falcons will continue to take a small crop, unless they are disturbed in some way.

Occasionally a hawk proves to be obstinate and requires more drastic handling. As in the West, if it refuses to eat, the falconer takes hold of its left foot and grips it firmly in his gloved hand, along with a piece of meat. Feeling trapped, the falcon bites at the hand and then is induced to feed. If the falcon does not respond immediately, however, the falconer squeezes its foot a little. Aggressive, wild hawks are usually easier to train than those that sit like statues, doing nothing wrong but equally doing nothing right. An aggressive hawk usually turns into a generous, eager one, quick to learn and enthusiastic at the lure and later at quarry.

Much of the day is spent in firmly handling each hawk in turn. Falconers push their free hand against the hawk's throat as their fingers caress the muscles and body, ending by running down the thigh and leg, teasing out the trouser feathers. This stroking is repeated over and over again until the hawk is relaxed and almost seems to enjoy the caressing. This type of handling is first done when the hawk is hooded and then when it is unhooded. When first feeding the hawk or handling her unhooded, falconers do not look into its eyes as this will worry the bird.

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### Call by name

When handling a new hawk, Arab falconers continually call to it, using its name over and over again. Today some new names—Petrol, Dollar, Zizoom and others—have joined the list of traditional ones—Mansour, Gerah, Meshur, Dhib, Nimran and others—but the traditional names are used over and over again.

As Taymur Mirza wrote in 1868 in the *Baz-Nama-Yi Nasiri*:

Should a passage falcon [saker] with sealed eyes come into your possession ... fit her with some suitable name such as Sultan, Zargham, Faris, Shabib, Habib, Mahbub, Shahab, Badran, etc. Next fit her with an old hood that is soft and easy, one that will not, by hurting her eyes, make her hood-shy. Let her remain 'sealed' under the hood for three days. Every day when you feed her call her name. On the third or fourth day, i.e., as soon as she has learnt to feed freely, which she will show by searching eagerly for food when you mention her name, unseal her eyes about two hours to sunset, and then rehood her. Call her name, and when she bends her hooded head in search of food, give her a mouthful or two. Then stroke her on the breast, the thighs, and the wings, and again remove the hood that she might see daylight, and quickly replace it. Continue this treatment until half an hour before

sunset. Then set her down and leave her until after the evening prayer. Then again take her on the fist and sit near the lamp, with your back to the wall, so that none may come behind you and your hawk. (p.94)



**Pakistan, 1967:** *Ahmed bin Amran came to my tent in the evening—we had a long chat about training. Bin Amran sets great store by the hawk being taught to know its name. This, he says, is of great importance with sakers, less so with peregrines. To illustrate how well his saker Mansour knows her name, he placed her hooded on the ground beside her perch, then shouted her name. She immediately ran toward him to the full length of her leash, then jumped in her attempts to get to him. Once excited she would indeed come to almost any shout, but if calm would only take notice of her own name. This saker, trapped in Syria, took five houbara today but will only take them in the air, stooping behind them and coming in from underneath to bind to the houbara.*



A very large peregrine.

But the *Baz-Nama-Yi Nasiri* notes that it is not necessary to teach the peregrine to recognize its name:

For if you taught her to recognize her name like a passage saker, and call her by it when she is hooded, she will bate with her claws convulsively in the glove—It is sufficient to teach the shahin to come to the luring call.

Generally, however, falconers do talk to their hawks as they approach them, calling their name before touching them. This attracts their attention and, if they are hooded, they are not surprised by being suddenly touched. It is surprising how many people want to stroke a hooded hawk and then seem surprised that it jumps when touched.

Every precaution should be taken to ensure that the hawk is not frightened. This is the topic of many stories that are told around the campfires. One such story goes as follows:

To save his hawk from startling in alarm  
He seized the child and thrust him 'neath his arm,  
And pressed tight and tighter in his dread,  
He killed the boy by crushing upon his head.

The above story is based on a falconer named Sayyid Adham, who, while manning a fine passage saker, tucked his two-year-old son under his arm to stop him from frightening the falcon, which was quietly preening its feathers unhooded for the first time. Later, after rehooding the falcon, the falconer found that his son had suffocated.



A passage falcon from Iran.

