

National Birds of Prey Centre NEWSLETTER

June 1999, *Number 5*

PERSONAL NOTE FROM JEMIMA

Sarah has given me a whole load of headings to write up for this news letter, including this one – a personal note – but I am trying to do less personal things so I am not sure what to put!!!!!!

I have been racing round the world this year and that has made it hard work catching up on things whenever I get home.

Plus I appear to keep having more things to do. There is a new book coming out for kids, although I am not impressed with their delivery date, seeing as it was supposed to come out for Christmas.

The Hawk Board has more legislation to deal with both from the UK and Europe and as the Vice Chair I have a fair bit to do with that one. I have had to work on expert witness statements for two court cases, both of which have taken some time and all sorts of other reports – one for India, one for Japan and one for the Philippines. My poor computer keeps crashing because Sarah and I both ask them to do more than they can really manage.



I have a Labrador on the back of my office chair that is giving me about four inches of chair to sit on which is extremely uncomfortable, but its nice to have them back and have the company. One thing is for sure, with six Labs I rarely get bored. It is being an up and down year for us because the weather is so dismal and consequently we are not really getting the customers that we so desperately need. It is very frustrating because as soon as the sun comes out we get busy and all the visitors have a great time. We are getting really good comments about how the place looks and the gardens which I have to say really are looking superb.

Ok that's it for personal!

ACTIVITY AFTERNOON FOR MEMBERS ONLY

In February we found ourselves very short staffed with Jemima and John away in Japan, and our first month of a new season. The Member's Activity Afternoon went as planned on Saturday 27th, and everyone joined in with different groups doing falconry techniques, how to tie a falconers knot, bird handling, lure swinging, flying to the fist (plus the demonstrations as usual for visitors) and a telemetry hunt in the afternoon.

It appears that the lure swinging was a favourite, especially when everyone realised that it is not as easy as it looks; and those who experienced what it was really like when a Falcon flying at you! The telemetry hunt was fun too, which is not always the case when we spend hours trekking over miles of open countryside looking for birds. The two members left behind on May Hill, although not for long, did not seem to mind too much about being forgotten!

From the response received, the afternoon was enjoyed by both the Members and all the Staff involved. We will be holding another "Activity Afternoon" early next year. Details and dates will be in the December Newsletter.

UPDATES FROM THE DECEMBER NEWSLETTER

Red Kites.

The Kite that came as a youngster is definitely staying here, he has been flying all winter and very soon will be rested and moulted as he has some huge gaps in his wings now. It has been a pleasure to fly him and I will be interested to see how he flies after a good moult.

We have sent two Kites that have to be released up to the Owl Centre at Muncaster Castle. Tony Warburton who is the director and also my opposite number as Owl TAG chair for British Zoos, just built a very nice and very large aviary for an eagle that I had lent him years ago. The eagle with enormous lack of concern for all the efforts made for her died just as the pen was completed. So Tony was keen to try and get some Red Kites to put in there. The two birds that I had here can benefit greatly from being in this pen as it is 35 feet long and will give them more space than they had here. They will spend the summer getting fit in the pen and then go either down to Wales to be released or possibly go to the new release site in Yorkshire.



We were very pleased to be contacted by the RSPB about the aviary design for the new Red Kite release pens in Yorkshire. They had looked at the various problems in the other release pens and we had a discussion on the phone and between us came up with ideas and suggestions that should get over all the problems.

That is just the sort of work that the Centre can do standing on its head as we have so much experience in building pens that really do work well. We were delighted to be able to help and hope that the programme goes well.

There is a chance of two more injured Red Kites arriving here, we are just waiting for their assessments before we know if they are going to arrive. Our own pair of Red Kites here at the Centre laid eggs this year, but they were infertile. We are going to give them a baby buzzard and see if we can get them to rear, this should help their pair bond for next year.



Conferences

Three trips abroad are planned this year for meetings. June 8 – 11th is a big TAG meeting at Walsrode in Germany. The Bird of Prey TAG have a meeting here and will be discussing Management Guidelines, Stud Books, Monitoring and potential species which need special concern in Zoos. This meeting should be very interesting and hopefully will provide us with management plans for raptors in zoos through the millennium. I am driving to this one as it is the cheapest way to get there as three of us are going.

