

National Birds of Prey Centre

NEWSLETTER

December 1998, Number 4

NOTE FROM JEMIMA

This is Newsletter number four, I find that amazing – boy doesn't time fly past and that is not a comment made lightly by one who runs a centre for birds of prey. It's bloody nearly December, we will be seeing many of you on the 11th, I hope - bring lots of cash!

Such a lot has happened this year. It has been a difficult one, both for the Centre, weather and customer wise and for me personally. My Mother died on June 13th after a very long illness, but both the Centre and I have got through OK.

However, we are on track for 1999. I hope the weather is better than the last two years. I have a new car – hooray, my old and much loved (and much battered and mistreated) Range Rover is not well and has been relegated to work as a tractor. I bought a new (er) one, damn me it cost less than the old one ten years ago. Its blue and very fast, and I washed it yesterday, will wonders never cease!

To those of you who have helped us over the year – thank you, what would I do without you? And if I have not shown enough gratitude, please forgive me, I have had a lot to think about in one way and another. But believe me when I say that I do thank all of you who are members, who help out and support us in the many different ways that you do. For those of you who get this, but are not members, why the hell aren't you? Get moving please – pronto, we need you too and I am not that much of a slave driver, ask my staff, no perhaps you had better not!



RRF DIRECTORSHIP

I have been a member of the Raptor Research Foundation for many years now. Sometime ago I was elected as one of the International Directors for the foundation. After my term was up I stood for another post, but failed, so I was pleased when asked to stand again this year, I was voted in again.

The RRF does a great deal of good conservation work and it is really nice to be involved with such a diverse and international group.

RED KITE RELEASE PROGRAMME
PEREGRINE FUND BOARD MEETING
HAPPY ENDING FOR SYMONDS YAT PEREGRINE
SECOND HALF OF 1998

RED KITE RELEASE PROGRAMME

Last year we had two Red Kites brought to us for eventual release. They were illegally taken birds and so needed to be assessed for return to the wild. I had already sent one Kite off, which, against my judgement had been released and sadly had died. So this time we did some work on one of the kites before sending it to the release program that was based in Northampton.

Our Kite actually failed the veterinary test and was not released, but I was invited up to the release day, firstly to collect 'our' kite and secondly to see the release. I arrived fairly early and Dr Ian Carter of English Nature took me to collect our kite and to see the birds destined for release. He had two other birds out of the twenty or so kites that he was not happy about being a total success. On looking at them, I agreed with him and said that if they did fail I would be pleased to give them a home and if we bred from them in the future, we would release their young in exchange.

The Red Kite programme has been very successful and just to give you an example, over 70 wild young were produced from the scheme in the Chilterns last year.

About six weeks later I got a phone call from the project and was asked if I would take one Red Kite that had failed to be released on three occasions, and had been picked up each time.

We were asked to assess the kite to see what the problem was, so I trained it here. In terms of flying, after a very shaky start he improved no end, however, if he was in the slightest bit hungry he would strike at people's heads, demanding food. Consequently we considered that he would probably not be a good idea to release back to the wild. If he had got at all stressed through lack of food in the wild he would most likely have done the same thing, which would not have been good for the programme.

So now he lives here, is flying on demonstration and is a pleasure to see in flight. We hope now that the work he is doing in terms of PR is as important as him being released into the wild, were most likely he would not have survived.

Philip filming with
Red Kite
November 1998



NEW ARRIVALS, BUT NOT BIRDS

Congratulations to Mark and Kirsty on the birth of their baby boy... Jack did his Dad a favour by arriving before PWLO and Five Day Falconry Courses, on the 30th September - weighing in at 7lb 14ozs he arrived at 11.10pm during a Manchester United European Cup Match, which Mark was watching in the delivery room!

Lots and lots of babies for Aspen – Hebe's daughter of four years ago. She came to our Royal do last year as the fifth dog, to take Tamale's place who had died two weeks before. On October 1st she produced 10 puppies, six weeks later I collected four from Norfolk where she lives and brought them back to Gloucestershire. One went to our local – The Glasshouse – a pub in a million! One to some friends who are on their third generation of PJ Labradors, one to two very nice and local journalists and one here – Nettle.

THE REALLY USEFUL OWL GUIDE

Unfortunately, the publishers will not be able to get the new children's book finished in time for Christmas.

I received the first proof at the beginning of November - it looks very promising, and the illustrations effective...