## Training continues

Great importance is placed on the early stage of manning. If the hawk feeds freely through the hood in early training, it is important not to delay too long before feeding her unhooded. A hawk that is fed day after day through the hood soon develops the trying habit of biting at the glove or jesses whenever hunger strikes or when a slight noise or movement convinces it that it is feeding time. Some hawks that have been kept too long in a trapping camp or at the home of the hawk dealer acquire this annoying habit.

It is better to unhood and rehood a hawk that has not been sealed in the middle of its meal. Its attention is then on feeding and it will very often continue feeding even after an initial look round. But, it is best to rehood the hawk before it has satisfied its hunger. Once well fed, a hawk is likely to be at its most restless. If rehooded, it continues feeding until satisfied and then remains calm and unruffled.

## Well-manned hawks

Although at one time it was regarded as almost essential to carry hawks in training in the *suq* or bazaar to accustom them to the noise and bustle of their new life, now the carrying and manning is usually done around the house or tent. Sitting quietly by the hawk on its perch, the falconer does not frighten it by towering over it.

With concentrated manning, Arab hawks, particularly sakers, become extremely tame. Soon they rouse, preen and even sleep with head under wing amid the bustle and activity of an Arab house. Each hawk soon learns its name and its own perch, and by repeatedly jumping to the fist for snippets of meat from the perch, the ground, or the knee or lap of the falconer, it associates its name and the falconer's call with reward. As they become accustomed to their new regime, the falconer will often unhood them before lifting them from the block. Soon they will freely step to the fist for the accustomed meal.

The Arabs say that a falcon beats out the dust (Arabic: *ya tel na fad*) when it rouses. As a falcon sits on its perch or on the glove, it can be encouraged to rouse by pulling at its leash. When holding the hawk on the fist, it is wise to lay the perch on the ground or tuck it under the leg so that the hawk is not tempted to jump to it, as it is higher than the fist.

An Arab falconer considers a hawk well manned when it rouses and preens unhooded on the fist, as is noted in the *Baz-Nama-Yi Nasiri*:



Being manned, a haggard lanner.

For about three days feed her under the hood, calling her name. Now at early sunrise, on the morning of the third or fourth day, take just sufficient meat for one meal; well wet your hawk under the wings, wash her nostrils letting a little water enter them, and set her perch in a quiet place in the sun where none can disturb you, and seat yourself near on the ground. Now remove the hood and handle her a little, stroking her breast, head, and neck; then slowly close your fist to her perch and induce her to step onto the perch of her own accord. [Hawks soon know their own perch.] Hold the leash in your hand, and occasionally draw it tight gently to induce her to rouse. She is sure, after one or two of these rousings, to commence oiling her feathers. When you see that she has carried her beak to the oil bottle near her tail, preparatory to oiling her feathers, you must sit absolutely still; do not pull the leash; keep even a guard over the way you breathe, and let her oil her feathers to her heart's content. (p.96)

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## Taking to the desert

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Soon the hawk will be jumping to the glove from both the perch and the ground. Still, the falconer should spend much of the day stroking and handling it. There is no great hurry in getting the hawk to fly loose unless a very early hawking trip is planned.

However, it is not wise to waste too much time before finishing the training necessary to get the hawk ready to take to the field. For some time after capture, a hawk retains its natural hunger, the instinct to kill and feed, although in good condition. A hawk thus trained and kept in wild condition always performs far better than one trained by hunger, induced by loss of condition. Peregrines in particular, if trained quickly and in high condition, demonstrate aggressiveness at large quarry such as houbara; but they will soon lose this confidence if they are low in condition and too long on the perch.

Phillott wrote of the peregrine:

Peregrines should be trained and entered to wild quarry as soon as possible, while the first hunger is still on them. If a hawk has been simply exercised to the lure for a long time and not flown at wild quarry, she may be quite spoilt, and it may be no easy matter to get her to kill even teal. [This was written of passagers and haggards, and is even more likely to be the case with eyasses.] She will have lost her decision and will stoop too late. When the first hunger is on them, peregrines may easily be entered to big quarry, in fact I believe that any young falcon and most haggards can be made to heron [and presumably houbara] at this stage if properly entered. A peregrine can with ease

be fully trained to fly out of the hood in three weeks. On the 4th November, two peregrines were brought to me with sealed eyes. The first killed a wild houbara on the 19th of the same month ... The second, trained in the same way, killed on the 21st. (p.30/4)

All hawks should be trained as fat as possible. If trained thin, they will, when brought up in condition, take to soaring or self-hunting, or will misbehave in some way. If a hawk is thin during training, it will have to be kept thin when flying at quarry and it will not do well. If trained thin and then allowed to improve in condition, the hawk will become disobedient on being flown. If flown early in the day, the hawk will take to soaring, will not come well to a lure and will refuse quarry. If a hawk comes to you in a poor condition, it should be brought up in condition with rich feeding, and no attempt should be made to fly it during this time.

