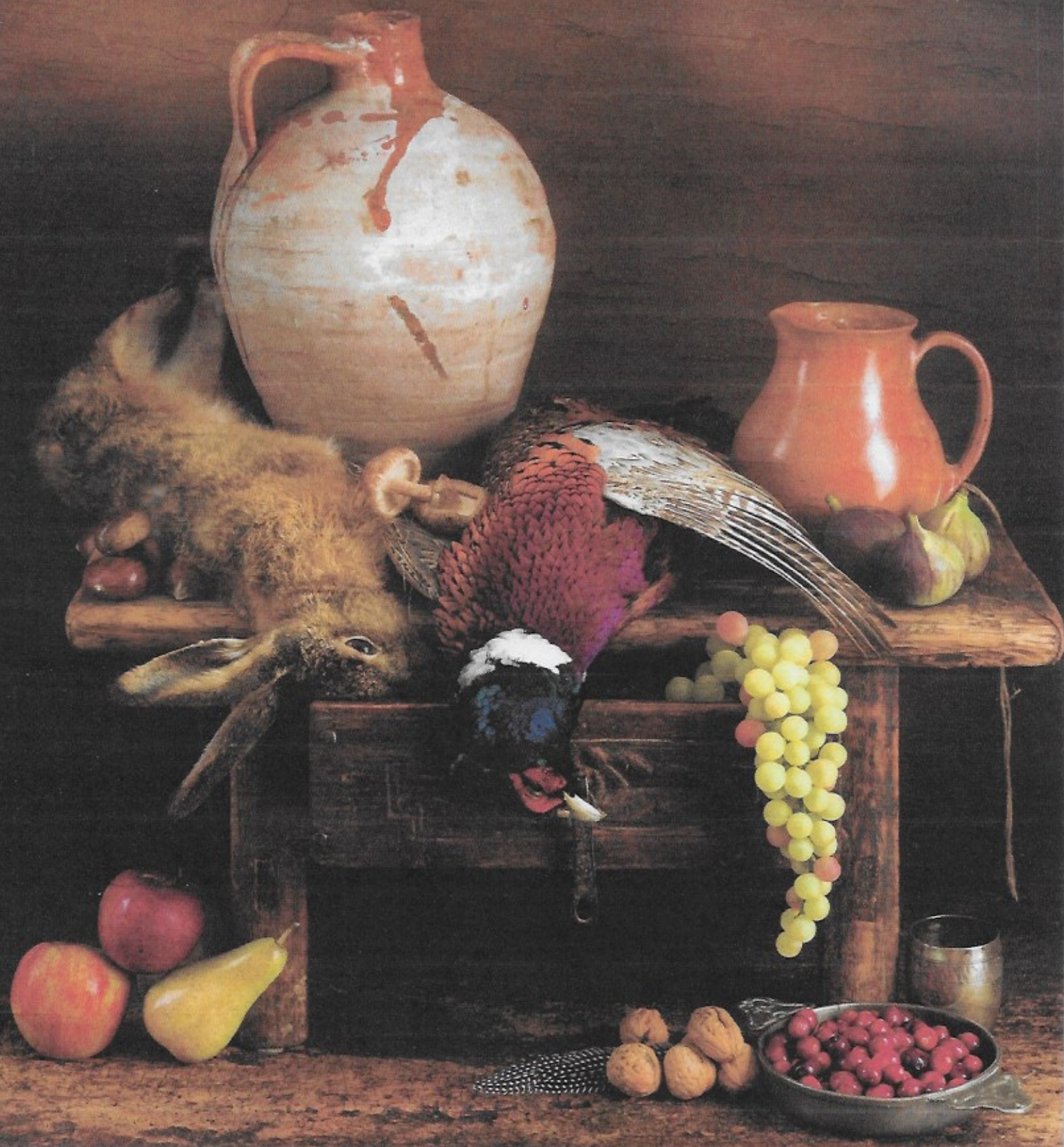


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GYRAN



America's love affair with the beautiful unique longwing designed for speed and determination

BY: BILL JOHNSTON AND STEVE BOWERS

Gyrmodo is the moniker for gyr x aplomado, and I've had the pleasure of flying two of these fine falcons, a tiercel in 2017, and a female this year. One of the most popular hybrids flown today incorporates gyr-falcon genes in some part or another. Pure gyrs are also high on the list of fa-

vorite falcons. I have flown, a pure gyr, a number of gyr x peregrines and a gyr x saker. All have been kite trained and all have been hunted from a pitch. There is a plethora of written material relative to this species. Little however is documented about aplomados, and even less about gyrmados.

