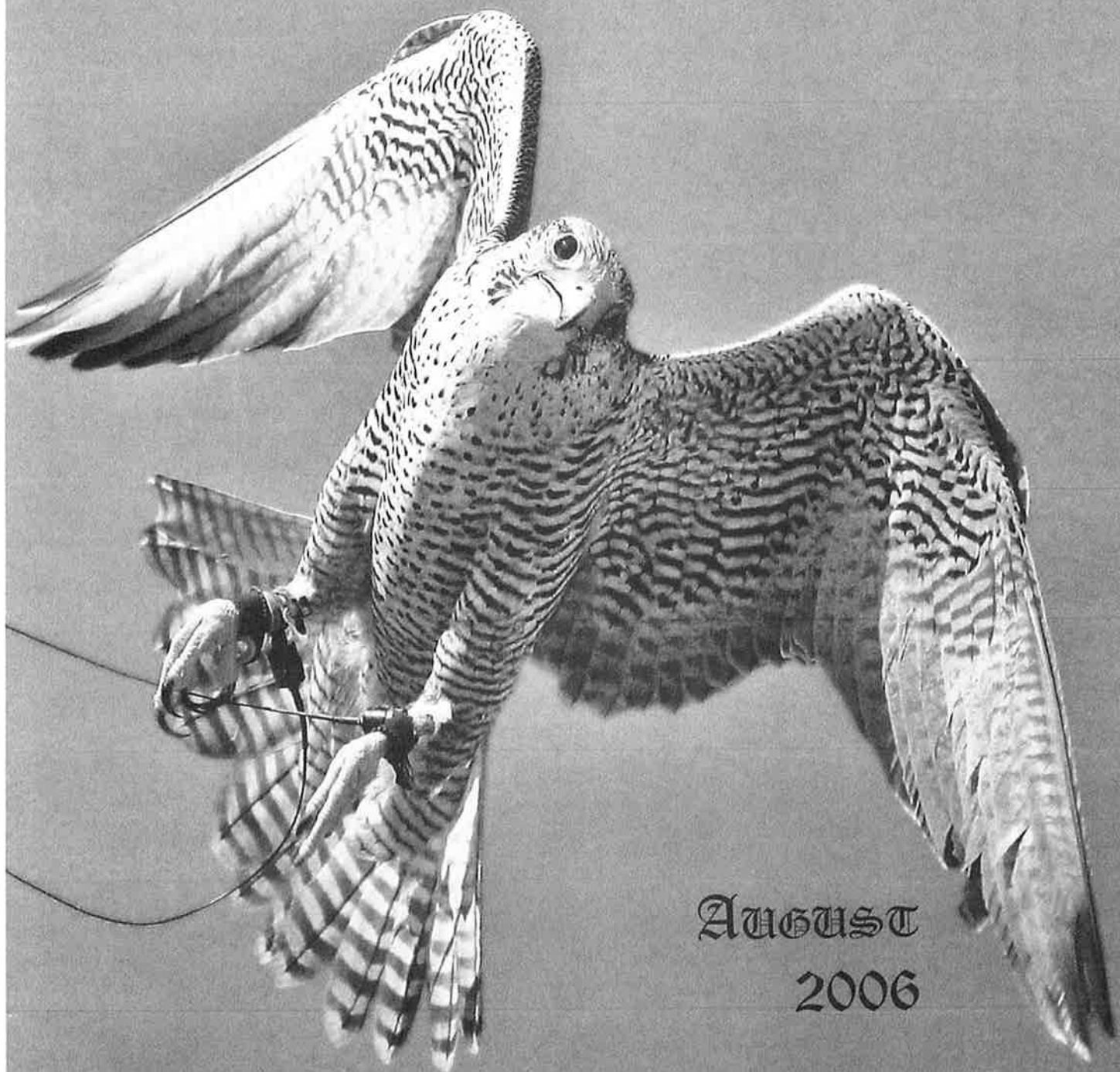


HAWK CHALK

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE NORTH AMERICAN FALCONERS ASSOCIATION



AUGUST
2006

APLO-FAN-TASIA

BY CARLOS TELLO QUIROZ, MEXICO CITY, MEXICO



Photo: Carlos Tello Quiroz

I have been working with aplomado (aplo) falcons for the last 10 years. I fell in love with these beautiful creatures the first time I saw one. I have flown both eyass and passage, falcons and tierceles. Almost all my experience is based on the close relation I share with "Tyson," my nine times intermewed eyass tiercel partner.