A saker can be kept out of work for some time without apparent loss of condition and fitness, and it will retain its enthusiasm for the pursuit of houbara, which feature in its diet. Among Pakistani falconers it was considered necessary to use trains (bagged quarry) to enter sakers to all quarry but houbara. Some haggard sakers will not enter to heron but will kill wild houbara with style.

Once the hawk comes the length of its leash to the fist from the perch or the ground, it is usually entered to the lure. However, some falconers still call their hawks longer distances to the hand. They tie one end of the creance to the glove or the perch, the other end to the hawk's leash. They often hold their hand high to make the hawk work quite hard for its reward. As always, the hawk is called by name and encouraged by much shouting of "Ush, ush, ush." In earlier times, when hunting was done from camelback or horseback, it was much more convenient to have a hawk return to the fist than to the thrown lure, which entailed dismounting to recover the hawk.

While the young entry are learning the routine of a trained hawk, those few that were kept at the end of the previous season and had been molted in captivity have to go through a reminder course of instruction. Unlike fresh-caught hawks, these intermewed or bati hawks are very unfit, often full of internal fat, and have little appetite. Feeding these hawks takes skill, but the process can be encouraged by dosing them with sal ammoniac (Arabic: *nashadir*) or raw sugar (Arabic: *nabat* or *sukkar al nabat*).

Also, these intermewed hawks may sometimes have one or two feathers still "in the blood." These newly growing feathers are



Searching for houbara.



Training—feeding on a pigeon.

At the training camp.  
*Photo: Martyn Paterson*





Waiting in the desert.

A small reward, in case she flies again.



A jerkin brought in by the hawk dealers.

quite fragile and are easily damaged if the hawk is restless and bates, knocking them on the ground. Much care is therefore necessary to bring the hawks to hand without damage.



**Al Ain, February 20, 1965:** *Today the men gave a haggard saker that had not been flown for some weeks a small piece of sal ammoniac, about the size of a broad bean. This was pushed down the hawk's throat with a finger until in the crop. A piece of meat was also given in the same way, pushed down on top of the drug. The hawk was then hooded and put in the hot sun. A couple of times she appeared to be trying to throw up the sal ammoniac and she was tapped and stroked to stop her doing so. After two or three minutes the falcon was unhooded but still kept in the sun. After fifteen minutes or so the hawk cast up a mess of meat and slime. This treatment was considered too drastic to use on peregrines, which would only be dosed with a piece of sugar, which had somewhat the same effect.*

Indian falconers were very fond of giving intoxicants or drugs to their hawks, in particular sakers, to make them fly quarry better. If a hawk was to fly in the morning, after the falcon had put over its crop from the previous evening's feed (the crop being empty but not the stomach), the falconer would give her a piece of rock salt weighing about two grains. Two or three hours afterward he would give her a few mouthfuls of warm flesh and blood. An alternative dose was about twenty cloves ground up into a powder with a peeled croton seed. A small quantity of this powder, about the equivalent of two peppercorns, would be given in a wafer of meat. The falconer would carry the hawk to ensure that it did not cast up the dose. Half an hour later, after the falcon had thrown a discolored mite or two, it would be given one or two mouthfuls of warm meat and blood.

Indian falconers would also drug a fresh-caught hawk to speed its training, using camphor mixed with sugar candy, butter and sometimes liquorice root. With these methods they could have a hawk flying free in three or four days. However, many of these drastic drugs are undoubtedly injurious to the health of the hawk, and they are not found in use among Arab falconers.

Once the intermewed hawk has gotten rid of its internal fat and has recovered its appetite, it can be treated in much the same way as the new hawks, jumping to the fist and coming to the lure. It should not require quite the same amount of attention, however, and can on occasion be allowed to feed on the block rather than on the fist.

Young or old hawks that are persistently restless and contin-

ually bate from the block or fist are best quieted by being wetted. This treatment, called spouting, is very effective in calming a hawk. The falconer fills his mouth with water, then spouts it out in a forceful spray, wetting the falcon under each wing and on the stomach, between the legs. Finally, if it is thought necessary, the hood is removed and its head and breast soaked. The back is not wetted, as this does not have the same effect. When it is thoroughly wet, the hawk will quietly sit on the perch or fist, looking rather miserable but getting manned to the surroundings. If necessary, the hawk can be wetted again and again.