MADDO

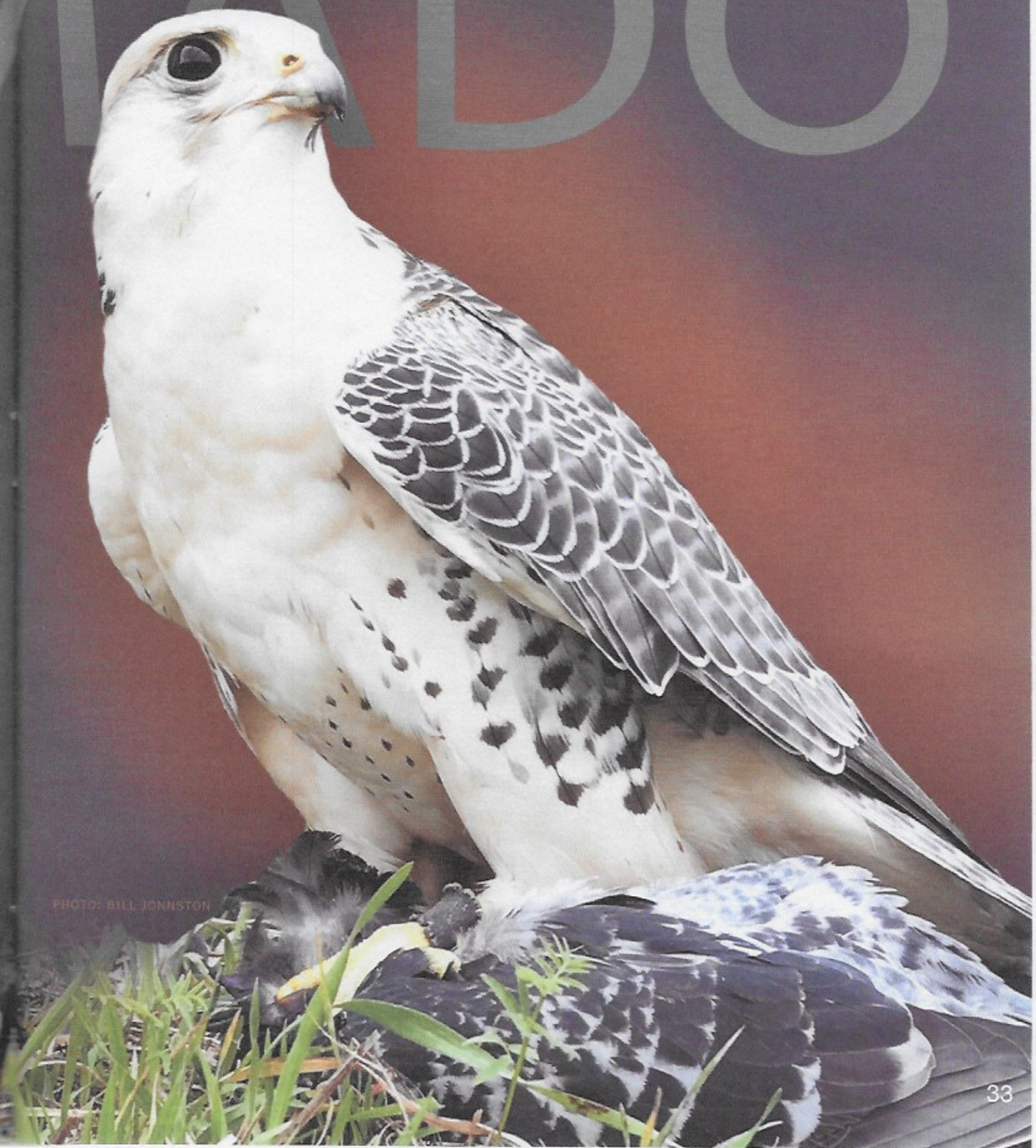
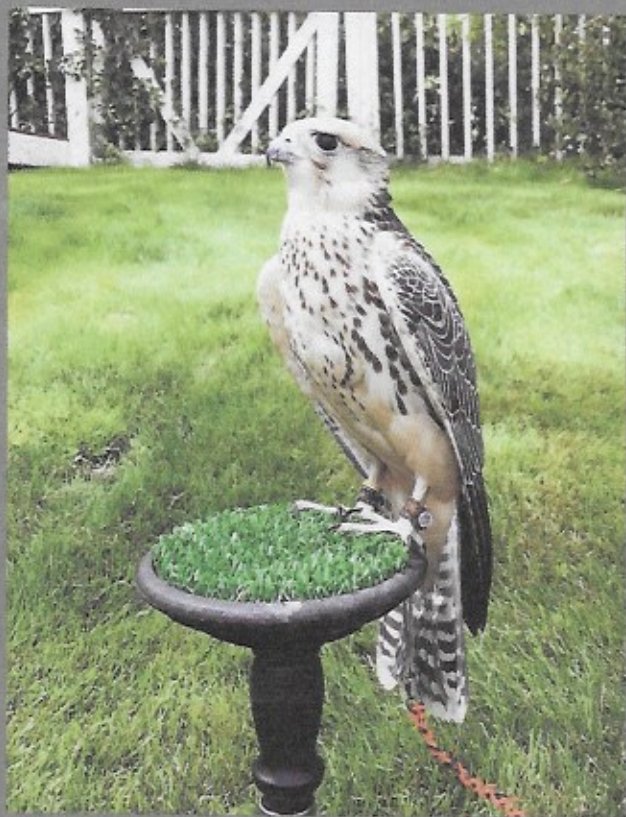