3rd Eurasian Conference of Raptor Research Foundation at Trebon, Czech Republic. This conference is on September 21st – 26th. As I am an international director for RRF I really need to go to this one, so I am hoping we do better visitor wise so I can afford to go by air, rather than have to drive as it is a long way to go by car, especially driving alone. As yet I am not sure what the program for this conference is, but generally it is important because of the contacts that we make and the information that is shared.

November 1 – 7th RRF main meeting in La Paz Baja California. Should be a good one, a lovely location and a very good meeting. Then if all goes to plan and we can get the paperwork sorted out, I then fly to the Canadian border and pick up some birds that we will have already been sent to Canada to get through quarantine. We then drive down to Awendaw South Carolina with the birds, so that The South Carolina Center for Birds of Prey has its own team of fully trained demonstration birds for all the educational work that they are doing. We settle the birds in and get them going and the staff there working well with them, give a couple of demonstrations and then come home at the end of November. Bit of a trip really, but well worth it we all hope.

Japan Contract

As you will see in the diary, we had have the contract in Japan renewed, this time for a much more extended period. We have two staff – John and Ben out there right now, with a team of nine birds. The contract runs from March 26th through to November 23rd. Gary, one of my younger members of the bird team is going out in late August to help out, with him will go three young falcons to replace the three older birds that will be returning back to the Centre. John will settle Gary and the new birds in and then he is coming back via a holiday in Australia. Gary and Ben will stay out till the end of the contract and then come home. Gary is coming back via Australia and Ben is coming home via Canada.

While they are out they John and Ben are training a Japanese staff member to work with the birds so that they can stay out there. The company has built some really nice aviaries for the birds and they are well and comfortably housed. They will have a rest period during the winter months and then start work again in the spring. By staying out there the birds will not have the stress of travelling out to Japan again, which actually turned out to be a nightmare as British Airways for the second time failed to get the birds onto the flight for which they were booked and even managed to leave a box with a bird behind on the second attempt at sending them off.

The birds will need to be re-trained in the early spring and we are hoping to send John out again to achieve this, with the Japanese staff member, and a second person in training. Once the birds are up and flying well, he will return to the Centre.

The Symonds Yat Peregrine.

Is still here! But having gone through the winter and learning to be a reasonable flyer, he was not really good enough to release back to the wild and have a good chance of survival. We decided that the best choice was to moult him out, then get him going again, as fit as we could with some decent feathers this time, send him off for some hunting training and then release him in the late autumn. At the same time we have two other Peregrines waiting to go as well. One is a female dropped off by the RSPCA Wildlife Unit near Taunton she had a broken wing that was on the mend – she has to moult and then be flown and accessed, but should be easy to release as she is adult and should know all about hunting. The other bird is a tiercel that came in last year poisoned and again needs to have a moult before being able to be released, just fitness training is all he requires. We are planning on getting all three back to the wild before the winter.

New Clinic

We have in upwards of 200 injured and confiscated wild birds per year. It is getting harder to treat them in our very poor excuse for a hospital. So this year we are turning an old garage into a clinic. We had it re-roofed in November and now there are windows and doors going in. The walls and ceiling are being lined, a new floor on the attic above for storage, the floor will be tiled and the whole thing lined with units and worktops. We are knocking through into the old weighing room to build a small dark room for housing the sick birds in sick quarters, and we are hoping to get someone to buy some stainless steel cages to house the birds in good, safe and very cleanable quarters. It is being done right now and should be finished in a month. We then have to get hold of all the right equipment to make sure we can give the birds the best of care. The old hospital will then be turned into two small recovery pens for birds that need a little more space.

Then all we need is the land and funding to put up good flight pens for the birds to gain fitness before release – we are dreaming a little with that one!

NEW STAFF

If you have visited the Centre recently you may have seen some new faces. Sven, from Holland spent three months here last year on work experience, and has come back as a full-time member of Birds Staff until December.