While feeding a well-manned hawk on the fist, some falconers jerk the fist about, presumably to teach the falcon to hang on tightly so that it does so when it has hold of a struggling houbara.

The hawk is not always rewarded with meat when it jumps to the fist. A well-manned hawk should jump to the fist eagerly for no reward, being happy to sit on the fist as a favored perch. To encourage a hesitant hawk to come to a hand, a falconer will often wiggle the first finger or thumb of his right hand between the thumb and first finger of the gloved hand to attract the attention of the falcon, which will then spring to the glove.

An untrained hawk should, of course, never be approached without a reward in hand, and should always be approached with the side or back to it. It should never be confronted directly, as this makes a hawk nervous. One should also not look at a hawk's eyes when it first comes to you, for that will frighten it in the same way that a bird or animal is frightened when a predator fixes its eye on it.

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## Introduction to the lure

The next stage is to introduce the hawk to the lure. Some falconers first encourage the hawk to kill a live pigeon on a string. The hawk is rewarded with hot meat and blood lifted from the pigeon and is then immediately called to the dead pigeon—the lure. Some falconers believe that it is necessary to remove the head and neck of the dead pigeon before using it as a lure in order to accustom the hawk to the idea that a lure does not have a head.

Certainly a hawk that has just killed a pigeon will undoubtedly come to that same pigeon that is being swung as a dead lure. Once entered in this way, it is fairly easy to switch to a traditional lure made up of four to six houbara wings tied together and garnished with meat. With a difficult hawk it may be necessary to tie a dead pigeon to the lure for a day or two before relying on a garnish of meat.

Some falconers do not use the pigeon treatment but introduce



Ready to start.  
Photo: Terry Spring



Ready in the hawking car.



A peregrine on a kill.

the hawk to the houbara wing lure while feeding it on the fist. They call the hawk to the fist, holding the lure against the glove so that it can see the meat tied to it. After repeating this process once or twice, they call the hawk again, but this time they throw the lure to the ground. The hawk is then encouraged to jump down to it to continue its meal. Unlike Western and Pakistani falconers, some of whom get a falcon fit by stooping it at a swinging lure, Arab falconers believe that a saker or peregrine is ready to be entered at houbara as soon as it will come immediately to a houbara wing lure.



**Al Ain, November 18, 1965:** *Saw a nice pale-colored passage falcon [peregrine], Ashak, being called to the lure for the first time, on the creance from the wokr. The falconer held the houbara wing lure in his hand and, kneeling down in front of the falcon, he shook the lure about close to the ground to attract her attention. He was careful to hold it so that the hawk could see the meat that was tied to it. Finally, after some hesitation, the hawk came, landed beside it, then grabbed hold of the meat and was allowed to eat a little. Leaving the hawk on the sand (after taking the lure from her) the falconer went about twenty paces away and again showed her the lure, dangling it on a short string and jerking it about. The falcon came immediately and bound to it, the falconer lowering both lure and hawk to the ground.*

It is also sensible to call hawks to the lure in different locations, preferably similar to those in which they will later be flown at quarry. A hawk that appears to be keen at home may prove less enthusiastic when in strange territory. Before calling it to the lure or flying it at quarry in different country, it is a good idea to unhood the hawk once or twice to show that it is not at home.

Once well entered to the lure, a hawk is called every evening and is rewarded with part of its meal on the lure. It then feeds up on the hand. When well entered to the lure, it is not considered necessary to garnish the lure with meat, but it is still advisable to give at least part of the evening feed while the hawk is on the lure. Some falconers drag the lure on the ground as the hawk approaches, others prefer to dangle it on a short string just above the ground and encourage the hawk to bind to it. Falconers always shout and call the hawk by name. The noise seems to encourage the hawk to hang on tightly as the lure is jerked about to simulate the struggles of a houbara.



**Abu Dhabi, November 15, 1965:** *Late in the evening the sheikhs came out and sat on a sand hill, the men all grouped below them. The*



Hybrid saker-gyr (1992).



Silver jerkin in immature plumage.

