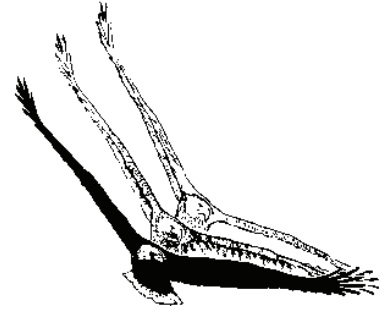


# THE NATIONAL BIRDS OF PREY CENTRE

## NEWSLETTER No 2. DECEMBER 1997

Editor. Jemima Parry-Jones  
Director.  
The National Birds of Prey Centre, Newent, Glos. GL18 1JJ, UK.  
Tel. 01531 821581. International ++44 1531 821581. Fax 01531 821389  
Email jemima@nbpc.win-uk.net or jpj@nbpc.demon.co.uk



## HELLO AGAIN

Well who would have thought it, nearly Christmas already, where did the year go! We now have a scanner so hopefully this news letter will be easier for me to do, you should have seen me with photos and scissors and many swear words trying to get the first one right! This second newsletter will also be an improvement on the first if I can work out how to use the damn thing.



## NEW BUILDINGS COMPLETED

As I mentioned in the last newsletter, the Hawk Walk was in desperate need of renewal. We did not realise how close to falling down it was till we pulled it down and it didn't take much effort!! Along with Eleven large compartments on the lower side for eagles and hawks and eighteen smaller ones on the top side for the falcons, we completely re did the barrier fences with a chevron design. Mark and Wayne who built it all hated me because it was tricky to do. There are now three paths and two middle lawns, with three new specimen trees in the new lower lawn and a timber pergola with wisteria and clematis planted up each alternate pole. Give us two years and it should look stunning. We then built some new pens for flying birds at the back of the lower side of the

Hawkwalk which I put a picture of in the last newsletter, then we replaced the old greenhouse aviaries at the end of the top side. And now I am broke! One other expense that I could not resist, a good friend, Peter Dowle who has been advising and helping with the garden had an arbour of 10 Whitebeam trees at a really good price, so it arrived and was planted either side of the path on the way down the to flying ground - in time for the Royal opening and it looked wonderful. ----- In fact the whole place is looking stunning even in grey foggy late November.

## NEW ARRIVALS

I really did not want any new birds this year, I would rather consolidate a bit and we desperately need to buy eight acres of land adjoining the Centre so we can plan for new barns for new birds. However it has been a year for things not going to plan. Late last year I had a really weird phone call from a solicitors. A lady client of theirs had been left two eagles by a man whom she had no idea was actually her father - bit of a shock really! She knew nothing about birds of prey and so they wondered if I could value and assess the birds for them. Well the Newcastle's Disease outbreak in January meant that we could not go and collect the birds until April, however Philip went over to somewhere

in Wales and picked up a Tawny Eagle and a very bad tempered Golden Eagle. The Golden had been kept in a tiny cage for ten years and the whole floor was over a foot deep in pigeon remains! Both birds stayed here for assessment and then I managed to sell the Tawny Eagle for the poor lady, I am glad to say it went to a great home and is now flying free and looking great.

The Golden Eagle was not allowed to be sold as it was not a captive bred bird, in fact neither the DOE or us could find out any history on the bird. She has been called Montana, and will stay here with us as a donation because she can't be sold. We also had a Hooded Vulture sent to us on loan, which turned out to be a male, he went temporarily in with the Egyptian Vultures, then a Ruppells Vulture came in from France, then we got offered a female Hooded Vulture, so I had to buy it really.

Then I had to get a Hobby for some filming next year. We have been waiting since last June for a license to import a male White-tailed Sea-eagle for our female here and it just came through, I was about to get the quarantine quarters cleared by MAFF again for it to arrive and HM Customs phoned up - could we take seven eagles and a vulture that had been confiscated on welfare grounds and when we heard about these poor birds we could not turn them away.

So you see things have definitely gone to plan on the bird front, with new birds coming in and that does not count the birds that I have bred and kept, like Bollinger the Great Gray Owl who is wonderful, Macon the Verreaux Eagle, several Harris Hawks, a Harlans Hawk and Christ knows what else!

#### **A YEAR OF WOES! AND A ROYAL VISIT.**

Actually I have to say its been a vile year with so many things going wrong, it almost got funny, but not quite. I am not going to bore you with the details, suffice to say that I will not be sorry to see the end of this year, and am looking forward to a much better one next year - I blame that bloody comet Hallibop or whatever it was called!

Our Royal visit went very well, at least I think it did. The trouble with these sort of things is that you rarely get the chance to enjoy them yourself, because there is always things to do, consequently what happens is



that I welcome people as they arrive, then get busy with Princesses and what have you, then once the pressure is off and I am free to talk to all the guests - they leave! Oh well, I am told that everyone had a good time which I am pleased about as that is the reason for doing these things.

The lads did all the flying this time - I did not fly a bird until after Princess Anne had left and then I did Treasure the Secretary Bird.