I will let you know as soon as it is available, hopefully February 1999 (TFH Kingdom Books RRP £4.95)



CONFERENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA

As some of you may know, I go to one or two conferences a year. This summer it was South Africa. I flew over on August 3rd, from Birmingham Airport – which I can thoroughly recommend! The first day was supposed to be a ‘free’ day and I had arranged to meet some friends and have a play, sight seeing. As it turned out I spent the morning and early afternoon working on the CITES figures and the workshop with my Co-convenor, never got any breakfast or lunch and finally met up with my friends in the Botanical Gardens to look at a wild Black Eagle’s nest, at 3pm. We had a good afternoon and then I discovered that three Americans, one Canadian, one Australian and one English (me) were all going back to the conference in the smallest car I have been in in a long time! It was a little cramped, but we all ended up better friends than we had started.

The conference went well and it was really good to hear some of the papers and spend time discussing raptor issues with scientists from all over the world. It was also good to see old friends, renew friendships and make new ones. I am so lucky, I have some of the nicest and most caring friends and they are from all over the world. I have to say that with all that had gone before in June and July, I was not at my most stable, but it was a very worthwhile visit. I think and hope my Workshop went OK – there is still a good deal of work to do to follow up on what was discussed.

The next World Conference will now take place in Australia, Nick Mooney a completely barmy Tasmanian, who is one of my best friends, will be one of the organisers, and God help us all! It will be good, but I have a feeling it will also be unforgettable. It is not for another four years though.

I also met, or re-met the Director of the South Carolina Center for Birds of Prey, Jim Elliott. For some reason that completely escapes me, probably because I liked him and what he is trying to do, I offered to go over and give them a hand; at least I think that is how it happened. He had asked me before, however this time I had the time to do it and it all seemed to work out in the end.

I got back from Africa, clutching a very large and very beautiful wooden buffalo, far more papers than I had started with and a million things to catch up with.

THE JAPANESE JOB

We went, we did it and I am going to collect John and Mark from Heathrow tomorrow morning at 5.30am! I have to say, that without this contract we could have been in a little trouble this year.



Sadly, if we had had a good year, we could have used this money for a new project, but instead it has kept us on track (although having said that, I do have a little project in mind that I want to pull off before next spring!)

John & Mark at

Nasu Animal Kingdom

We flew out to Japan on September 21st, I went for ten days to help set it up with John and Mark. It was a good thing that I had decided to get out there before the birds, because in the end we had to do a fair bit to the housing before we got it right for them. However, it was all achieved in time and the birds finally arrived after a major cock up at Heathrow (not by us I hasten to add!).

The Park is about 200 kilometres north of Tokyo in beautiful mountainous countryside and teeming with Ravens and Black Kites, all of whom came in and chased our birds during the demonstrations! But although it sounds like an exciting thing to do, I saw the airport, the Japanese equivalent of the M25 and the M4 (twice!) two towns similar to Gloucester while going to the local DIY shops for timber and the like, and the Park.

The Visitors use the Cat & Dog Buses

We did have one afternoon off and climbed the local live volcano, which was pretty exciting. Other than that we were either, or generally organising things. I left on September 30th and came home and John and Mark stayed out with the birds until November 6th. The birds were then sent home and are now safe and sound in my quarantine quarters. John and Mark, having done seven days a week, had a holiday in Australia for twelve days and then two days in Singapore. I am such a good boss.



A View from the Picnic Area

I am now in the throws of putting together another contract as they would like us to go back in July and August next year!



1998 – THE SECOND HALF...

Following on from the year so far... The hour-long film of British Birds of Prey, directed by JPJ is going very well, although some Autumn filming has been held up by the weather.

During July we had lots of injured wild birds this year and at one point we had nine Little Owls in the Hospital at once. All of which, we are happy to say have been released back to the wild, as part of a project we are working on with the RSPCA Release Station in Taunton.

JPJ took a fall leaving the weighing room in a hurry with a bird on her fist... The bird avoided injury and remained comfortably perched on the glove, however JPJ broke her foot. After a quick visit to Gloucester Hospital she arrived back at the Centre in plaster, but not for long, she had removed it by the following morning by using every implement to hand apart from a chain saw! (Sarah wrote that – I think that people are all wrong about broken feet – abuse is what they need not TLC!!! Its fixed now and four weeks later I climbed a volcano in sandals to prove it)

JPJ was special guest at Gatcombe to do a flying demonstration for HRH the Princess Royal and the UK Land Rover Event.

Mark and John did the flying demonstration for British Aerospace family day again this year in Preston.