PHOTO: BILL JOHNSON



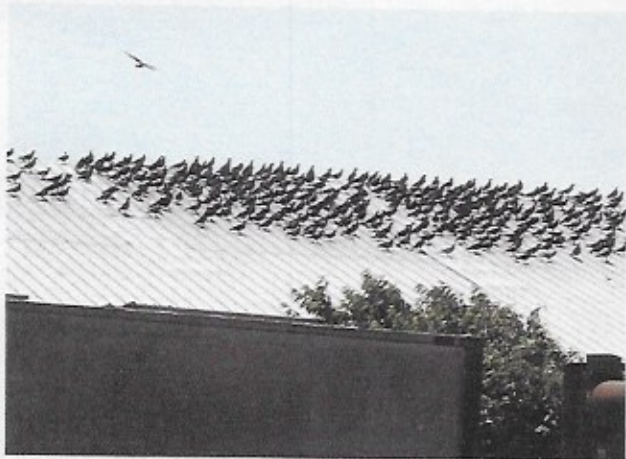
Why would anyone want a bird that specializes in endurance and long adventures over the surrounding countryside? Well, under the right circumstances it isn't a problem, more of an asset. One of the basic tenets of our craft is, fly the raptor at the quarry at hand. So, if you have lots of bunnies and squirrels where you live and hunt, get a red tail. Want to hunt sparrows and starlings, a kestrel or sharpie. I wanted to pursue feral pigeons. Not protected by state or federal law, in relative abundance and not especially cherished by the local populace, seemed to be a logical choice. Plus, they are worthy. Quick and agile, feral pigeons are difficult to catch.

Roofus, my 2017 tiercel arrived in late August. Chamber raised, my first impression was, not as biddable as a Harris's Hawk, but certainly more outgoing than your typical longwing raised under similar circumstances. Finding his response weight was straightforward and he was soon flying free. I long lure flew him to build stamina and work on footing. Also, since this bird was likely to go some distance, I wanted instant response to the swung lure. I have been doing this falconry thing for some 50 years and was completely unprepared for how quickly Roofus learned what to do. I decided, therefore to get on with the ultimate objective, hunting.

My experience with this complex raptor is one of resourcefulness, persistence and a biddable demeanor. They are falcons and can fly like one, and could probably be trained to take a pitch and wait on. But, they hunt in a style more akin to a shortwing. To say that they are shortwings dressed up like falcons would be a misnomer. They act like both, as circumstances provide. Gyrmados will pursue quarry until it is either caught, or manages to escape. They readily go into cover. In fact, my tiercel soon learned to do this as a tactic for success. He flies up into a flock of pigeons seeking one that loses its nerve and bails. As soon as his chosen quarry brakes, Roofus turns on the after burners, matching his target jink for dive until the pigeon loses its minerals and heads for cover. Roofus is not a whole lot larger than a feral pigeon, so wherever one goes, he follows.

We have engaged with the infamous rock dove in several locations, but our favorite is, "The Farm." Located a quick twenty minute drive from home, it's loaded with cattle feed-seeking pigeons. The farm doesn't pasture its cows. Rather, they have fields of hay and corn that they harvest and transport to the livestock. The cows are housed in open-sided sheds, some with access to small feedlots adjacent to the sheds. Feed troughs line the parameter where the farmer places grain and hay. This smorgasbord is a magnet to upwards of a thousand pigeons. These pest birds not only consume the feed, but also foul it with their droppings and litter. Needless to say, the farmer and anyone else in similar circumstances are pleased to see me show up with my gyrmado.

