

**THE
1996**

JOURNAL



**NORTH AMERICAN
FALCONERS'
ASSOCIATION**

Volume 35

IN SEARCH OF l'ALETHE

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This article is a condensed rewrite of the original, "l'Alethe Revisited," which appeared in the December 1995 issue of "Mewsletter", the publication of the Washington Falconers Association. To save space, most of the citations within the text and numerous passages were removed. What remains is the skeleton of my contention that the mystery bird of Louis XIII's court was actually the aplomado falcon. For a more in-depth look at this argument, please see the original article or contact me personally.

During the time of Shakespeare a new bird from the New World came upon the falconry scene in Spain, Portugal and France. It was known to courtiers of Henry IV and Louis XIII as the Alethe - probably pronounced "Alette" - and to the Spanish as the Aletto. Alethes, prized as "high-mettled" partridge hawks, were snapped up as soon as they arrived on the docks for 300 ecus apiece. At that time an ecu d'or was a quarter-sized gold coin. Imagine a purse sack loaded with 300 solid gold coins; a handsome price in any age!

In 1955 the British falconer, William Ruttledge, speculated on l'Alethe's identity. From Ruttledge we learned that l'Alethe was exported to Europe from South America, and in his estimation, was most likely the orange-breasted falcon (*Falco deiroleucus*). However, physical descriptions more resembled the aplomado falcon (*Falco femoralis*), a fact Ruttledge acknowledged but discarded in his belief that the aplomado was not worthy as the "high-mettled" Alethe. His article was followed up in 1986 by Jose Antonio Aguilar Rivera, who contended that "los Aletos" had been various raptors in the genus *Micrastur* (the forest falcons), and, in particular, *M. semitorquatus*, the collared forest falcon.

Sixteen years ago I became fascinated with the debate and over time became convinced that descriptions of the "high-mettled" Alethe do apply to aplomados and that it was they - not the orange-breasted or the collared forest falcon - that were exported to Europe during the post conquest era and treasured by European nobility as partridge hawks second to none. The following was constructed to compare the physical/behavioral descriptions of the original Alethe to physical/behavioral characteristics of the orange-breasted, the aplomado, and collared forest falcon.

Three individuals - Charles d'Arcussia, the French falconer, Fernandez Ferriera, the Portuguese falconer; and Philip Henriques, a Portuguese traveler in the New World - provided our original sources of information.

D'Arcussia was a French country gentleman of "modest standing" who frequented the court of

Louis XIII to visit his "most magnificent stud of hawks in Paris." Louis had his mews organized in teams of men, birds and dogs specifically assigned for various flights. For heron flights he assigned fifteen men, four greyhounds, and twelve falcons. He also had a large team for kite hawking, and another for crows. D'Arcussia, himself, was a dedicated partridge hawk and went so far as to gather wild *Perdix* eggs to put under hens in order to have birds with which to train his falcons. D'Arcussia himself employed, or saw used, peregrines, sakers, lanners, alphanets (a type of lanner), goshawks, sparrowhawks, and Alethes. He is our most prominent source as d'Arcussia is the only writer who actually saw game taken with trained Alethes.

Ferriera was presumably Portuguese, presumably a falconer, and is quoted as having seen Alethes up close but apparently did not see one fly at game. Shipwrecked in Pernambuco (a captainate of Brazil; then Portuguese territory.) in 1605, Phillipe Butaca Henriques, a friend of Ferriera, claimed to have seen wild Alethes while waiting there for passage out.

Huber, the artist who provided the only graphic depiction of the Alethe, may have drawn from life, description, or recall. There is no documentation as to his source.

Enter now the "armchair quarterbacks." They are 1) Schlegel and Wulverhorst - and later Belvallette - who believed the Alethe to be *Harpagus bidentatus* (Belvallette's *Falco bidentatus*), a form of cuckoo-falcon; 2) T. A. M. Jack, a British falconer who translated d'Arcussia's writings on partridge hawking with Alethes and then questioned the identification of the Alethe as a cuckoo-falcon; 3) William Ruttledge, a British falconer and one time editor of *The Falconer*, who stated his own belief that the Alethe was the orange-breasted falcon; 4) Jose Antonio Aguilar Rivera, who felt that "los Aletos" were forest falcons in the genus *Micrastur*, primarily the collared forest falcon; and 5) this writer, who firmly believes that the aplomado falcon was, always has been, and always will be, the genuine Alethe.