Helen has joined us to assist Mark on the Falconry Experience Days and Courses, until the beginning of July. Then she is off around the world to do research for a project on falconry, starting in South Africa.

Ian works mostly behind the scenes with the continuous Raptor Keeping side of the Centre, and has been a great help in the daily routine carried out by the Bird Staff, including assisting with the demonstrations.

Sally-Anne also works very much behind the scenes, but in the office. Since the beginning of March she has successfully taken on the challenge of computerising our accounts system, and we are now well on the way to being up-to-date at last.



PERFORMANCE FILMS

As you may remember I was asked to direct/produce a film on British Birds of Prey for a company called Performance films. The one hour special is a part of a series of 24 half hour programmes about British Wildlife. The series is called Wild Islands. We had two somewhat insurmountable problems, the first one being that because of the very poor weather last year, many of the wild nests that we monitored for potential filming failed. The poor breeding season in the wild was reflected with some of our captive birds, particularly those species that we really needed to both film in a breeding situation and also train a young bird for getting the special shots.

As I write this we are hand rearing a Little Owl (*Athene noctua*) for demonstration and film work here at the Centre, but needless to say, last year, we did not have enough young to both film them in an imitation nesting hole, and have one to rear for training. Our Kestrels, having bred here for years, failed last year.

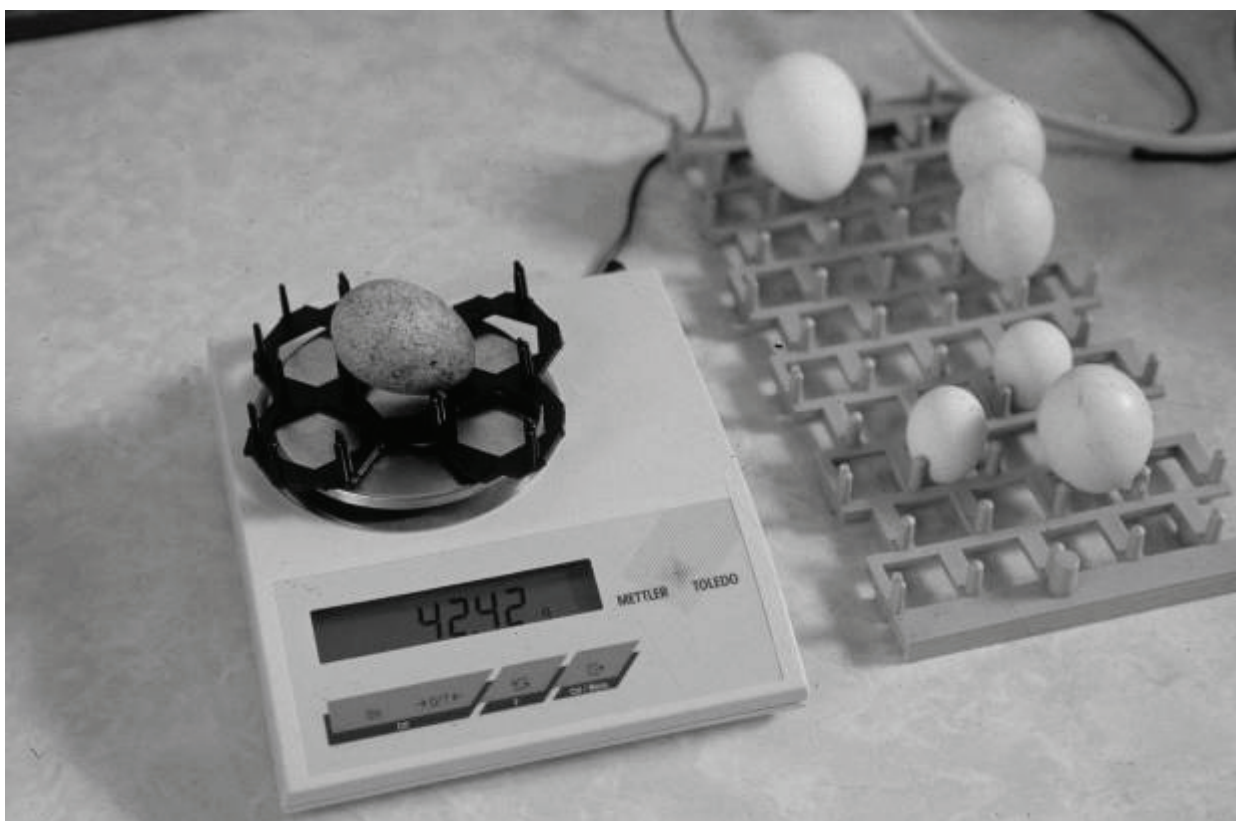
However with Maurice Tibbles as our main camera man and some excellent work by Philip, John, Mark and Gary as well as myself and the birds, we got some very good material and better still it looked like wild stuff rather than the usual very obvious trained birds. Generally I was very pleased with what we got. Sadly the budget disappeared before we had finished filming which was a great shame, so we did not get some of the listed shots that I was hoping for. Nevertheless, the editing done by Ramone has made a really very nice and pretty representative film of British Raptors. We are hoping that a version will come out on video for us and other places to sell, possibly with the voice over redone by us as well.