Aplos are widely distributed in Mexico, and South and Central America. Three subspecies exist, the "northern aplomados" *f.f. Septentrionalis* that ranges from Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Chihuahua, the east coast of Mexico (Tamaulipas, Tampico, Veracruz, and Tabasco), and Central America. This is perhaps the palest and blu-

ish form of aplomados. The *f.f. femoralis* that inhabits the lowlands of South America is the most grayish species and the smallest of the family. Finally, the *f.f. pinchae* inhabits the temperate mountains in South America. This one is the largest and darkest.

The weight ranges between species varies a lot. As an example we can compare the tierceles of the northern individuals in which weights can be as low as 180gr to the females from South America whose weight can be up to 440gr. The average weight for an aplomado (*septentrionalis*) varies between 220gr for a tiercel and 290gr for the females.

The aplos appearance is perhaps one of the most pretty of any falcon in the world. Their slim and longish bodies with long heavily streaked tails, exquisite facial mustache, and unique colors make this bird truly one of a kind. Aplos are indeed extremely intelligent and docile creatures: they have the tame temperament of the Harris' Hawk but the disposition and behavior of the noble hawk, very much like the peregrine.

Aplomados are extremely resistant to hot weather. They can stand long hunting periods in hot or humid hot climates. I have hawked with them for straight 7 hours in semi-desert arid terrain, only giving the bird refreshing and resting periods of 10 minutes every 3 hours. These birds just keep hunting with the same enthusiasm they had at the beginning of the day.

Aplos are the next revolution in modern falconry, they possess the falcon type temperament and a versatility that I'm sure the American falconer would appreciate the gentle temperament and versatility of this bird once they got to know it. If it ever becomes legal to fly them in the United States I'm confident that they will love them as much as I do. Falconers would probably not want to deal with anything else when hunting small to medium birds. The only way to get a better understanding of this magnificent bird is by experiencing the fun and adrenaline involved on an aplo hunt.

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Now-a-days some aplomado enthusiasts from Argentina, Chile, Peru, Brazil and Mexico are successfully hunting with them in a variety of styles and on a wide spectrum of feathered quarry.

Aplos are not for everybody. If you are not mastering the weight control for medium to small falcons and if

you do not have the ability to control a bating Merlin or if you cannot stand up to long walks on difficult terrain then it is better not to take on an aplo.

Managing this bird's weight can be quite a challenge. Some people never get to the point where they understand it. aplos demand a lot of hunting time and if they are not properly handled they can easily become a bating demon. This can cause severe scale abrasion and serious injury in a very short period. So if you are considering taking an aplomado as your next hunting partner take all these issues into consideration first and "THINK TWICE."

Aplomados are naturally oriented to carry. This can lead to a lost falcon and as a consequence a secure death in a bigger raptor claws. However if you manage them well and never rob or offend them you can have a companion that is a pleasure to hunt. Keep in mind that aplos are used to caching their prey. Both tiercels and falcons love this practice and continue hunting after doing it.

HUNTING STYLES

Because of their nature aplos opt to tail chase the majority of the time. They usually hunt by searching the sky. Then they mount up and after a long, spectacular, aerial and acrobatic chase they capture passerines. Their light wing load allows them to climb and wait on very quickly.

If your intention is to hunt with an aplo in "waiting on" style then you MUST train them from the very beginning. You can use a balloon or a kite as you probably do with a peregrine. But take under consideration that aplos do not require a high pitch to take quarry, a 90ft pitch is good enough to chase doves. When you train them for this purpose aplos can wait on for very long periods. I have worked mine for as long as an hour while seeking a suitable quail, dove, or plover to flush. If the victim escapes on the first stoop then a tail chase ensues. This raptor can accelerate with every meter they fly. Once the quarry gets into cover the female aplo will smash into the bush grabbing the unfortunate prey in

an accipitrine fashion. Tiercels on the other hand prefer to hover over the victim and wait for the falconer to produce a re-flush. They are indeed very acrobatic and delicate birds.

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When you hunt an aplo with dogs they tend to learn very quickly that the game is produced by

the canine, so they like to fly over them. Unfortunately at the moment I do not have a proper space for housing a dog, therefore right now I hawk alone and I'm the one producing the slips. I help myself with the aid of a modified T perch which I designed. This instrument has proven to be very handy when I need to re-flush. My falcon can simply wait on the T perch which is held over my head and with my free hand I use the stick to beat the brush and successfully produce the flush.