The following is Jack's translation of d'Arcussia. The brackets are Jack's, the parentheses are mine: "For several years there has been another sort [of hawk] known; that is the Alethe. They are now highly thought of, as much because they are rare as for their "gaillardise" [literally in modern French jollity or spriteliness]. The first one I saw was at Ferrara, thirty-eight years ago [i.e. about 1590], which belonged to His Highness (in 1590 the king of France was Henry IV; Goubert): and on the same occasion, when I was passing through Turin, I saw two more belonging to the Late Duke of Savoy. The



(left)
Illus. #1 courtesy
of Harry McElroy



(right)
Illus. #2 courtesy
of Robert Berry

Illustration #1 clearly demonstrates that the size of a female aplomado is "almost that of a tiercel peregrine" as was d'Arcussia's Alethe. Also, note the "pale orange" front of the aplomado (again as per d'Arcussia) and compare this to the deeper rufous tone of the orange-breasted falcon in illustration #2. Unfortunately, no publishable illustration of *M. semitorquatus* was available to include in this article.



#3



#4



#5

Illustration #3 displays the aplomado's "thin legs and pounces" per Ferreira's Alethe, as well as the suggestion of d'Arcussia's crescent-shaped band "below the belly and toward the thighs." Illustration #5 shows the relatively peregrine-like dorsal plumage of the aplomado as per d'Arcussia's Alethe, as well as the long wings and the supraorbital band of light colored feathers nearly encircling the head as per Ferreira (both photos courtesy Harry McElroy). Huber's sketch (illustration #4) is inserted for comparison.

present Queen (Marie de Medici, Louis XIII's mother), when she was visiting Marseilles, had one brought to her, which several people no doubt saw, and which flew partridges very well... "Their size is almost that of a peregrine tiercel, and their plumage on the back is just the same. Their front is a pale orange, rather like a parrot, with a brown crescent like a horseshoe at the bottom toward the thighs."

Compare the above with Ferriera's description. Again, the brackets are Jack's and parentheses mine: "They are small and their plumage is different from that of other hawks. Part of the breast, thighs and belly is covered with reddish feathers, and their crop is not spotted at all; the red colour is about the same as a Kite's. The head is almost entirely encircled by a band of the same color. Under the wings, with some parts of white, are grey feathers with cross spottings, very like [?] a falcon's plumage (here he may be using the term falcon in the traditional sense, meaning female peregrine). Their wings are long, the tail well proportioned to their body, the legs are pretty thin and the pounces long."

Ruttledge dispensed the notion that the Alethe was a cuckoo-falcon. To summarize his main points, *H. bidentatus* is a South American raptor little resembling a true falcon; but, d'Arcussia includes the Alethe only in his section on longwings. *H. bidentatus* also lacks the dark crescent shaped transverse band across the belly, key to the Alethe. Ruttledge examined skins of *bidentatus* and described them as having short wings and short, weak toes; but of the Alethe, Ferriera says, "Their wings are long...the legs are pretty thin and the pounces long."

This brings us to the notion that the Alethe was either the orange-breasted or the aplomado. Ruttledge introduces this view by saying: "Having, I hope, demonstrated that neither did Schlegel and Wulverhorst nor Belvallette's authority identify the Alethe correctly, we go back to d'Arcussia and Ferriera, from whose descriptions the salient points emerge that the Alethe was found in Brazil, was a high-mettled bird that probably resembled a peregrine tiercel, and had an orange-coloured mail with a dark band across it...One is, in fact, left with three true falcons all of which have an orange mail with a dark transverse band. One of these, the White-throated Batfalcon (*Falco albigularis* Daudin) [now classified as *F. ruficularis*], was further eliminated as being too small, so that there remained the aplomado falcon (*F. fusco-caerulescens* Vieillot) and the orange-breasted falcon (*F. deiroleucus* Temminck)."