RARE EGG COLLECTION

In February this year the centre donated a rare bird egg collection to the National Museums of Scotland. The National Birds of Prey Centre has owned the collection since the 1970's, during which time it has been loaned to research divisions of other conservation bodies, such as London Zoo.

Some of the eggs are very rare and it is a significant collection, dating back at least 100 years. We therefore felt it was important that the collection was used properly, rather than hiding it away here. It needed to be permanently and safely housed and extensively catalogued, and also made available to others for research - and the National Museums of Scotland offered to do just this. They will also continue research into areas such as the effects of pollution on bird eggs and why certain species of birds may experience a fall in population, or suffer from various diseases.

The collection was handed over to Mr Bob McGowan, Bird Section Curator at the Natural History Division in Edinburgh, and means that the Museum will own the second largest egg collection in the UK.



A VERY IMPORTANT BABY!

Last year Dennis Salvador, founder of the Philippine Eagle Foundation visited the centre to get help, hands-on experience, advice and working practises from NBPC. The Philippine Eagle is the world's rarest eagle with only approximately 124 wild individuals left, and has suffered a massive decline in its population, due to loss of its natural habitat.

The centre uses Brinsea Incubators very successfully, and for this reason we were able to ask Brinsea to send two over to the Philippines. The result was the first hatching of a Philippine Eagle in seven years!

Perfect timing... Jemima and John were "en route" from Japan after their visit to NASU Animal Kingdom to spend a few days at the Foundation, and saw the news of the hatching in one of the Far East based newspapers in the airport! We are in regular contact with the Foundation and will continue to assist wherever we can with the breeding program. There are possible plans to send a member of staff from the centre over early next year to work at the Foundation.

1999 – THE YEAR SO FAR...