I started Roofus at the farm with several slightly handicapped pigeons that I had trapped. I think no more than three, because bagged quarry isn't falconry and easy catches can ruin a bird. We then moved to the real thing. It took him awhile to figure out that he was the source of food, not me. A typical longwing flight is from a waiting on position. Not so with a gyrmado. It's off of the fist, like they do in The Middle East. Or, like a shortwing from some nearby perch, like a barn roof. Feral pigeons are not too smart, but they are cautious. Even when trapping it takes some time before they become accustomed enough to enter the trap. Roofus learned to wait in some inconspicuous spot for the pigeons to come down from the farm silos and start to forage among the cow chow. He would then launch like an accip-



FEEDLOT PIGEONS ATOP THE OPEN-SIDED SHEDS

iter and try to grab one on the rise. Failing that, he would follow looking for that one bird that shows some infirmity that I can't see. Roofus would then focus his full attention on that bird.

We arrive at the farm around 11:00 AM. The balmy fall October has leached into a cold, blustery and cloudy November. I started flying Roofus at 470 grams; he is now a hefty 510 grams. GPS and radio telemetry attached, we wait impatiently for the ever-cautious pigeons to leave the relative safety of the silos. Presently, a small group takes leave of the

silos and alights on one of the low shed roofs. Here's where forbearance is important. My first impulse is to unleash the winged terror on them, but I must wait. After a few minutes hunger overcomes about a dozen birds and they come down to pilfer feed among the bovines. Using the truck as a shield, I slowly move around closer to the small flock, now preoccupied with filling their crops. Slowly, ever so slowly I edge around closer. At the right moment, off comes the hood and off goes Roofus in hot pursuit. Hugging the ground like a goshawk he closes on the unsuspecting flock. At last they spot the incoming and in an all out panic scatter to the four winds. Roofus follows trying to shorten the gap. Around the farm, out over the adjacent fields and back to the farm complex, Roofus has selected his target. Up goes the pigeon; up goes Roofus flying about 20 feet behind. In desperation the hapless pigeon flies into a shed containing bales of hay. After a few minutes when neither reappears, I look at my I-phone. Pulse, pulse, there he is up and over the stored hay bales. Full of adrenaline, my tired old legs manage to get up the stacks and locate Roofus happily plucking his prize some eight feet out on a small plywood shelf too weak to support my weight. Out comes the well-garnished lure and

ROOFUS ON HIS FAVORITE QUARRY - THE FERAL PIGEON



over comes an obedient gyrmado leaving his pigeon for the ever-present farm cats to feast upon.

In the past, whenever I started an eyass goshawk, I would try to introduce him/her to everything that they might encounter before they hard panned. Chamber raised, Roofus had none of this early conditioning. Didn't matter, he soon recognized that front-end loaders tractors and manure hauling trucks pose no danger. Speaking of manure, cows and piles of the stuff don't bother him either. On one occasion I found him beneath a bunch of cows calmly consuming his catch. The farmer, not far away pointed to him and said, "Bill, that falcon of yours is fearless." Another time Roofus caught a pigeon alongside an enormous pile of wet, soupy fresh dung, scooped up by a front-end loader ready to be trucked out and spread on the fields. The oozing mass supported the falcon, but not the falconer. In for a penny, in for a pound. I waded in to collect him. Despite twenty-degree temperatures that day, I drove home with the windows wide open.

On this day when we arrived, the pigeons decided to stay on top of the silos and wait it out. An hour later they were still there, so out of frustration, I unhooded Roofus and hoped for the best. He promptly flew straight up and landed on one of silos. Of course the entire flock split. Roofus didn't chase or try to catch any; he just sat there unconcerned, waiting. Dumb pigeons flew around for about fifteen minutes and then must have forgotten that their nemesis sat 100 feet up looking out from a perfect vantage point. So, the pigeons landed and soon, oblivious to Roofus started going about their business. Huge mistake. Dropping down the side of the silo, Roofus shot over the top of the adjacent cow shed, came around a piece of parked farm equipment and nailed an unsuspecting blue bar before it could get five feet into the air. All of this occurred some twenty feet from where I stood watching. Go Roofus. By the way, did I mention that this little hybrid is way smart?

Roofus's weight is a bit high but we head to the farm anyhow. Small wonder then that he isn't interested in putting much effort into securing a pigeon. Oh, he would

be happy for me to just feed him and head home, but I have no interest in doing that. So, it becomes a game of hide and seek. I'm not your meal ticket; it's up there. Finally in desperation I slip into one of the sheds and watch Roofus with my I-phone. He is loafing on the shed roof and has been doing so for a good half hour. When he still hadn't moved, I exit the shed ready to call him down to the ungarnished lure and head home. My timing was exquisite; I looked up just as a male Cooper's hawk launched into a flock of pigeons flying about 100 feet overhead. This amazing little raptor turned on his back in mid flight and caught one. Falling to earth, Roofus immediately saw his chance to become a pirate. No sooner had the unfortunate coops landed with his hard earned meal, then Roofus was there to rob him of it. Lesson to self, don't take your eyes off of the falcon, next time it could be a red-tail. As I mention before, gyrmado's are smart, but I'm not sure they are that smart!