We must also consider Rivera's claim that "los Aletos" were *micrasturs*, or forest falcons. Unlike *H. bidentatus*, *M. semitorquatus* seemed compelling. The collared forest falcon is a largely unknown raptor of forest regions. It is rapacious, taking birds as large as toucans, chachalacas, and even the oscillated turkey. In one of its three color morphs it has dark dorsal plumage, rufous ventral coloration, and its head is

"collared" by a band of light colored feathers.

Ruttledge contended that the Alethe's behavior of pursuing quarry into cover led early armchair quarterbacks to assume that the Alethe was accipitrine. This was evident in written speculations which referred to the Alethe as the "goshawk of the Azores." Belvallette even described the Alethe as a bird with light colored irises, though no such mention was made by any original source. Thus the double-toothed kite was set forth as the first candidate.

When Ruttledge pointed out this error he dismissed similar birds without exploring other species. He embraced Jack's reasoning that since the genuine Alethe was only mentioned in the "Premier Partie" of d'Arcussia's writings - a section devoted entirely to longwings - and not mentioned in d'Arcussia's discussion of accipiters at all; it was, therefore, a true falcon making *micrasturs* unlikely candidates. However, given Rivera, it became necessary here to include the collared forest falcon as a candidate for the Alethe.

Ruttledge did admit that Ferriera described the aplomado. However, he maintained the "real" Alethe was the bird d'Arcussia described and suggested perhaps that "slack-mettled" aplomados were being foisted off as look-a-like "high-mettled" orange-breasted. So it became critical to analyze the physical features of d'Arcussia's "genuine" Alethe in detail. Ruttledge favored the orange-breasted because he concluded that it more closely resembled the peregrine and believed that d'Arcussia's description was designed to draw that comparison. However, except for the size being "almost that of a tiercel peregrine" and the plumage on the back being "just the same," d'Arcussia wrote no other comparison between the Alethe and the peregrine.

Both female aplomados and female orange-breasted are tiercel-peregrine-sized birds. Ventral coloration, as described by d'Arcussia, favored the aplomado. Orange-breasted falcons have no crescent-shaped band near their flanks, and their orange color is deep compared to the aplomado's which could be accurately described as being "pale orange." Also, the North American subspecies of the aplomado, *F. a. septentrionalis*, is described as being bluish grey above and looks peregrine-like on back. The aplomado still remains top candidate by virtue of all physical descriptions offered by d'Arcussia as well as Ferriera.

Most puzzling is Huber's sketch. Rendered in 1784 - a century and a half past the time of d'Arcussia - this drawing appeared in the section on l'Alethe in Belvallette's *Traite' de Fauconnerie*. The sketch depicted a falcon, but did not entirely resemble either aplomado or orange-breasted. However, the head band and thin malar was aplomado-like, and Huber supplied the requisite upside-down horseshoe on the lower abdomen, though thin and stylized compared to that of a living aplomado. Adding to the confusion was the caption which stated l'Alethe

is a falcon "de Acores" (the Azore Islands). According to Cade, no falcon species on the Azores would meet the description of the Alethe. Ruttledge mentioned that this may have been a misinterpretation of d'Arcussia's phrase "... the newly discovered Islands to the West".

The collared forest falcon displayed no crescent shaped brown band. The adult of the red morph was uniformly colored ventrally with no markings of any kind, and immature plumage was highly marked, breast to vent, with thin horizontal cross barrings which could not have

gone unmentioned by d'Arcussia. On the other hand, the aplomado wore a band of dark feathers curving across the belly and down toward the thighs. Dorsal plumage of the collared forest falcon was black or chocolate brown, and not much like a peregrine's.

Ferriera wrote, "The head is almost entirely encircled by a band of feathers of the same colour (as the breast)." The aplomado falcon's supraorbital band was often broken and incomplete in front and in back (see illustrations #1 and #5;).