- As always the New Year started off at full tilt, and to be honest it did not slow down even at Christmas! We received a phone call on the 25th December, just before midnight from Nasu Animal Kingdom to confirm the contract for Flying Demonstrations from March to November.
 - On the 5th January Jemima flew out to the South Carolina Center for Birds of Prey, and again in April to advise and assist where she could with handling techniques for the educational team of birds used by the center.
 - Our much-loved boisterous teenagers, Aster, Arabis and Lilly went off to Willow Wyck Kennels for some basic, much needed training.
 - Sarah travelled to Florida for ten days to join the International Zoo Marketing Forum, organised by the Zoo Federation.
 - Another trip for the director, this time to India to advise on the Vulture Breeding Project.
 - Finally after a prolonged wait for all the paperwork to be correct and in date, a male White-Tailed Sea Eagle arrived from a zoo in Bulgaria, as part of a Breeding Project here at the Centre. After being quarantined he was put with the female and an immediate pair bond was formed.
 - Children's TV spent a day at the Centre filming the "Top Ten Birds of Prey".
 - Ben and Sarah took Amnesia the Raven to Turkey for a starring role in a film called "Arabian Nights" for American TV.
 - RAFA sponsorship renewal for another year, with Philip and Macon booked to attend various events throughout the coming months.
 - Jemima and John flew to Japan and visited Nasu Animal Kingdom to finalise the contract for Flying Demonstrations this year and make sure that the new aviaries for the birds were being built to the right designs. They travelled back via the Philippine Eagle Project.
 - A Stroud radio station, Falcon FM decided to sponsor Arsenic and assist with promoting the Centre locally.
 - The Valentine Owl Evening was filmed for a series called "Night Owls" Opus TV Wales and West.
 - NBPC's Egg Collection was carefully packed up and donated to the Natural History Museum in Edinburgh, Scotland.
 - Dr Simone Scoccianti spent some time at the Centre with us to learn more about incubation and babies. He has now returned to Italy to continue an Egyptian Vulture Breeding Project, and we all miss his fantastic pasta dishes!
 - Nedra Hecker joined us for a very busy learning week from the South Carolina Center for Birds of Prey, where she works as Volunteer in charge of the Educational Birds.
- Dr Marsha Schlee from La Jardin de Plants in France for the fifth year, was here to catalogue and carry out research on our breeding Vultures.
- Filming for the hour-long programme on British Birds of Prey for Channel 4 is complete, and will be shown on TV later in the year.
 - We had a much better Easter this year, with reasonably pleasant weather and a steady flow of visitors over the whole weekend.
 - The Director was nominated and then appointed Chairman of the new government appointed advisory group, The Zoo Forum.
 - John and Ben travelled to Japan to prepare for the arrival of the nine bird flying team the following week.
 - Mark took on the job of teaching the Falconry Course at Hartpury College, in addition to the Falconry Experience Days and Courses at the Centre.
 - Filming at Hadrian's Wall in Scotland with Mark and a Merlin in appalling weather conditions proved to be a challenge.
 - The hatching of the latest two new species to NBPC – an Aplomado Falcon, a British first, and two enchanting Turkey Vultures. All young are doing well.

SPONSORSHIP FROM SUZUKI

Following a recent visit to the Centre, Suzuki decided they would like sponsor a Peregrine Falcon to represent the launch of their new super-bike.

On one of the very few glorious sunny days in April, Laertes perched (posed) very comfortably on the handle-bars of the new GSX1300R Hayabusa in the flying ground for a photo shoot.

The photographs taken can be seen in the May edition of Suzuki Magazine, along with a two-page feature about the bike, the falcon and the Centre, entitled "Bikes and Birds".

Since then we have hatched five young Peregrines, and Suzuki have chosen a female to sponsor for a year. The funding will go towards the considerable running costs of the Centre and training of the new "Hayabusa". The sponsorship will benefit both Suzuki and the centre, with the opportunity for additional publicity at some of Suzuki's planned events this year.



THE NEW ZOO FORUM

The newly formed Zoo Forum is a government advisory body, made up of 18 individuals who have been invited by the government to serve on this group for a one to three year period. This body will be advising the government on Zoo practises and standards, zoo inspectors and the new Zoo directive from the EU.

The newly appointed chair of the Zoo Forum is none other than the director of The National Birds of Prey Centre. This appointment was unexpected but nevertheless welcome. As JPJ is the Taxon Advisory Group Chair for birds of prey both in zoos in the UK and in Europe she is experienced in looking at standards and practises and has written three sets of Management Guidelines for birds of prey and owls.

The office is for a three year period and the government Minister visited the Centre at the end of May to discuss how the Zoo Forum will work and what projects it could take up in the first year. He is keen to see that the ZF is an achieving body, which is we assume one of the reasons that JPJ was chosen as the Chair. She is certainly an achiever!

CINNABAR COMING HOME

You may remember that we decided to send Cinnabar away for her maiden flights. Because she is a very large female Golden Eagle, and because our rather small field in Gloucestershire is not ideal for training eagles, we contacted Whipsnade Zoo where a number of our birds are working on demonstration. Whipsnade is situated on the Chilterns, right on the top of the Chilterns and is an ideal place for a young eagle to learn to fly well and safely. Cinnabar went over to Andy Reeve who is in charge of the flying demonstrations there, she arrived in the late autumn.