It would be unfair of me to try comparing Roofus to his sister. Sandy arrived late and as of this writing has only been on the wing for about a month. Of course she is larger, weighing 630 grams compared to her brother at 510 grams. She also sometimes comes back from an unsuccessful chase and lands on the ground near me. At first this annoyed me, but then I recalled seeing a female aplomado doing the same thing at a NAFA meet. I also seem to re-



MY FEMALE SANDY ON A DUCK

member reading somewhere that they sometimes do this. Sandy is way less hyper than her brother. She is also much slower to leave the fist. Whereas Roofus gets footy and impatient for the flight. Sandy calmly stands there while I secure GPS and remove her jesses. She does not seem to have the same flare for pigeons, but this might change with time. I have been flying her on hard to catch, released pheasants and ducks. The only difference between these and wild birds, they don't know where they are when released. Sandy is relentless in the chase and willingly goes into cover. She chased one hen pheasant some 500 feet into deep woods before catching it. Sometime within the next week, I will hook up with my friend Dave and head down to Cape Cod for ducks in the cranberry bogs.

I've heard of falconers who prefer the snappy wing beat of a tiercel peregrine to the more deliberate beat of a female. I noticed a difference between my two gyrmados. But, when I checked GPS flight speed, I found that the female was chasing at the same, or a little faster speed than her brother. So, the jury is out, but I'm inclined to believe that my girl will be just as good a game hawk as her brother.

In the mews the birds are tied to adjacent perches. So far they don't seem too enamored with each other, but that could change. I have never flown a cast of falcons, so perhaps this will lead to something.

As previously mentioned, I have been doing this falconry thing for quite awhile. I've flown buteos, accipiters, and falcons. But, never any raptor as truly unique as a gyrmado. They are an amazing falcon, full of surprises and an absolute pleasure to be around.

- OBSERVATIONS BY STEVE BOWERS ON GYRMADOS

To understand my perspective on hunting upland game birds with the gyrmado, I feel I should start with a little background about myself and my falconry history thus far. I grew up in the Western United States, hunting upland game birds with a shotgun and a dog. I hunted mourning dove, blue (dusky) grouse, ruffed grouse, and ring-necked pheasant. My favorite upland game bird to pursue, however, was the chukar partridge. I could write an entire article on pursuing chukar partridge

through falconry (or how not to), but for this article, I think it's enough to say the main factor that has limited me from reaching this falconry goal is lack of access to quarry. Due mainly to personal life decisions, I was only able to get out to pursue chukars one day per week. During the rest of the week, my main game was rabbits (western cottontail and black-tailed jack). Harris's hawks were the species of raptor I had the most falconry success with over the years. I also flew red-tailed hawks, Cooper's hawks, one northern goshawk, and a handful of various falcons. All of the chukar partridge I've taken over the years were taken with Harris's hawks.

I felt I reached an apex (or enough of an apex for me) in Harris's hawk hunting when I took a cast of wild-trapped Harris's hawks, one male and one female, to North Dakota in October, taking three fully-feathered rooster ring-necked pheasants in one hunt. The following spring, I released those Harris's hawks back into the Arizona desert and began thinking about the next bird I'd fly in my attempt to take late-season chukar partridge. In the interim, I also moved to North Dakota to be closer to my parents and have better access to upland game birds on a daily basis. The move added the ability to deal with extremely cold temperatures to the list of attributes my next falconry bird would need. I still travel back to the Western U.S. to pursue chukar partridge each season in December and/or January.

Ultimately, the gyrmado was the species of bird I settled on. The gyrmado is a hybrid falcon – a cross between a male gyr falcon and a female aplomado falcon. The first gyrmado I got was a female. She flew at around 700 grams and wore the same-sized hood an average-sized female prairie falcon would wear. I only flew her for a partial season before she was killed by an eagle in December while pursuing chukar in the Western U.S. I really had only intended to fly one gyrmado, but when I considered all my options in the off-season, combined with the fact that I felt I had learned so much from that first one and could do a lot better a second time around, I finally decided to fly one again. I was late finalizing my decision and there were no females available by the time I was ready to put down my deposit, so I settled on a male. He flies at about 500 grams and wears the same-sized hood an average-sized tiercel prairie falcon would wear. I have indeed been

much more successful with the second bird than I was with the first. He has taken a variety of field birds in our first season together and essentially fed himself that way for two months, until around mid-October when an early cold snap drove the smaller field birds south. Things have been tougher for us since then. As for upland game birds, he has accounted for eight ring-necked pheasant (his last three taken around mid-October) and two grey partridge (both taken early in the season as their numbers are very low and I've been unable to find partridge slips for him since then).