Otherwise we flew three Harris Hawks together and they were brilliant, the Burrowing Owl who was I think the most popular, a cast (two) of falcons, three kites, Hard Tackle the Tawny Eagle, the three Black Vultures and the newly bred (he walked) Striated Caracara who is incredibly noisy and the next time the parents want to eat their eggs - they are welcome to! This bird who is called Bachus (the theme for names this year has been wine) is not only the noisiest bird that we have, but his birth brought us to fifty species in our 30 years of existence - not bad hey!

We put a marquee up in the field so all could have food and drink and shelter if it rained, which it didn't. Dr. Ruth Cromie who designed the new permanent exhibition in the Education Centre managed to get back from Trinidad for the day, actually Angus - a friend of hers did a good deal of the work as well and it now looks very nice and educational!

## MEMBERS EVENTS

We held one this summer which went very well and those who came seemed to have fun. We let the condor out and she failed to eat anyone and the weather was great. So what have we got coming up in the near future.

The Owl Evenings seem to be very popular and so I thought that we would run one early on. FEB 7<sup>th</sup> will be the special one for members. If you are local you may note that we will be running a couple of other owl evenings, but that date, i.e. Feb 7<sup>th</sup> will be for you only. I was thinking about having an evening on May 16<sup>th</sup> where we will talk about incubation and rearing, this is the time of year when I have eggs hatching, so I could show you in groups, behind the scenes in the aviaries, the incubator room and the brooder room - Good idea?

There will be a separate sheet for booking your places enclosed with this newsletter, spaces will be limited for the May event, so book early I thought we'd go for a barbecue in the summer and everyone can bring a bottle of something to drink, but I will think about that one for the next newsletter. If any of you have ideas or suggestions please let me know as it will help me to run a membership that you like.

## CONFERENCES/TRAVEL

I mentioned in the last newsletter that I was going to a conference in the US in October, in fact I did not go, due to sick parents and financial constraints. I have to go to a very big conference in South Africa in August next year, which is lousy timing for me, but I am chairing a session and many of my scientist colleagues will be there. I attended the DETR (government branch that deal with wildlife) Wildlife Inspectors Seminar in November, did you know I am a Wildlife Inspector, I don't get used often and then only for identification purposes normally. I also chaired the Hawk Board Symposium which was held at Birmingham University in October and went very well.

I am going to the US in early December to do a book signing at Hawk Mountain, I am only going for five days, but it will be a much needed break and a cheap one.

## BOOKS AND THINGS

The owl book I told you about in the last NL is going to be called Understanding Owls, there is a great picture on the front of the Striped Owl Rockling and I am quite pleased with the book. I have been asked to do a similar one, but for children by another publisher, the pay is dreadful, but if I don't do it, they may ask someone who will give the wrong sort of information, so I will probably do it anyway. We have been working with the CITES (Convention for the International Trade of Endangered Species) Enforcement Team at Heathrow for the last year on a project called Green Parrot. This is a computer program for identifying parrots, birds of prey, owls, reptiles and insects that come into the UK and checking that they are what they purport to be. It makes it easy for inexperienced people to identify the bird by choosing size, colour, leg length, beak size and so on and the program keeps narrowing down the choices until there are only a few, then it brings up photos of the individual species. Many of the photos of the birds of prey and the owls were done here and much of the identification and grouping also. We are hoping that a customized program can eventually go into the Education Centre so kids can use it to find out more about the different bird species - we just need IBM to give us the computer to run it!

## NEW JOB FOR JPJ

*Late last year I was approached by a film company who are doing a fifty minute special on birds of prey. We talked about what birds we could use for any of the special shots that were needed and I had a look at the script, gave some more ideas and then some prices and forgot about it. Then early this year David Rolfe came back to discuss things further and offered me the job of directing the program. So after a bit of time to recover from the shock and think whether or not I could do it, I said yes! We start filming in the New Year and have until mid 1999 to finish it. I will let you know when it is due out.*

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## SHOWS

Since 1968 I have driven round the countryside throughout the summer months giving flying demonstrations at shows, fetes, parties, game fairs and so on. I have got through about four vans several Landrover engines, a couple of cars, and done thousands of miles. In the worst year I did 63 days away from home between May and September. I have done the first and as far as I know only demonstrations stooping falcons to the lure indoors at Wembley Pool, Earls Court, and the NEC. But this



year I decided that it would be my last doing shows. In the last few years many other people have started doing them, (none I think quite as good as ours, but I could be biased!), prices have dropped and quite frankly I have had enough. So I did my swan song at the CLA Game Fair this year. The only one I am going

to keep on is Chatsworth, which is my favourite and this year was quite amazing. On the second day it rained like I have never seen and the main ring went from muddy to about 12" of water in 20 minutes, we had great fun and got very wet.