A group of students from Bristol University made a ten minute "Video Postcard" for us, which sold very well during the Summer at only £3.95.

JPJ and Cinnabar (the Baby Golden Eagle) have been involved in regular interviews on BBC Radio Gloucester and Central TV.

JPJ was invited to launch the Bath Branch of the Welsh Hawking Club.

A much dryer Chatsworth Show this year, making it the 17th year for JPJ, with Salix, Lupin and the three puppies, Aster, Arabis and Lily.

Mark Parker and JPJ attended the first Police Wildlife Liaison Officers Conference in Warwickshire to talk about Birds of Prey and legal issues.

Made a pilot film for Channel 5 and Focus Productions involving JPJ, Cream Tea and a Pig!

John, Mark Rich, Jemima flew to Japan on the 21st September 1998 to set-up flying demonstrations at NASU Animal Kingdom.

THE CHILDREN'S DAYS

After introducing the Children's Days (for 7-11 year olds) during the School Holidays, we will definitely be running them again next year... The day includes a guided tour of the Centre, behind the scenes before the visitors arrive, a flying demonstration with drinks and sweets! Followed by a bird handling session in the indoor Hawk Walk, how to tie a falconers knot, and a picnic lunch.



Away from the Centre in the afternoon on a hedgerow walk and pond dipping, with colouring and drawing and a competition

The children are fully supervised all and even get a present to take home, and the cost is £30 per child. We will be running the first day at half term in February, so book early – 01531 820286.

Kazik enjoying the Children's Day in July



OWLS CONFERENCE 2000

In January 2000 there is a conference on Owls being held in Australia. I have been invited on a number of occasions to go to Australia and I have not managed to go. However, this time I have been asked to be the Keynote Speaker for the session on Captive Management, so it's a great excuse to go.

I have to say though that I have decided to make the trip as far away from the change of year as possible. I admit to a concern about all the computers that manage Traffic Control. I want to know if they survive the Millennium or not before I travel!

DON'T FORGET TO RENEW YOUR

MEMBERSHIP FOR 1999

THE DOGS

My dogs, my very dear and beloved dogs who keep me sane. A week after Mother died in June of this year, I was walking down to the field to see how the 'one day course' was going and Daisy was sitting under the Turkey Oak, looking miserable. I sat beside her and asked her what was wrong – she put her head on my chest and just stayed there. She went to our vets and died there in my arms, that night of acute liver failure. She was only six.

The other dogs missed her badly, she was pivotal to all of us. Lupin had had three pups about three weeks before. Hebe and Salix who didn't have pups to care for, then came up and started to sleep on my bed. We buried Daisy in the wood by the flying ground, by Bramble her Gt. Grandmother and Tamale her Grandmother.

The day after Daisy died, I had a phone call and my ex sister in law Vicci, who was a good friend had died at only 41. I went to her funeral later that week.

Then on July 28th, just before I was due to fly out to Africa for a conference, Hebe, Daisy's mother and Salix's sister became ill again, she had been ill the week before. I rushed her over to the vet late that night, and she died in my arms just after midnight. I buried her the following day next to Daisy.



Lily, Arabis and Aster with Lupin (Mum)

Because of how much a part of the Centre the dogs are, as I am sure you all know, all the staff were pretty upset by these losses, so I decided to keep all three of Lupin's puppies.

Now as I write, they are nearly six months old and have hit the extremely destructive teenage stage, so far they have eaten the TV remote control (have you any idea how expensive those are without the damn TV!) the printer cable to the computer – that one was popular. A book, someone's camera, three dog beds and my supper yesterday, including the Clingfilm! Plus the keys to my new car damn it!

HELP WITH PUBLICITY

Earlier this year we welcomed Henrietta Lilley and her much needed assistance with publicity. Since June she has been slogging away to get as much "free" publicity as possible



in newspapers, magazines and television. The hard work is definitely beginning to pay off with sponsorship of Arsenic, the Lanner Falcon as Mascot for a new radio station "Falcon

FM" in the Stroud Valleys, features in Bath & West Magazine, Country Life, NFU Magazine, The Field and Girl Talk.

The New Year promises a visit from the Rolf's Amazing World of Animals to film during the breeding season, and the possibility of a Behind the Scenes documentary by the Discovery Channel... fingers crossed everyone!

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TRAINING OF CINNABAR

As you must all know, either by our last newsletter, or from the newsletter, or the hundreds of emails I sent out (!) that we bred our first Golden Eagle this year. She grew up, and yes she is definitely a she, into a very beautiful and extremely large lady, weighing in at over eleven pounds and probably heavier as she thickened out.