My personal choice of a hunting dog for an aplo would be the Brittany. These creatures are compact sized and very intelligent, a match for the falcons intellect. However vislas, pointers, setters and bracos may also work fine.

QUARRY

Aplos love to kill feathered creatures ranging from chukar partridges down to pipits. Therefore you will have a wide repertoire of quarry including feral pigeons, mourning doves, plovers, snipe, meadow larks, quail, thrashers, tohees, sparrows, larks, starlings and much more. Some of our more challenging flights were observed when hunting doves, plovers or snipe, however the clever tohees and thrashers have proven to provide more fun. On horned larks, pipit and starling hunts you will get ringing flights. With an aplo you can virtually hunt every bird that is legal to hunt. On adequate open land you can enjoy the feeling of an "adrenaline boosted" flight on meadow larks and quail.



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THE SMARTEST BIRD OF THE FALCON FAMILY

Aplos are in my opinion are perhaps the most intelligent birds of all falcon species (red head falcons *f.chiquera* are yet to be studied.)

Their nature is to usually hunt in pairs. I have enjoyed the sight of watching them hunting in the wild in small parties outside of breeding season. They are sociable creatures becoming more of a companion than any other trained raptor. They are clever and capable of understanding the signals we produce to give directions while hunting. Tyson my tiercel usually becomes quite noisy when he sights potential prey, he actually tells me where it is hiding. Aplos create a strong bond with the falconer, similar to the bond dogs and parrots have with their owners. Aplos are prone to scream due to their intelligence and also as a result of a poor handling. When you are raising an eyass aplo I would recommend that they be left to be raised by parents at least for the first 35 days, and/or allow for 40 days tame hack. If this is not possible and you have the experience required you can opt to introduce baggies at the right time. If this last technique is done correctly the bird will mature quickly and you will be able to avoid screaming behavior. A falconer can end up with an ideal hunting companion or with a nervous, screaming, carrying, bad mannered raptor.

CONDITIONING

Unfortunately and because my activities and job, it is hard to get to the field and hunting grounds. I live in Mexico City, the biggest city of the world (27 million people) and a complicated place to live. It takes me a lot of time to get to the hawking fields. Therefore I usually hawk 3 or 4 times per week. The resting days I supply high jumps to the fist. Sessions of 100 to 120 jumps per day. This develops their pectoral muscles to a point that allows them to catch doves. The ideal scenario is to hawk the aplo every second day. When aplos are well conditioned they do not show fatigue at all, even if they hawk all day long in temperatures of thirty centigrade (86 degrees Fahrenheit.)

I combine high jumps and stooping to the lure to exercise my birds. Aplos love to stoop at the lure, and usually I have him make 50 passes in a session.

ALETO VERSUS ACCIPITER

Many people wonder about the similarities between Aletos (Ancient Spanish name for aplomados) and their cousins the accipiters. Both of them have longish bodies, long tails and long tarsus but there is a world of

difference in behavior, character and temper. The speed and hunting styles also differ a lot from each other.

Accipiters are extremely fast in the first few meters, a truly "master of the spring" but aplos fly longer distances and accelerate gradually as merlins do. Accipiters are the masters of grabbing quarry in thick cover, aplos do not have the same success and they require more re-flushes to bind to quarry in this hunting style. Accipiters can be flown in tick covered wood lands; aplos require open terrain and few bushes. Semi-desert terrains are excellent for aplos. Accipiters are very agile but they cannot climb hundreds of meters in the sky with the ease of an aplo. With an accipiter you are able to kill almost everything that moves, an aplo requires a lot of conditioning but the slips are also more enjoyable. The average accipiter has a difficult temper the average aplo is as sweet as pie, (if well handled).

TELEMETRY

I'm not an expert on fancy mounting transmitters, in fact I consider myself a traditional and orthodox falconer. I always attach my transmitters to the tarsus of the bird in such a way that they have sufficient space to carry them without diminishing their grabbing performance. My transmitters came from Ed Levine (Merlin Systems), the mini FMV hand potted hand tuned works perfect even on small tiercels. Tyson my 9 times intermewed tiercel has hunted with them for all eight seasons. He likes to get into bushes and cache in all kinds of places. So far I do not have any problems with the system; of course precaution is always in order. I never fly the falcon in risky places like close to electric posts, houses or highways, these precautions have saved my birds from electrocution risks.