### **STAFF CHANGES**

Most of you will remember Craig - the short laid back surfing type who always flew Uranium the Burrowing Owl, he lived with Debbie the blond cheerful girl who worked in the café, shop and office. Well they left at the end of September - they have emigrated to Australia, they flew out to Aus-sie on November 16<sup>th</sup>. I have not replaced either of them for the time being as this is the quietest time of the year, and we are going to see how things go next year. Earlier in the year Sarah-Jane started in the office and café helping out. We then discovered that she is not bad on a computer, which has turned out to be really useful because Monica, who was my business manager for the last four years, handed in her notice when she got back from her September holiday. Thankfully - and I am very grateful to Monica for waiting until it was our quieter time of the season, we are coping. I am going to computerize the accounts. I now know how my accounts work and I do not want to be an accountant when I grow up. All this would have been a relatively easy changeover, had it not been for my father breaking his hip and having to have two operations, which meant my mother and the dog moved in so life has been less than easy, to say the least!!!

### **CONFISCATED BIRDS**

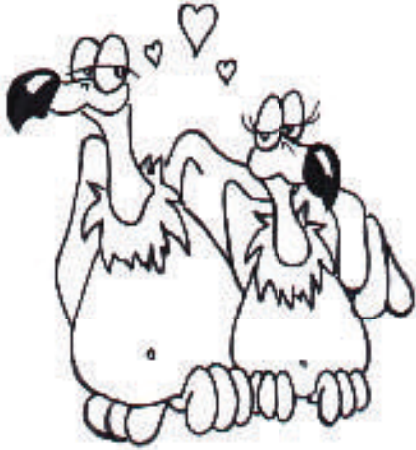
I think I told you last time about the confiscated white-tailed eagles - no, I just checked and I didn't!! Bad Luck! Anyway, about two weeks ago we had a phone call from the CITES enforcement team at Heathrow, could we take care of some eagles. So I said yes, and we then discovered that they had confiscated eight Bateleur Eagles, one of which had to be put down immediately because of its appalling condition, and one vulture, described as a Nubian vulture - which turned out to be a Lappet-faced Vulture. These birds were able to be brought in perfectly legally because of a recent change in the law, but because of their outrageous condition they were confiscated on welfare grounds. To add to the fact that they had been in transit for four days in the boxes which was disgraceful, they all were suffering from injuries consistent with very poor management, were very very hungry, far more so than a fat eagle missing food for four days, and to cap it all it turned out that some of the eagles and the vulture had Avian TB. This is a disease that humans can get so we are being particularly careful at this stage and the poor birds have to have antibiotics twice a day for 45 days. It was bit of a task to take on, but I am glad to report that they are doing well, eating us out of house and home and improving daily.



## COURSES AT NBPC

Most of you probably know that we do falconry experience days here at the Centre, they go really well and people seem to enjoy them enormously. I was thinking about offering them to our members at a 10% discount. We do a voucher that you can buy and put into a card or Christmas card as a present to a friend or relation, or you could just come on one yourself. Normally they cost £110 which includes learning how to handle and fly birds in the morning, lunch here and then the afternoon out hunting - if you are interested give us a ring.

### VULTURES



You will remember that I mentioned earlier that we have had a fair number of new birds, John is really pleased because from having only two species of Old World Vultures we now have five species. He is so pleased he just did a cartoon for you all as I was sitting here doing this newsletter - what a star. Mind you I have to own up that although I am really pleased to have got the photos to scan in, they are none of them in the place I wanted them, I lost that argument with the computer!!! Now I seriously need a new vulture barn so that they can have a good chance of breeding - HELP. I need lots of cash!!!

### END NOTES

We really have had a very difficult year, not least losing Tamale my oldest Labrador, whom I am sure most of you remember. She died aged 15 on August 27<sup>th</sup> and is buried in the field with the other special animals that have given their best at, and to the Centre. Nevertheless, with all that has gone wrong, we are still here, still cheerful and still hoping that you will all renew your membership and join us in making 1998 a great year.

### MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

RENEWAL IS £20.00 FOR THE CALENDAR YEAR 1<sup>st</sup> JANUARY 1998 - 31<sup>st</sup> DECEMBER 1998.

NAME ..... MEMBERSHIP No .....

ADDRESS.....

POST CODE ..... TELEPHONE No .....

EMAIL (if you have it) .....

PLEASE MAKE CHEQUES PAYABLE TO: NATIONAL BIRDS OF PREY CENTRE  
or send cash, as it means we pay less than if you use your Credit Card - thank you.

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### OWL EVENING 7<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 1998 at 6.30pm

Light refreshments, wine, coffee, hot apple juice. Guided tour of the owls. Flying demonstration. Short lecture.  
Members £5.00 each and Members Guests £10.00 each.

I will be attending on 7<sup>th</sup> February 1998 and will be bringing ..... guest(s).

### BEHIND THE SCENES IN THE BREEDING SEASON EVENING 16<sup>TH</sup> MAY 1998 at 6.30pm

There are a limited amount of places for this evening, so please book early. Bring a bottle! Light refreshments included.  
Members £5.00 each and Members Guests £10.00 each

I will be attending on 16<sup>th</sup> May 1998 and will be bringing ..... guest(s).