

SAVE OUR SPORT

A more detailed report on "The Eye" sent in by Stan Ferguson.

Goodbye To Trouble...

Happy to read Ron Davis' letter in BHW of 1st October, that he had discovered a method of repelling hawks by the use of a "pigeon dressing". In the January 1993 edition of the "Gazette" I mentioned the idea put forward by Barry Mickelthwaite of Dewsbury, who suggested painting a red and yellow "eye" on a pigeon's wings, or the shoulders of a couple of birds to see the hawk's reactions. I was intrigued by Ron's statement that he will "market the kit".

Birds of prey have cost us 70% of our membership in the west country in the last 20 years, and anything designed to repel hawks (whatever his system is) should be available to the Fancy at a reasonable cost, and I know to my experience that paints and dyes are expensive items. Without the DAP Fund backing me I'd probably have given up long ago!

What I did eventually (after much trial and error) was to paint a 2" circle of feather absolutely jet black (using silk paint, from Craft shops) surrounded by a bright yellow circle half an inch thick, and that circle surrounded by another - bright red - circle an inch thick, on to the opened wing and used a hair drier on low/medium setting to speed drying. It is a "fiddly" job, but well worth while. You need waterproof colours, like those used by grass and artificial flower sellers to dye pampas grass and dried stalks. I tried silk paint, water based lacquer and Nylon dyes, the silk paint is best. The paint is expensive, but it is very, very effective.

This then looks like the bright glaring eye of an owl, one each side on the bird's wings, and *it frightens the hell out of anything else flying*, even other pigeons if they get too close! If you do it with your own YBs from the earliest age they seem to accept it, but birds approaching the bunch with intent to join them will sheer off once they sport the "eye"! Who says they can't see colour?

So far it seems that one bird in a bunch is enough to keep the peregrine off, and I used a barless Mealie as my 'guinea-pig subject'. My losses to peregrines this year have been NIL since I started using the 'eye', and believe me, there are seven nesting pairs within a five mile radius of the loft. Last year I witnessed 17 lost to peregrines.

The 'eye' idea wasn't mine I repeat. It was suggested by Barry who reasoned that if Butterflies use the trick to avoid being eaten, why not pigeons?

Now, congratulating myself and the bright spark who thought up this idea, I just happened to mention it when speaking with that electronic genius, Richard Wylie of DAZER UK fame.

He told me that Dr Ian Inglis, now of the Rodent Division of the MAFF at Worplesdon, in Surrey, came up with the idea of painting an eye on a balloon to scare birds off crops. Nobody in Britain or Europe took him up on it, but the Japanese did and patented the idea. They've since sold over 3,000,000 of these "Terror Eyes" as they call them, and they work like magic!

Further, they now paint the propellers of all fan-driven aircraft so that when spinning they resemble great big eyes, and have been so successful in reducing bird strikes that the world is now copying them - and paying royalties for the idea too!

The balloon with a large glaring eye on it keeps the entire area free from birds, *all* birds, even really persistent ones like starlings. The eye painted on to a pigeon's feathers keeps away hawks, *all* hawks.

The eye colours used are important I have discovered, some are ignored, some are magic in effect. If they work nationwide as well as all out tests and trials of the last six months suggest they will, then *goodbye all problems with peregrines, goshawks, and sparrowhawks!*

Larger scale trials countrywide are necessary now in order to ascertain whether or not my success hasn't just been luck, so if other fanciers who are really badly troubled by aerial predators can contact me *now* and will trial some transfers I've had made, I'll take it from there. If we can cut losses right down, or out completely as I now feel sure we can, our troubles are over for good!

Dr Derek Ratcliffe

Has updated and revised (1993) his masterpiece "The Peregrine" and it is on sale at all good bookshops. A firm believer in the old principle "Know thine enemy" I bought a copy, and was interested in much of the data concerning the bird, and its weaknesses. (It costs 25 pound)

Dr Ratcliffe states that he knows of 1196 actual breeding nests in 1993, and he states as do most other experts on the bird - that if/when either a cock or hen falcon is killed, a replacement is to be found at the nesting site within a day or so, sometimes within mere hours. This reinforces my firm belief that the 'immature' or without-nesting-sites population of peregrines countrywide is at least as large as the "official" nesting population, and there are in fact firmly and officially over 5,000 peregrines at the very least, now corroborated by his evidence. He knows of no sites in Wiltshire, or Norfolk, but I do!