Because of my history with Harris's hawks, that's the species I tend to compare the gyrmado to the most. In fact, it was my reason for choosing a gyrmado, as I felt they might be the falcon version of a Harris's hawk. In a lot of ways they are, and in a lot of ways they are not.

Sociability. The gyrmado is a very social and intelligent bird which bonds strongly to the falconer in a way that can only be compared to the Harris's hawk. Both of my birds quickly began making soft vocalizations when they would see me once training began. Both birds appeared to want to jump to me early in training just to be with me, rather than just wanting the food I was offering. Both birds very actively returned to me and searched for me when long flights would take them out of my sight. I describe my female gyrmado as the sweetest bird I've ever owned. Although I'm not exactly sure what I mean by that, I think that's saying something, considering I've flown Harris's hawks most of my falconry career. It was the similarity of the gyrmado in both sociability and intelligence that I feel got me in trouble with the first bird I trained, as I trained her just like I would a Harris's hawk. I'm not sure how to exactly describe the difference in how the sociability and intelligence of these two species is different, except to say that where it makes the Harris's hawk amazingly easy to train, it makes the gyrmado amazingly difficult. Where the HH is flexible, adjusting, and progressive, the gyrmado tends to be rigid, focused, and tunnel-visioned. I've wondered if it's the difference between the Harris's hawk being an opportunistic hunter and the gyrmado being an active hunter. The young Harris's hawk seems to be concerned about learning where to be to give itself the best chance of having the opportunity to catch game. The young gyrmado seems only to be

concerned with the series of events leading up to it eating food. Where an opportunity leading to a near miss seems to invigorate a Harris's hawk and will lead to the bird trying to put itself in the same situation again hoping for another chance, an opportunity leading to a near miss is simply a failure to a gyrmado. After two near misses, it will quickly avoid putting itself in the same situation and will likely refuse the next similar slip if it occurs.

However, if you simply feed the gyrmado after the near miss, it suddenly records the whole series of events as successful. The next time that same situation arises, it will likely throw itself in with full commitment BUT (and this is where they can be frustrating) it will also very likely simulate the exact same series of events that led to it eating the previous time, which means... missing the prey (on purpose?) and then returning to you to get the reward it got last time it almost caught something but didn't. If you do that twice, your gyrmado will now pursue game, almost catch it (the "almost" now definitely being on purpose), then return to you to eat. If you do it again, she'll likely jump off the fist on the next slip but immediately roll back and land on the glove, expecting to eat. She's learning what series of events lead to her eating. In this example, the series of events are: I am unhooded; prey flushes; I leave the glove; I chase the prey; I come back to the glove; I eat. If you keep rewarding her, she'll likely digress from the game chasing part, chasing less and less each slip. Eventually she'll digress even more and try this shortcut: I am unhooded; I leave the glove (before prey is even flushed); I come back to the glove; I expect to eat. See how smart she is? She figured out that leaving the glove and then coming back is what leads to her eating. Chasing prey was an unnecessary step, so she cut it right out! It's in this regard that the gyrmado's sociability and intelligence work against you.

They're absolutely amazing in the takeaway lessons they learn from a series of events that leads to them eating food. With the Harris's hawks, I essentially took them out and hunted with them, the more time afield the better for everyone. Not so with the gyrmado. You have to be super-aware of what you want from them, and every outing in those first three months has to be exactly scripted to mold the bird to behave and hunt the way you'd like. Even then, you need to anticipate the

bird derailing itself and heading down a different path, requiring you to make near-constant subtle adjustments to keep them on track.

Ability. The first wild prey item my female gyrmado took was an adult mourning dove in molt. It was September 1 and it was the first mourning dove she had ever encountered. First the dove tried to outfly her by climbing as strong and steep as it could. The gyrmado outclimbed it. Then the dove took her to the ground, where it tried to outmaneuver her at low speeds in a stop-and-go tail-chase-style pursuit, which was definitely a mistake as my bird loved that pursuit style above all others. After about 30 yards of that, she took the dove. I feel like this sample flight is a great example of the potential the gyrmado has: the ability to close in on an adult dove in the open sky and force it out of the air, followed by the ability to match the dove turn for turn in low speed, stop-and-go, twisting/turning flight. They really can do everything! In my opinion, the gyrmado is as fast, and probably faster, off the fist than any Harris's hawk I've flown. Certainly, my female was. I'm not as sure about my male, as he doesn't rely on high speed to catch game as much as he relies on being in very good position on the reflush. And as for top speed, I know gyrmados have been recorded at 65 MPH in level flight while chasing pigeons in stockyards. Again, I don't think my birds have shown this top speed because our flights are flush/reflush-style flights that are more about position than high speed. In stop-and-go flights, the gyrmado matches and exceeds the ability of the Harris's hawk. When I took my female west to hunt chukars, she started chasing western cottontails. She was more goshawk-like than any of my Harris's hawks ever were. I've only flown one goshawk for a short period of time, but in my opinion, the gyrmado flight style and ability in the first 30 yards is comparable to a goshawk (it exceeds the ability of a Harris's hawk, anyway). After 30 yards, the sky's the limit, of course.