We did try putting her back with her mother, who said – great, a snack between meals! So we didn't! She then went under the old pair of Ferruginous Buzzards, who for some reason were not very attentive, so we switched and put the slightly older baby Tawny Eagle under her and the Golden Eagle under the Common Buzzards.

They did a superb job and she grew up to full size with them. However by the time she left the nest not only was she somewhat oversized for the aviary, but the foster parents were extremely nervous of her. So we took her out (they cheered up no end at her removal) and put her on the lawn



in the Hawk Walk to start training. I called her Cinnabar. She gave us a small scare by starting to vomit about two weeks into handling, however a trip to the vet and x-rays, laproscoped (which is when we discovered that she was definitely female) and generally checked over, it turned out that she just had a tummy bug.

I have been really careful handling her and she has a very nice temperament. But I have been worried about teaching her to fly in our very small field. She has a wingspan of seven feet and like all young eagles is liable to be very clumsy. I want her to have every chance to fly well, so I contacted a friend of mine at Whipsnade Wild Animal Park. He is one of the very few people I would trust to handle Cinnabar and so with the kind agreement of the curator, Nick Lindsay, Cinnabar is going up to Whipsnade, probably until April next year. The park is situated on the top of the downs and she

should have every chance to learn to fly safely and well there, without risk.

MEMBERS EVENING

We had a barbecue for the members in August this year. We flew a number of birds all of which had done film jobs of one sort or another over the years – so it was 'film stars' only. Then, as promised, we let Real, our imprinted female Andean Condor out! Not one of the members got eaten, (which was really rather disappointing!!!!!!) However I think she did show everyone just how enormous and powerful these birds really are. We don't let her out for our normal day to day visitors as she is pretty difficult to work with, but it was a treat for us to see the reaction from the members when she can galloping across the field.

Sadly we have never been able to get Real to fly, I have considered even taking her up in a hot air balloon to 500 feet and lobbing her out – but we can't find anyone stupid enough to go in a small basket with an Andean Condor – I wouldn't!!!

The barbecue itself was done by our local butcher and a great job he did. He must have done, there was nothing left to eat, even for a Labrador!



We held a "Medieval Weekend" in August to try and recover the funds lost over Easter because of the weather. All in all it was successful, although we were let down by the Knights in Armour at the last minute – The rain stayed away, everyone kept their costumes on for most of the time - we are planning to do more theme weekends next year.

YOUNG PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR

Heather Angel, top wildlife photographer spent a day at the Centre in October advising a young wildlife photographer on how to take pictures of owls. Rebecca Dean from Surrey, won and part of her prize was to spend a day with Heather, who has just published her 46th book. Rebecca is a keen photographer of birds and won the award for her picture of a red-winged parrot. The Competition is run by BBC Wildlife Magazine and The Natural History Museum

ROYAL AIR FORCES ASSOCIATION MASCOT

Philip and Macon (the Black Eagle) have spent the year travelling throughout the UK to events as the Mascot for RAFA. Attending many of the national air shows, including Woodford, Waddington, Lyneham, and the International Air Tattoo, Fairford.



In

September Macon's final appearance at RAF Leuchars in Scotland, gave us some very unfair publicity. Macon and Philip travelled by Hercules from RAF Lyneham in Wiltshire to Scotland, and on arrival journalists immediately found out that Macon had been sick. They found it far more interesting to print "Macon the Airsick Eagle" - which he was most embarrassed about - rather than tell everyone about the thousands of pounds he has helped raise for RAFA... Don't you just love journalists?

THE NEW GUIDE BOOK

Thanks to Stoate and Bishop we now have a very attractively designed Guide Book. Although it was a struggle with time and lots of hard work to bring our Guide Book up-to-date, it finally went on sale during the August Bank Holiday weekend.

The main delay was getting it published with an ISBN number, so that we can sell it in book shops. The new Guide Book is selling very well and is still only £1.50. We have received approval from WH Smith to sell copies in some of their branches.

Have you been watching the BBC series "The Life of Birds" with David Attenborough?

Did you spot any of the birds from the Centre?

Lots Of Feet !!



THE PAVILLION

You may remember from the last Newsletter that we had just received a donation from Wall's Ice Cream to build a "The Pavilion" in the flying ground. Following planning permission approval it was ordered and built within a week... and very nice it is too! As a result of this outlet in the flying ground, our ice cream sales have increased, even during this awful summer, and we are very pleased with the results.