Andy kept us posted as to her progress and generally he was very pleased with her. We had done the initial work of manning her and getting her tame and this continued along with her flight training. In March we drove over to Whipsnade to see her fly and were delighted at how well she was doing.

She has now just started to moult and has also sadly started to think rather seriously about hunting rabbits. So she is returning home on June 12th, and after a few days of settling here she will go in with the wonderful adult male that we have here who has been very lonely since his mate died last year. She is too young to breed as yet, but if they form a pair bond that will bode well for the future and in the meantime it gives him some company and her the chance to socialise with one of her own kind.



INTERNATIONAL ZOO MARKETING FORUM (not to be confused with the Zoo Forum)

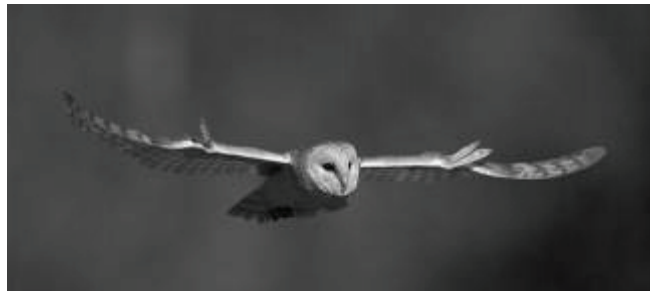
Sarah Rumble

Many people do not realise that the National Birds of Prey Centre is a specialist zoo, and a member of The Federation of Zoological Gardens of Great Britain and Ireland. Although the Centre is small in comparison to places like London Zoo, we all have a common interest in conservation, breeding projects and world-wide interest in endangered species. It is getting more and more difficult to attract visitors to zoos without making them into a theme park, but sadly this seems to be the only way forward.

The International Zoo Marketing Forum is organised by the British Zoo Federation, and earlier this year I had the opportunity to travel to Florida, USA. The aim of the trip was to visit some of the top animal attractions in the area, to meet the people responsible for the marketing and PR, look behind the scenes, and then to experience each attraction as a visitor.

During the trip we visited Disney Animal Kingdom, Sea World, Miami-Metro Zoo, Busch Gardens and Lowry Park Zoo. Some of you may have already visited some of these places, and will do doubt agree that as a visitor you could not wish for more. The facilities, care of animals, conservation and entertainment value is amazing, but my favourite place was Lowry Park Zoo, and one of the smallest places we had the pleasure of visiting.

Lowry Park Zoo is near Tampa and believe it or not, the only place they do flying demonstrations with birds of prey. Although much smaller than the other zoos, Lowry Park also has everything a visitors needs with excellent facilities, beautiful gardens, shaded walkways, education centre, and 1,500 animals living in habitats similar to their own natural environment. It was very easy to relate to this self supporting zoo, and the constant struggle they have trying to raise money to fund conservation projects, look after the animals in residence and all the sick and injured animals to the zoo. Since 1991, the zoo has released over half of the 60 sick and injured Manatees back to the wild.



FORTHCOMING MEMBERS EVENTS

Thursday 12th August 1999

Summer Picnic

The Centre will be open from 6.30pm for you to relax and enjoy an evening with family and friends. Bring a picnic and a good bottle of wine, and we will organise a flying demonstration, treasure hunt and silent auction. The cost will be £4.95 per person.

Saturday 9th October 1999

An evening with the Director of the National Birds of Prey.

Starting at 6.30pm with an illustrated talk about all the conservation and breeding projects the Centre is involved, including recent trips to the South Carolina Centre for Birds of Prey, the Philippine Eagle Project and other significant visits to areas with endangered species of birds of prey. Followed by a ½ question time. The cost will be £15.00 per person including a glass of wine and buffet.

CHRISTMAS OWL EVENINGS

The Owl Evenings leading up to Christmas have been a great success over the past couple of years, so we will be holding them again this year on **Saturday 27th November, 4th, 11th and 18th December 1999.**

The evening starts at 6.30pm with guided tours of all the aviaries by torchlight, finishing in the education