Dr Ratcliffe's comments on page 375 concerning the credibility of our "over the top" publicity do not escape attention, but then

S.O.S. Cont'd...

he's defending his idols, the peregrines, just as we're defending ours, the pigeons on which they feed.

Domestic pigeons form up to 80% of the diet of peregrines in some locations, yet nationwide the woodpigeon forms only up to 31% of that diet. By the way, he adds that if domestic pigeons were suddenly to become "unavailable" (i.e. locked up in the loft during winter) then lots of young peregrines would die. Think about it! A really bad week or two of rain, freezing cold and harsh weather could do these bandits enormous damage, if they had no nice fat pigeons to kill and eat. Lock 'em up lads, you won't hurt them, even after months let alone a few weeks.

Reaction!

To my comments on the "eye" I have painted on the shoulders of my pigeons to keep hawks off was fantastic. I had 20 letters inside 24 hours of the BHW's appearance. Another stack of letters on Monday and Tuesday and a steady flow of them ever since!

One lad sent a stamp, one sent an SAE, one Welsh gentleman sent a fiver for the Fund, yet asked for the transfers. Surprising too how few of those who wrote in had contributed to the DAP Fund in the past, not that that makes any difference to whether I help them or not, but those who had contributed and wrote in got first crack and the transfers I had available, which I think is "fair do's".

Fixative is a problem for the transfers at the moment, but as soon as we have found one that will stick the transfers for the life of the feather then the sooner they will be available to all.

* *

The Other Day...

Ron Davis partly unveiled his now quite famous "anti-hawk" system in a Fancy Press weekly. This is news that so many fanciers have been waiting for, and it isn't before time. Ron has developed a system of very discreetly marking the birds with a secret formula substance which apparently the hawks don't like the look of at all. This has been tested, apparently successfully, at two different locations, both lofts where the fancier has been on the verge of quitting the sport because of hawk problems.

Well if it fulfils expectations I say well done Ron. I know you have been working on this for two years, and although you say you are more interested in saving pigeons than in making money, you deserve to make a few quid in the process. If it works out long term you might not just save a few pigeons, you might save the sport.

(It will be interesting to see which of the two discoveries works best, Ron's (which is still secret) or my own which I published in full in the November issue of the "Gazette". They both work on the same principle I believe, of putting the hawk off his strike, mine by the hawk's natural fear of a bigger predator, Ron's by fear of an unknown. Let's hope they both succeed. The sport stands to benefit and that is the ultimate satisfaction. "Bilco").

STAN.

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TOSSING & LOSSES

Courtesy of Bill Wells, Editor The Australian Racing Pigeon

I thought I would put pen to paper in an effort to help the fancy. T.G.

1. Tossing conditions for country flyers.

When tossing birds, particularly youngsters, do not toss in windy weather because falcons utilise the wind by flying with it and against it to achieve incredible speeds. When about to attack falcons must achieve high altitudes in order to attain these same fast speeds but at the same time this gives the pigeon ample time to see them and the falcons cannot use a surprise attack. In windy weather Falcons don't have to climb to a high altitude, surprising and shocking the pigeon. Add to this falcons working in pairs and/or small groups, headwind, multiple attacks and in a race situation when the bird is tired, weary and hungry etc., it becomes a recipe for disaster. Then you begin to understand why 2 year olds throw in the towel. Unfortunately the numbers of Hawks and Falcons is much greater these days. I live on the outskirts of Melbourne and there was a time I could leave youngsters out on the landing board all day. Now that's impossible. Country flyers have got it tough, but if they toss on calm days it puts the falcons at a real disadvantage.

2. Losing Birds

A lot of flyers complain or fret over lost race birds. However this is a waste. It must be remembered that it is a step forward for your stockloft when you lose a bird, and don't lose another, why does one get lost when another returns? Each time you lose a bird the basket is electing what birds should be stocked. In reality one cock and one hen is all you need at the end of the racing season. Its their young that will carry your breeding. Where would we be if we didn't lose any? The task of selecting is aided by the loss of birds.

T.G.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

NOW OVERDUE

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