UPDATE ON BIRD SPONSORSHIP

Since introducing a Bird Sponsorship Scheme earlier this year, several points have been raised by members and visitors. We have received numerous offers to contribute to the cost of sponsorship, but not actually sponsor a bird because of the expense.

Our members, probably more than most of the visitors to the Centre understand the immense cost of keeping and maintaining the birds that live here, plus the injured wild birds and all the other project involvement. So, after careful consideration, contact with several of the UK's largest zoos and the Zoo Federation, we have decided to run a "Share Scheme". This will make bird sponsorship far more accessible to the majority of our visitors, including children and families.



SUNNY SOUTH CAROLINA

Some of you may know that my Mother was very ill for a number of years, the only good thing that could be said about it was that her illness brought my two sisters and I closer together, which is very special to me. Anna is a world renowned Doctor – a consultant specialising in gynaecology, and apart from running a large clinic in Edinburgh, she travels the world for the World Health Organisation. Consequently she gets lots of air miles. My other sister, Dinah, lives in New York with a reporter on the Wall St Journal and they have a superb apartment in Brooklyn overlooking the New York Skyline. So in November Anna paid my airfare to NY as she had a five day meeting. We had a great time and I bought some clothes, then I caught another plane down to Charleston, to see and the South Carolina Center for Birds of Prey. They paid my airfare, and Jim told me that he would be working me hard, and bloody hell he was not joking.

They did need a lot of help, and once I get moving I can get fairly motivated. So we set up about 11 of their permanently wild disabled birds with new equipment and rebuilt some of the housing, it was very poor. I was also able to do some teaching of his staff and volunteers. I have to say that rarely have I been more impressed with a group of people. The dedication they all showed, towards the birds, the idea of rehabilitation and towards learning was impressive. So much so that I am going back in January, which is a quiet time for us, to continue helping out where I can.

PEREGRINE FUND BOARD MEETING

While I was at the conference in South Africa I met Professor Tom Cade, and his wife and grandson. I have known Tom for many years, he is a part of bird of prey conservation history world wide, so it is a real honour to be friends with him.

He very kindly invited me to the Board Meeting of the Peregrine Fund and World Center for Birds of Prey. The Peregrine Fund is based in Boise Idaho. I have had the chance to visit it on a number of occasions. The conservation work that they do is impressive to say the least. The Board Meeting was being held in Marble Canyon, which is a beautiful place, north of the Grand Canyon, but on the same river system in Arizona. I would have loved to have gone.

However because of its remote situation it was not only a very difficult place to get to, but also a very expensive place to get to. Consequently, I did not feel that I could really justify going, which why I went to South Carolina instead. I am hoping that one day they will invite me again and it will be in a place that is easier to get to.

HAPPY ENDING SYMONDS YAT PEREGRINE

In June Fire Officers from the Wye Valley abseiled down a cliff to save a seven-week-old Peregrine Falcon which had become entangled in barbed wire. The bird which had been flying for only three days at Symonds Yat suffered a serious leg wound and was in shock. The bird was treated by our vet, Neil Forbes at The Clockhouse Veterinary Hospital in Stroud, and then brought to the Centre for convalescence.



During October the Symonds Yat Peregrine started training, much to the amusement of our visitors, he really had no idea how to fly and not very co-ordinated. However, progress has been excellent and he can now do two to three circuits of the field, and is well on the way to being fit enough for release back to the wild later this year.

ELEONORA'S FALCON

Early this year I had a phone call from a friend in Scotland about a bird he had had sent up from a vet. The bird was registered with the Department of the Environment as a Hobby, but he was pretty sure that it was in fact an Eleonora's Falcon. He did not want to keep it as he did not have the space, plus the bird was in a hell of a state feather wise. All the primaries and secondaries (wing feathers) were broken and someone had tried to imp on a new tail, but had used Jackdaw feathers instead!

The bird came down here and we handled it for a bit and then put it into an aviary for the summer to moult. Sadly, partly because of the very poor summer weather he, or she, we don't know which has not achieved a good moult. So having taken it out and done a little more work, we decided to leave it until after the moult next year and then try again to train it for flying.

LIMITED EDITION PRINTS – *An Ideal Gift*

In the past you may have seen some of John MacDonnell's paintings on display at the Centre. To assist the Centre with fund raising John, who paints from his home in Scotland, offered us the opportunity to do some limited edition prints of his work. The prints are signed and numbered by John, and only available from the Centre (Shop or Mail Order).