As with their other qualities, their ability can be a liability. Owls are a huge problem here in North Dakota. I've had so many close calls with great horned owls coming in on my gyrmado after a long flight that it's difficult to count them. In fact, I'd say more often than not, when my gyrmado has put prey in at 1500 or more feet away from me, there has been an owl within 20 yards of my bird when I've

arrived on the scene. Luckily, most upland game bird flights don't go as far as pigeon or dove flights, and the game bird can usually avoid the gyrmado when putting in, so my birds haven't been on kills when the owls arrived (although I've had many close calls). Pigeons, on the other hand, are not so good at that, and for that reason, I choose not to fly my gyrmado on pigeons or doves. Other falconers fly this quarry at stockyards and I think that might represent the apex of gyrmado flights, but the pigeons at stockyards do not generally want to leave the area and so the flights tend to remain close. Out in the open country where I am, flights are likely to go miles and result in a kill in some type of cover where the falcon would be very susceptible to owls or other larger raptors.

Prey options. I feel like the gyrmado is capable of taking about any prey in any flight style you might want. However, as I stated earlier, the gyrmado is very tunnel-visioned, and once you select a prey base and flight style, you might limit your potential for different quarry and flight styles. My experience is limited to two gyrmados, both in their first year, so maybe with time they'd become more versatile. However, in my opinion, there are two hunting styles/prey bases that are optimal for the gyrmado in falconry. First would be flying pigeons and doves at a stockyard. These types of flights have the potential to bring the most out of the gyrmado. The flights can be long and fast, with multiple flights in succession, but still remain close most of the time. I've heard of one gyrmado flying over ten miles at 50+ MPH the entire time, chasing pigeons within sight of the falconer nearly the entire time, only to have the flight end in a kill very close to the falconer. The second style/prey base would be flush/reflush scenarios hunting upland game birds. The gyrmado has the acceleration necessary to get right on flushing birds, combined with the tenacity to stick with them and force them to put in where they'd otherwise prefer not to. A timely reflush then leads to a similar second (or third) flight, but this time the gyrmado has the advantage, as the upland game bird is not built for multiple explosive flights out of cover. The gyrmado has the maneuverability and willingness to drop into cover and chase down prey on foot once the game bird has been gassed out a little bit or forced into less than ideal cover. A lot of field birds fall into this category, too, as they prefer to drop into cover when pressed. One oth-



PHOTO: STEVE BOWERS

er potential quarry would be cottontail rabbits. I was blown away by the flights my female had on them at the end of her career. I felt like I was flying a goshawk in those flights, as she'd close on those rabbits so quickly and then pepper them with shot after shot, seemingly not losing any speed in the process. For rabbits (especially eastern cottontail), I think the larger size of a female would be advantageous and perhaps necessary late in the season.

Vices. Before I got my first gyrmado, I had read they were prone to carry and were also difficult to hood. Both gymrados I've trained showed qualities I feel could lead to an issue with carrying. In fact, in my whole falconry career, I've never had a bird that I felt naturally wanted to carry other than my two gymrados. I think it's a real concern. However, having said that, neither of my birds ever carried. I trained both my birds to leave the kill to eat on the fist. As I previously stated, the gyrmado is a bird of habit, especially in regard to the series of events that lead up to eating. Both of my birds have voluntarily left kills and flown to me to eat off the fist. With my female, I even felt it was a problem (her leaving kills so quickly to rejoin me on the fist), so when training my male, I've waited until he has finished the head before trading him off. My female began to kill prey and then leave it uneaten to come find me so she could eat on the fist before I had even found her. This is another example of how tunnel-visioned the gyrmado can be in regard to the series of events that lead to eating. When small, sparrow-sized prey is taken (gyrmados can be very effective on small quarry if you encourage it), I allow the bird to eat it while I sit nearby with the rest of their meal waiting. As soon as they're done with the small meal,

they jump to the glove to take the bulk of their meal on the fist. This technique has led to cases where my gymrados have carried small prey items back to me to eat at my feet, or simply dropped small kills to return to the fist to eat their full meal.