CONCLUSION

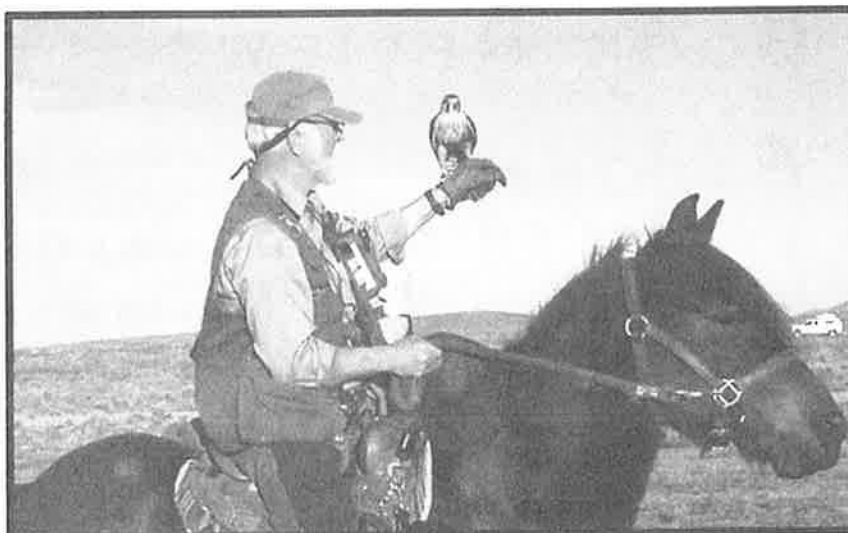
Aplos require a lot of hunting and if well handled they are a lot of fun. They're dedicated, but if bored, they are very prone to pluck the leg feathers. They are not easy to hood, but with a good hooding method they accept the hood just fine. Hoods must be very light weight and have a big beak opening. They tolerate heat much better than cold climates. They have a delicate tarsus and cannot be allowed to bate for long periods of time. If you can master the training of small raptors, give aplomados a try. Well handled aplos are very tame and calm, but poor handling produces a very difficult and nervous raptor. They are very smart, they love the chase, and they are extremely pretty creatures. A very fun and interesting bird to fly!

chewing at it when sitting idle between flights. With some of the newer magnetic on/off transmitters falconers leave the transmitter on and simply tap on it with the magnet when the bird is about to fly. I have even heard of some falconers leaving the transmitter turned on while the bird sits on the block in an uncovered weathering area for added security in the event of accidental loss.

Conclusion

In conclusion I would encourage those considering this alternative method to check out a comprehensive, well laid out instruction sheet on fitting one's bird. It is located on Marshall Radio's web site www.marshallradio.com. Alternatively I would be happy to assist those of you with any difficulties if you would like to e-mail me directly at markwilliams_1@hotmail.com.

Good...safe, hawking!



HARRY McELROY LOOKS BACK AND COMMENTS ON HIS SECOND SEASON USING A NEW MOUNTING METHOD:

From my perspective, the TrackPack has worked well, and the falconers I've contacted who are opposed to it have not given it a try. Several are accomplished falconers and more than a bit emotional about the idea, which surprises me.

Some worry about abrasions: At one point we were examining for abrasions at each battery replacement of the PowerMax but we now assume that all is well. My concern was that a hawk like the Aplomado, that uses direct pursuit, would somehow rub against the ribbon but it hasn't happened and she still runs

down dove now and again in flights of 1 1/2 to over 2 miles. If there were problems with the backpack how could she perform at such a level?

Some worry it's too heavy or restrictive. My 320 gram Aplomado carries about 10 1/2 grams of harness including the 7 gram PowerMax and in the process overtakes a share of mourning dove. If the backpack were so dangerous how could she perform such a feat? The dove is not a slow creature. I estimate that she travels about 20% faster than quail that she is chasing and that too would indicate good speed using the harness.

Some worry the harness will 'catch on something.' I haven't heard of such. It seems to me that if it were to get hung up it would have happened here where the thorn bush is everywhere.

In the field the Aplomado flew right past my left shoulder and I thought how she was free of anything that I could see. Her tail was in perfect form too.

Dr. Ken Felix was visiting Friday and I asked him to inspect the aplomado now that the season is over. As you may recall she has used the PowerMax on the TrackPack for a full season. Ken, Bill Linde and I took her down and found no problems after going through the bird from stem to stern. Being a vet, Ken was quite thorough in his examination of the hawk.

He is interested in the TrackPack and will likely order one of your packages that include the ribbon, Delrin mounting plate and brass attachment.

My feeling is that if it will last a season without problems on a direct pursuit falcon, that it will cause no harm to any raptor if fitted properly.

Harry