In contrast, the collar of the micrastur, which could also be said to encircle its head, was distinctly complete, no "almost" about it. Ferriera's comment that the Alethe had long wings also helped differentiate. The micrastur had relatively short, rounded wings accentuated by an extremely long tail. The longish tail of the aplomado gave it an appearance of having shorter wings than other *Falco* genus birds, but compared to *Micrastur*, the aplomado can be said to have long wings as per Ferriera.

The most important detail by Ferriera was the appearance of the wing undersurface. Under the wings, with some parts of white, are grey feathers with cross spottings, very like [?] a falcon's plumage. The underwing of the collared forest falcon (illustrated on pages 373 and 374 of Grossman and Handet's large volume) was patterned like an accipiter's or buteo's with light tones being contrasted by a series of thin dark horizontal bars instead of the distinctive "cross spottings" of a falcon. The aplomado's under wing was clearly similar to a peregrine's and most other *Falco* genus species. The adult aplomado, alone, had the correct combination of an unspotted breast coupled with an under wing having parts of white and falcon-like cross spottings.

Huber's sketch clearly represented a long-wing with a head pattern like an aplomado so that it can be said in 1784 Huber had knowledge of an aplomado-like bird which he believed to be the Alethe; and, that he clearly was not thinking of a

micrastur-like raptor at all.

Ruttledge's assertion that the "genuine high-mettled" Alethe was the orange-breasted falcon was more likely based on dynamics. He seemed convinced that the Alethe was peregrine-like, not because d'Arcussia described peregrine-like behavior but because the bird was described as "high mettled" and to Ruttledge this must have screamed peregrine.

Yet, read the description of d'Arcussia's Alethe on game: "They are high-mettled after their quarry, which is properly the partridge. They are thrown off [on les iette do poing' -this means he was thinking of them as long-winged hawks flown from the fist...] They usually fly low and straight, relying on their speed. They block (perch) in trees and of their nature do not continue flying for long. They will not fly in company with other hawks and one never sees an eyess...They are called Alethes, a Greek word meaning fullblooded, or valiant, and indeed they are the most deadly birds that fly partridges, killing them inside covert like a goshawk and so surely that it will never be the hawk's mistake if you lose her." The description is one of a high-mettled falcon, but does not seem very peregrine-like.

Later, d'Arcussia added, "...for partridges in winter..Alethes are excellent, but when they have taken their partridge they hide themselves, which is extremely annoying. Goshawks do the same, but one finds them much more easily as they are larger birds." Again, d'Arcussia compared Alethe behavior not with the peregrine but the goshawk.

The Alethe as a wild bird was described to Ferriera by Phillippe Butaca Henriques. "He was there for thirty days and during that time he saw these birds all along the coast. They were larger than Sparrowhawks and smaller than falcons (again, this must refer to the female peregrine); he noticed that they were capable of such swift flight that the eye could not follow them and appreciate all their movements. He often saw them take parrots and other birds, going after them like mad, chasing them with tremendous dash, penetrating with them into the thickest parts of the trees and having neither rest nor peace until they had something between their petty singles." This description again highlighted accipiter-like hunting tactics.

Ferriera said, "They are flown at partridge and are so keen to kill them that they go into hedges with them." Another raised eyebrow to peregrine-like behavior.

Whatever the Alethe was, it was not a bird that resembled the peregrine in hunting habits. The orange-breasted, however, is. Dr. Cade agreed that the orange-breasted falcon is not oriented toward ground hunting, and would be less likely to pursue quarry to cover than even a peregrine, no less an aplomado.

And the aplomado? Ruttledge's sources disparaged them. Sclater & Hudson (1889, p. 69) say of (the aplomado) that "compared with a

"...a very special kind of goshawk ... since it left the fist like a shortwing, flew like a rameur (i.e. longwing; ...) and with very rapid wingbeats; one may regard l'Alethe as holding a position intermediate between the falcons and the sparrowhawks..."