I also agree the gyrmado has traits that could lead to difficulty in hooding. I chose not to hood my Harris's hawks because I felt it was so very, very unnecessary. I definitely feel the gyrmado should be hooded (another way they're different than a Harris's hawk). My female was the best hooding falcon I've ever owned. My male is good, but he does have a little routine he likes to go through before hooding that makes it appear he's a difficult falcon to hood, when in fact it's just his routine. The gyrmado is longer than other large falcons, with longer legs and a longer tail and neck. They have much more agile necks and heads and are agile on the fist or in a bait. I think these are the reasons they have a reputation for being potentially difficult to hood. Much like an accipiter (or aplomado falcon), if they don't want you to get the hood on, they can prevent you from doing it. Therefore, when hooding these falcons, you want a training method where the falcon accepts the hood (chooses to be hooded), otherwise you won't get the hood on.

The last vice I'll touch on is more of a quality that can have unintended negative side effects. It's also another obvious difference between the gyrmado and the Harris's hawk. The gyrmado can, if it chooses to, up and fly ten miles away in the blink of an eye. My female did it to me twice, and I didn't get her back alive the second time. My male hasn't done it to me yet, but he's certainly physically capable of it. You'll likely be flying the gyrmado primarily as a direct pursuit falcon, and so by definition, many flights will likely go out of sight to one degree or another, attracting a lot of attention from owls and other larger raptors in the process. For these reasons, I strongly suggest two specific transmitters when flying your gyrmado. For the primary transmitter, I suggest one of the new GPS models. This transmitter will allow you to see their exact speed and position in real time on your smartphone. It's so useful to quickly relocate a falcon that has flown prey out of sight, and it's so important to get back to these falcons as quickly as possible after the flight, before owls or other large raptors that have been attracted by the flight close in and pinpoint your bird. I've had

many close calls where I feel another 1-10 minutes might have meant the difference in my bird coming home alive or not. The GPS transmitter gives you those extra minutes as you can go right to your bird without triangulating readings (you can also see if your bird is still flying or has landed, which can save you a lot of time and effort). The GPS transmitter also allows you to watch the flight after it leaves your sight. This is not only interesting but can also be useful in seeing where the prey likely put in, allowing you to produce a reflush if your gyrmado leaves it and returns to you.

The maps are incredibly accurate satellite images, and you can see bushes and streams and buildings and stands of trees – it's pretty amazing! Honestly, I'd hesitate to even fly a gyrmado without one now. At the same time, I would never fly a bird with just the GPS model transmitter. I've had scenarios where I couldn't get the GPS signal from the transmitter using the mobile antenna at as little as 800 feet (usually when the bird has chased prey to a ravine or other ground sitting lower than the ground I'm on). That transmitter also emits a ping like a regular transmitter that you can pick up with a regular receiver, and that seems to carry a lot better than the GPS signal. However, in my experience, it isn't as effective at long range, and the battery doesn't last nearly as long. Therefore, for the second transmitter I prefer a regular high-powered one that I'm comfortable with getting a signal from at least ten miles and with a battery that will go for three or more days. Between the two transmitters, you'll be able to quickly reconnect to your bird after a flight before an owl does, as well as track the bird over several days over tens of miles if it should come to that for any reason.

Overview. When I chose to fly a gyrmado, I did so hoping I would get the falcon version of a Harris's hawk: a bird with the keeping and handling ease of a Harris's hawk, both at home and in the field, with a similar off-the-fist direct pursuit hunting style, but more of an active hunter of avian prey rather than the opportunistic hunter of avian prey the Harris's hawk is in most falconry situations. In my opinion, the gyrmado is a great choice of raptor if you're looking for goshawk-style flights without having to deal with a goshawk at home or in the field. I'm not sure they can match a goshawk in the first 20 yards, but they'd quickly overtake a gos after that and still be going long after the goshawk

has given up the flight. They're charming falcons, easy keepers at home, and accepting of other people and dogs without problems. In my experience, they're easy birds to handle, although they're not easy birds to train as their intelligence and sociability are applied in ways that work against you and your goals for them. My advice to anyone considering flying a gyrmado would be to contact someone who has flown one before and listen to the advice they give you. In addition, be very cognizant of the quarry you want to fly and the style you want to fly it in, and make every effort, especially in those first three months, to gear every interaction toward rewarding and encouraging both the desired quarry and the flight style. If you can get through the first three months, keeping the bird focused and developed for the type of quarry and flight style you prefer, it will really settle into being a capable, loyal, dependable, and very enjoyable mid-sized falcon.



PHOTO: STEVE BOWERS