FALCONRY
A hunting art to unite Humankind.

4 000 years bridging cultural & political divides.

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Cover pictures from “Traité de Fauconnerie” by Schlegel and Wulverhorst (1845)
Falconry is the art of capturing wild quarry in its natural environment with a trained bird of prey, with or without the aid of a dog. It has been with us since before the time of the pyramids and has spread and developed until now it is practiced in over 80 countries.

Originally a way of obtaining food, falconry is today more identified with camaraderie and sharing than with a subsistence way of life. Falconers develop a spiritual bond with their birds; great commitment is required to train and handle and fly haws and falcons. In Europe falconry is usually transmitted from generation to generation as a cultural tradition by mentoring, by learning within families or by formal training in clubs. In Middle East and in Central Asia falconers still take their children to the desert to train and handle their bird, building up the same mutual trust.

Falconers from different backgrounds all share common values, traditions and practices in training and caring for birds, in the equipment used and in the bonding between the falconer and the bird. Falconry forms the basis of a wide cultural heritage, including clothes, food, music and song, poetry and dance, all sustained by the communities practicing it.
What is Falconry?
Falconry is the art of capturing wild quarry in its natural environment with a trained bird of prey, with or without the aid of a dog.
As all hunters are, so are we.

Hunting Tradition
The 20th century’s rejection of hunting was part of a cultural landscape where the space reserved for traditional values, virtues, passions and activities tended to shrink. In nature a predator hunting and killing its prey is praised as a thing of natural beauty. If a man trains the predator to do this in his company, modern cultural discourse condemns it as bloodthirsty. Rejecting hunting destroys those very activities that bring understanding of nature and positively shape identities friendships.
Community

It is an individualistic activity that also bears a strong sense of community. It has a spirit of independence for those who demand high standards for themselves and for those on whom they bestow their friendship, yet it has the power of creating a community across national boundaries and the boundaries of social class, ethnicity, ideology and differences in credo.

Living Tradition builds a community into which a human being can inscribe itself and from which it can draw a sense of individual existence. Falconry establishes such a community.

There is a surprising universalism attached to the down-to-earth activity of training a bird to hunt.
The bond a falcon has with the falconer is as fine as gossamer; it is almost spiritual.

Man is always in a hurry; this is not possible for the falconer. Training a falcon is a slow and solitary time when the falconer must strengthen the tenuous bond he has with his falcon; long hours of slowly gaining trust. It is neither fast nor easy. It is demanding. It is either complete perfection or complete failure.

For Medieval Man the falcon became a symbol that connoted tenderness and intimacy and falconry became related to spiritual and emotional dimensions of life. Falconry was part of the the courtly elites of both the Christian and the Moslem world; a, it became a cultural tradition joining east and west.

The decline of falconry would belittle human identity. Falconry is a state of mind that falconers want to pass on to future generations. They are not trying simply to transfer an archaic technique for acquiring meat.

The preservation of falconry is crucial not just to the benefit of a handful of hobbyists, but to the benefit of whole societies. It opens a door to universalism and cross-cultural contacts. The flight of the falcon opens horizons.
Poetry

Falconry books can be scientific works, ‘how-to-do’ manuals, photographic records or collections of anecdotes. They are works of philosophy, always poetic, even the modern ones.

The language of falconers is romantic, many words come from Norman French or early Arabic – creance, bowse, cast, jess, to hood, to lure to bate, mews, full crop. Many have even passed into day-to-day language of those who may know nothing of falconry.

In 15th century Europe falconry became a source of poetic inspiration. In Germany the magnificently illuminated manuscript Codex Manesse is a collection of courtly love poetry with miniatures Commemorating knights and kings, many shown with falcons and hawks during hunting expeditions and romantic moments. Besides books written for falconers, much poetry in English, French, Persian, Chinese, Japanese and Arabic is littered with falconry metaphors and they have been much used in mainstream literature. In the Gulf there is still a very strong tradition of recitation of falconry poems.

Diplomacy

There is no ideological gap, no difference of credo dividing people that falconry cannot put back together again. In all these domains falcons can offer a great and surprising lesson of being truly human.

In 783 the Byzantine Empress Irene offered an exquisite falconry manuscript by Archigenes of Apamea to establish a truth with the Muslim army. Already falconry was an important common point of interest, able to redirect the attention of both sides of a conflict to a loftier sphere, bringing truce.

Birds, falconry artefacts and literature have been widely used in the aftermath of conflict to re-establish order. Falconry and diplomacy went closely together all through the medieval history of Christian-Moslem conflicts. During the Crusades the time between battles was filled with hunting encounters and a falconer could reclaim a lost falcon from behind enemy lines without fear of harm to his person. There was much exchange of knowledge, artefacts and falcons.

In 986 the annual rent paid by Haakon Jarl to Harald Blåtand for a region of Norway was 100 marks and 60 hunting falcons. In fact the most significant contribution to falconry made by Scandinavian countries was in diplomatic gifts of goshawks and gyrfalcons to foreign monarchs like the Emperor of Morocco, the kings of France, the German Emperor, the kings of Portugal, kings of England, the Tsar, the Landgrave of Hesse, sultans, moguls and ambassadors.

In the 16th century Turkish occupation of Transylvania, saker falcons were sent as a tax in return for peace, the Falco Nagium.

After losing the Battle of Pavié in 1626 the captured French King François 1st had to give his two sons as hostages to Emperor Charles V. He paid the ransom for the boys with two white gyrfalcons.

In different times and places falcons, rather than gold or precious objects have been accepted as ransoms. It is no exaggeration at all to call the falcon, rather than the dove, the true Bird of Peace.
Falconry is not based on, neither does it foster exclusion. Contrary to many other forms of what might be thought of as typically male activities, it has never been closed to women. In late Medieval and Renaissance times falconry became a sophisticated entertainment, accessible to ladies, as observed in 1410 in the well-known miniatures of Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry.

Professor Ewa Łukaszyk of Warsaw University says: “Rather than just another typically male cultural practice, falconry is once again a point of contact, a bridge over a gap, this time between masculinity and femininity.”

Women currently form the fastest growing demographic in falconry.

As the sun sets on one group of falconers on one side of the world, it rises over another group on the other side.
Falconry is a Hunting Art that unites all Humankind

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