*sheikhs sat with their backs to the wind in the evening sunlight, waiting to see the hawks flown to the lure. In a short while a servant brought out meat and it was cut up into suitably sized lumps to feed each hawk. In turn the falconers carried their hawks to the sheikh, who would feel the hawk, discuss its condition with the handler and between them decide on how much it should receive for the evening meal. Men carried the hawks downwind half a mile or so to a distant dune, and from there each hawk was called in turn, lured by the falconer whose hawk it was. Most of the hawks made quite a lot of height to 100 feet [30 m] or so then glide or beat their way to the lure, but one or two of the intermewed hawks came very low, hugging the contours of the ground. As each falcon neared the falconer luring on the hill beside us, the falconer would run down the sand slope and take the hawk down behind us—a wonderful picture with the setting sun turning the sands red and the shadows black.*

Emir Saoud tells me that, in earlier times, falconers trained their lanners and sakers to turn back and even give up a long chase at a far-flying houbara by shouting at the hawk. During training they were taught to turn to the shout of the falconer and return to the lure. Two falconers would stand a few hundred meters away from each another. One would lure the falcon, but when it reached about halfway, the falconer would hide his lure and stop calling to her. Immediately the falconer who had originally slipped the hawk would shout out, calling the falcon's name, and as soon as it turned would lure the hawk. This process taught the hawk to turn to a shout in expectation of getting the lure. This was of great value in the past, when hawks were followed on camelback, horseback or even on foot. If the hawk flew too far, it would likely be lost as it would not hear the falconer's shouts. Some say this practice made some hawks lazy in taking on a distant houbara, but in those days of plentiful houbara that was of no consequence.

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## Sakers and peregrines

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It is not a good idea to fly sakers to the lure in the morning in the spring. Sakers migrate early in the year and may well ignore the lure. This is not the case with peregrines, which migrate later than sakers.

When feeling the condition of a hawk, it must be remembered that peregrines and sakers are different in shape and character. Peregrines may be highly strung and flighty by nature, but their behavior is consistent. They are fast and nervous in their movements, and their feathers are brittle and easily broken. They must therefore be kept hooded more than is necessary or indeed advisable

with the more relaxed sakers. If a peregrine bates about hooded, for example, there is a risk of the brittle-feathered hawk damaging its flight or train feathers.

With their deep, curved breastbone, peregrines will often appear to be sharper set and thinner than sakers, but it is up under the wing butts and about her neck and thighs that one should feel for the condition of a hawk. Peregrines are selective about their quarry and less persistent in pursuit, but fast and often reckless in their attack.

In the *Baz-Nama-Yi Nasiri*, it says of the peregrine:

Falconers have compared the shahin to a rifle bullet, and what an expert marksman expects from his weapon you must expect from your falcon; she must not miss when cast at quarry within her compass.

Peregrines are slow molters, and many haggards trapped as late as December are not clean molted. Ablah, a beautiful first-year haggard that I came across, still had her first primary in each wing to drop in January. Phillott notes that he twice caught fine healthy peregrines at Christmas that were not clean molted, their first flight feather only three parts grown. Passagers start molting earlier than haggards.

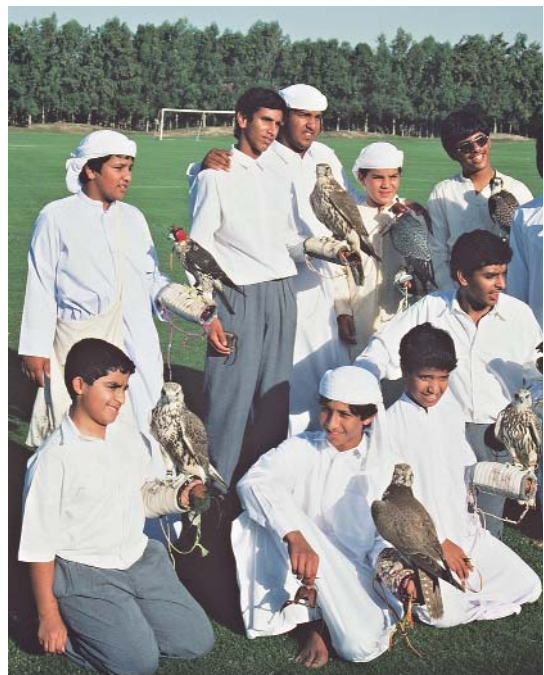
Once well entered to houbara, peregrines will continue to fly them well, even if they are high in condition, but they will rarely be prepared to fly a third or fourth in such condition. If they are not flown at quarry for some time, peregrines will lose some of their decisiveness. Phillott writes:

If a peregrine has not been flown at large quarry for some time it is as well she should be extra keen for the first flight. Perhaps you have an excellent young peregrine that has killed, say, only one or two houbara, and for some reason you have not been able to fly her for a fortnight. If she is now not extra keen, she will, at her first flight, follow the houbara perhaps for miles, hesitating to close and turn it. There is every chance of her getting lost. (p.30/5)

Haggard peregrines are not easily made and kept successfully to houbara. From their experiences in the wild, they know that there is easier quarry. Haggards are not difficult to train, but it is harder to keep them in the correct condition, and they rarely lose their wildness completely. They appear very tame at home but become wild when put on the wing. All hawks will become a little less manageable after they have made a kill or two, but haggards



Roger Upton in a hunting car with passage peregrine falcon, Thriyah.



Training the falcon—training the trainers. A new generation of falconers in Dubai participate in a school-organized falconry event.

*Photo: Nigel Barton*

*Left:*  
Calling her to the lure.

might revert to their wild ways just by being free in their natural element. However, occasionally haggards will prove to be the exception to the rule, and are generous and co-operative in their partnership with the falconer. But generally they are not worth the trouble bestowed on them. In the *Baz-Nama-Yi Nasiri*, it is written:

Hawks are of two kinds; those that the falconer must assist, and those that assist the falconer. A hawk that is metalled, high-spirited, and valiant, if given one 'train' is made, such a hawk gives assistance to the falconer. Another requires ten 'trains'—such a hawk demands assistance from the falconer.

Sakers are a tough, hardy hawk, require less careful feeding and are naturally inclined toward the pursuit of the houbara—Pakistani falconers say that, “sakers and houbara are enemies even from the egg.” Some sakers in the wild state also kill hares. Both passager and haggard sakers are trained, but haggards have a style and skill in flying and hunting that is of great advantage. However, it is among the passagers that a hawk can be found that will kill over and over again, seemingly indifferent to whether it needs feeding or not. Such sakers have been known to leave a houbara they have just killed to fly another nearby.

Haggard sakers are a little like peregrines in temperament, being more highly strung than passagers. They also require the correct type of manning and constant handling to get their best work. Their hood must be a comfortable fit since they are less tolerant and will easily learn to jump in the hood, constantly trying to get toward the chink of light they may see through an ill-fitting hood. They may appear tame and well mannered at home, but, when out hunting, they will revert to their wild ways and become unmanageable.

Once properly manned, sakers are better if kept in company. They seem to enjoy watching the world go by, and will sit bare-headed and relaxed around the campfires. Sakers are brave and persevering at their quarry and will go on pursuing even when all hope seems lost. They use their cunning and will take advantage of the terrain to make ground on an unsuspecting quarry. They are usually quite willing to take to their feet and tackle a houbara on the ground. Sakers also seem to have better eyesight than peregrines. Or, at least, they seem more adept at seeing stationary or slow-moving houbara at a greater distance; peregrines appear to need sudden movement to trigger their attention to potential quarry.

This ability, coupled with sakers' willingness to sit barehead-



A saker shaded from the midday heat.



A black saker.

ed on the fist, unlike many peregrines that often dash from the glove as soon as the hood is removed, make sakers useful to the Arab falconer in another way. Some sakers can be used to spot or find houbara, which are masters at camouflage and are not easy to find in the desert. Under certain conditions, their tracks are fairly easy to see and the Bedouin can follow their three-toed marks with little difficulty, but in gravel or stony places, much time would be wasted in painstaking tracking without spotters to find them.

Little can be done in early training to make a saker into a spotter—this is best done out hawking. But, when handling and manning new hawks, falconers may notice that one or two of the new hawks are suitable for the specialized work of spotting. Sakers molt well in captivity and should be clean molted by the start of the season if they are kept through the summer for another season of hawking. Haggards caught in October or November are usually clean molted. The best sakers and spotters will continue to improve for many seasons and may still be working at twelve or thirteen years.

### **Trained for success**

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The way hawks are handled, and the condition in which they are kept during training, prepares them for success or failure at quarry. Those that are well manned, relaxed, at peace with their handler, strong and healthy in condition, and in good feather, are likely to enter well to quarry and to repay the attention lavished on them. They will have the strength and enthusiasm to succeed even under difficult conditions, and will be a source of pride to falconers and princes alike.