Peregrine it has a very poor spirit. It never boldly attacks any bird except the smallest species". Swann & Wetmore (op. cit.), quoting Allen Brooks (Auk, 1933, pp. 61-62) "indicate that characteristically it is attracted to prairie fires taking the large green locusts that are driven into flight." Ruttledge adds, "It should be noted that the birds described by Ferreria, which can now be identified on head markings and leg characters ... as the slack-mettled (Aplomado), were not seen by him on the wing, let alone in flights on quarry."

Now we're getting somewhere. Ruttledge acknowledged that Ferreria described the aplomado falcon when describing the Alethe; but, because Ferreria did not witness the Alethe at game, Ruttledge rejected Ferreria's Alethe as the "genuine high-mettled Alethe" of d'Arcussia on the basis of its so-called "slack-mettled" nature. The pivotal question boils down to this, is the aplomado "slack-mettled" or "high-mettled"?

McElroy concluded that the aplomado's hunting style fit somewhere between that of a typical falcon and that of an accipiter, thus the title of his Hawk Chalk article "A Falcon for the Bush" (August 1987). He noted: "Like an Accipiter or Parabuteo, she frequently curves up and over to slam into the prey, and unfortunately, the ground at speed. The dust flies, but we hope, not her feathers. After collisions with the ground, bush or tree canopies, we have seen her stunned and almost unable to fly; yet her Kamikaze attacks continue...She shows persistence; once, selecting a bird to pursue, she locks in, entering a near demonic rage, using speed, endurance and footing in a combination of abilities not easily matched."

Compare to Henriques: "He often saw them take parrots and other birds, going after them like mad, chasing them with tremendous dash, penetrating with them into the thickest parts of the trees and having neither rest nor peace until they had something between their petty singles."

Cade listed parrots, as well as doves, pigeons, and snipe as prey species taken by aplomados in direct flight. Peregrine Fund observations reported aplomado falcons regularly returning to eyries to feed their young on night hawks and similar sized birds captured in fair flight. McElroy's female aplomados would crash into cover or enter burrows in pursuit of small birds, maneuvering inside "like a ferret."

Palmer (1988) stated, "The Aplomado is extremely swift in level flight, being capable of outflying such species as Mourning Doves, Rock Doves, and Killdeer." He also quoted a study by Hector which showed that 97% of the aplomado's estimated prey biomass was comprised of birds including white-winged doves, great-tailed grackles, groove billed anis, and yellow-billed cuckoos, and even the eastern chachalaca (*Ortalisvetula*), a tree dwelling gallinaceous bird somewhat larger than a female aplomado.

In addition to partridge, the Alethe was known to take "butors" (Bitterns), and "pies"

(magpies). McElroy shared that his falconer friend from Mexico, Rafael de Valle, regularly took shore birds, including egrets, with his female aplomado's. He also stated that in his opinion magpies were well within the capabilities of the female aplomado.

Brown and Amadon noted that the aplomado was, "Said to be easily tamed and used in Chile to hunt tinamous." Bent cited Colonel Grayson (Lawrence, 1874) on the aplomado's hunting behavior: "In its habits I am reminded of the Sharp-shinned hawk (*A. fuscus*) [now classified as *A. striatus*] in its stealthy manner of hunting for its prey beneath the thick foliage of woods, flying in near the ground, or perching...from whence it watched, catlike, for quail, ground doves, etc. It, however, may be seen at other times, falcon-like, boldly pursuing its prey in the open country, and the smaller species of ducks, as well as pigeons, plovers and sandpipers, are attacked and captured on the wing by these swift flying little falcons."

We now see an aplomado of far higher mettle than Ruttledge's sources allowed; and we again glimpse the combination of falcon/accipiter-like qualities gracing both modern aplomado and Alethe-of-old. This writer believes that had Ruttledge access to recent data his conclusion would simply have been that the Alethe was the aplomado.

The habits of the collared forest falcon were not well documented, but apparently it hunts in heavily forested habitats and secures a living by pursuing its prey into deep cover often scrambling through the branches on its long shanks much like a chachalaca. Though taxinomically included in the family Falconidae, it looks and behaves much like an accipiter.

McElroy raised the issue of the Alethe's ability on partridge. Partridge possess red pectoral muscles rather than white. This red tissue is characteristic of gallinaceous birds capable of enduring flight. When stooped on "huns" will often fly wingtips to ground to avoid a hit and will "bail out" into cover if available. If pursued by a hawk or an inexperienced falcon, however, they will flee by gaining altitude and putting significant distance between themselves and pursuit. To have been an efficient partridge killer off the fist the Alethe must have possessed great speed and substantial endurance. In personal communications, McElroy related an incident in which he timed the aerial flight of an aplomado pursuing quarry which lasted a full twelve minutes and he stated that the aplomados were difficult to fatigue in fair flight possessing the right combination of speed and endurance, the aplomado remained a prime candidate as the Alethe.

On the other hand, in McElroy's opinion, the micrastur, a deep forest bird, would not be capable of the long distance pursuits required to consistently take partridge; in fact, he stated that the case was, "just the opposite." Ap Evans stated that his collared forest falcon made long high speed flights at times, but these were always

downhill gliding forays ending up on farmyard fowl. He did not relate any instances where full power flight went the distance necessary to consistently catch wild partridge. Amadon and Brown described *M.semitorquatus* thusly: "A forest bird, partial to dense thickets, copses, and even impenetrable mangroves; it goes around rather than across forest clearings. A tame bird released in the open dashed into a burrow or a tussock for concealment. It usually stays at low levels and probably avoids tall forest with little undergrowth. Its slender body, long legs, and long tail enable it to thread through the thickest brush at great speed, alternately running with wings half spread or pressed to the side, according to cover, or flying. It flies through very small openings sometimes flipping sideways to do so... Sometimes it apparently runs on the ground like a Road-runner (*Geococcyx*) under thickets even when not hunting. It travels through taller trees by running along the limbs and jumping or fluttering from tree to tree. The tail is somewhat arched, which probably lessens abrasion." For the above bird to regularly fly down partridge across large tracts of open ground seemed improbable. That micrasturs could take partridge occasionally in the right circumstance was not questioned. That they could catch them with the frequency and efficiency of the Alethe was.

Aplomado training, according to McElroy, starts slowly but creates a strong bond. Today, in Mexico and South America, aplomados are being flown in fair numbers and with real success. Modern experiences with the collared forest falcon have been disappointing. The few that have been trained in recent history have proven extremely difficult, even by experienced falconers. Ap Evans writes, "Of vile temperament (Perthshire and Peru evidently have little in common) and most mean disposition, the hawk (a collared forest falcon), whom I named Itza, would frequently run after me through the long grass on leg's like a storks and jump on my back. Itza...was the most dreadful bird I ever took into partnership. Sent as a present from Peru for hare-hunting by a well known American falconer friend, it can only have been intended as a bad joke. It was a perfect lesson in not trying exotic foreign hawks without knowing their habits and hunting capabilities. Merciful release for both of us, in the form of a fit by Itza, did not come for over two long years."

In personal communications, McElroy said, "I have seen a few micrasturs and all were eyasses. Some were in the hands of skilled falconers (i.e. Rafael del Valle). No one has trained them to fly free to my knowledge. Most everyone in South America and Mexico describe them as "loco" and aggressive. I have never owned a forest falcon and repeat I have never seen one trained to even sit on the fist, much less fly free." Modern experiences with micrasturs have been with eyasses - by nature more aggressive than passagers - and the Alethe was known only as a passager. Even so, it is hard to imagine such a

difficult bird gaining real popularity amongst the European gentry.

A Falcon for the Bush became an ideal resource for objectively comparing the modern aplomado to the Alethe-of-old. In addition to similarities in hunting behavior, d'Arcussia stated that the Alethe is a bird not easily lost and McElroy equated the aplomado to the Harris' hawk in terms of staying close to the falconer. Despite its accipitrine behavior, d'Arcussia included the Alethe in his section on longwings, and McElroy said the aplomado hunts like an accipiter but flies like "an anorexic peregrine." D'Arcussia described the Alethe as high-mettled and fast, and McElroy described the aplomado as difficult to fatigue, tenacious, fast, and "...always flapping, flapping, flapping..." D'Arcussia extolled the virtues of the Alethe as a partridge hawk, and McElroy described the aplomado's prowess on quail, ground doves, and mourning doves.

McElroy also mentioned that in modern Peru the aplomado falcon is called perdillero, or "partridge hunter." It is interesting to note that the early Spaniards in Peru, whom Varner and Varner stated practiced falconry, referred to their bird dogs as perdiguera, which also translated to "partridge hunter." If the documented term for these setters employed for hawking in Peru circa the mid-to-late 1500's was perdiguera, it seems reasonable that the post-conquest Spaniards may have referred to the hawks they used with those setters as perdillero; the two terms being more loosely translated to, "partridge dog" and "partridge hawk." Thus the modern use of the name "perderillo" for the aplomado may have its roots in a post-Conquest past.

The last argument was based on biology. D'Arcussia specifically stated that "...one never sees an eyess." So it was safe to assume that Alethes were exclusively trapped rather than removed from eyries. Although it may have been possible to acquire eyass orange-breasted from natives, it is hard to imagine how the hawk traders of the sixteenth century could have regularly gotten their hands on passage or haggard orange-breasted falcons. According to Cade, while the orange-breasted falcon is not numerous today, it probably never was. It is extremely difficult to locate and does most of its hunting over the rainforest canopy. In personal communication he added, "the orange-breasted falcon is just too rare to have been seen often by Europeans in the New World." On the other hand McElroy related a letter from a friend writing from Peru in the 1950's in which he stated "(aplomados) are like kestrels to us." McElroy, himself, saw sixteen aplomados in one day in Peru. Their open habits and ground orientation would have made them an easy bird to locate and trap for the hawk merchants of old, their rarity in Europe being due to difficulties in transport - 3,800 nautical miles between Pernambuco and Portugal.

One can always find jigsaw pieces which almost fit the puzzle. However, they require

force to fit, there is a small gap at the seams, and the colors do not quite match. An inner voice whispers, "Close, very close." Finally, a piece is drawn that falls into place with no resistance, there are no gaps, and the colors match perfectly. The inner voice speaks again, "Perfect fit."

According to Belvalette, the Alethe was "...a very special kind of Goshawk ... since it left the fist like a shortwing, flew like a rameur (i.e. longwing; Ruttledge) and with very rapid wingbeats; one may regard l'Alethe as holding a position intermediate between the falcons and the sparrowhawks..." The orange-breasted falcon is a high-mettled neo-tropical raptor; but, as a jigsaw piece in the puzzle of the Alethe, it doesn't quite fit. It's too falconine. The collared forest falcon, also worthy, requires too much explanation - the missing crescent shaped band, the hawklike wing, questionable ability in open terrain, and its difficulty in training. It's just too accipitrine. So we come to rest with the aplomado falcon whose size, plumage, behavior, and ability fits our puzzle smoothly. On every point the aplomado, and only the aplomado, makes a perfect fit.

Four hundred years ago falconers in Spain, Portugal and France were enchanted by a mystery bird, a small colorful falcon imported from the New World which flew with reckless dash and proved capable of high sport on partridge. Shrouded by a distant past, poor record keeping, and the general ignorance of the times, the chapter of the Alethe-of-old concluded with the decline of medieval falconry. If the Alethe was the aplomado, a new view may be cast upon it as a potential bird for modern falconry. Though presently listed as endangered in the U.S., captive breeding and reintroduction efforts of *F. femoralis* are underway, headquartered at the Peregrine Fund in Boise. Hopefully, some day, in time, become available to falconers. If they do, the insights gained by our predecessors may provide keys to further unlock the potential of the aplomado falcon in our own time, and thus begin the chapter of the modern Alethe.

Acknowledgements

The following individuals contributed in significant ways to the development of this article: Robert Bonner and Danny Pike (technical), Brenda Nelson (editing); Harry McElroy (information, photographic contributions, and feedback); Kent Carnic (research material and feedback); Dr. Tom Cade (information and feedback); Bob Berry (photographic contribution and feedback); Lois Gephart (French to English translation of portions of Belvalette)

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