RED GROUSE HAWKING

By Professor Matt Gage

In the early 1980s, falconry was practiced by a tiny minority in Britain. Most of us with a fierce desire for the art had to connect through literature or bird-watching.

Over and over, I read every falconry or raptor book I could get my hands on, and spent hours watching wild raptors, with an obsessed desire that only the die-hard readers of this article will understand.

For me, the ultimate falconry dream had to be hunting high-flying peregrines over an English pointer at red grouse. In post-DDT Britain, getting a buzzard to fly was enough of a challenge, let alone a noble peregrine, so I resigned my pipe dream to the bottom drawer labelled ‘sheer fantasy’.

But things got much better through the nineties. Captive breeding took off, equipment and knowledge became more accessible, and it started to seem possible to practice falconry to a good standard in conjunction with other less eccentric activities, like having a job or a family. I played dabbled on a couple of small patches of heather, whom was an experienced grouse fanatic, and we

For me, the ultimate falconry dream had to be hunting high-flying peregrines over an English pointer at red grouse. In post-DDT Britain, getting a buzzard to fly was enough of a challenge, let alone a noble peregrine, so I resigned my pipe dream to the bottom drawer labelled ‘sheer fantasy’.

But things got much better through the nineties. Captive breeding took off, equipment and knowledge became more accessible, and it started to seem possible to practice falconry to a good standard in conjunction with other less eccentric activities, like having a job or a family. I played dabbled on a couple of small patches of heather, whom was an experienced grouse fanatic, and we

For me, the ultimate falconry dream had to be hunting high-flying peregrines over an English pointer at red grouse. In post-DDT Britain, getting a buzzard to fly was enough of a challenge, let alone a noble peregrine, so I resigned my pipe dream to the bottom drawer labelled ‘sheer fantasy’.

But things got much better through the nineties. Captive breeding took off, equipment and knowledge became more accessible, and it started to seem possible to practice falconry to a good standard in conjunction with other less eccentric activities, like having a job or a family. I played dabbled on a couple of small patches of heather, whom was an experienced grouse fanatic, and we

For me, the ultimate falconry dream had to be hunting high-flying peregrines over an English pointer at red grouse. In post-DDT Britain, getting a buzzard to fly was enough of a challenge, let alone a noble peregrine, so I resigned my pipe dream to the bottom drawer labelled ‘sheer fantasy’.

But things got much better through the nineties. Captive breeding took off, equipment and knowledge became more accessible, and it started to seem possible to practice falconry to a good standard in conjunction with other less eccentric activities, like having a job or a family. I played dabbled on a couple of small patches of heather, whom was an experienced grouse fanatic, and we

For me, the ultimate falconry dream had to be hunting high-flying peregrines over an English pointer at red grouse. In post-DDT Britain, getting a buzzard to fly was enough of a challenge, let alone a noble peregrine, so I resigned my pipe dream to the bottom drawer labelled ‘sheer fantasy’.

But things got much better through the nineties. Captive breeding took off, equipment and knowledge became more accessible, and it started to seem possible to practice falconry to a good standard in conjunction with other less eccentric activities, like having a job or a family. I played dabbled on a couple of small patches of heather, whom was an experienced grouse fanatic, and we
Some lairds and keepers are informed and open-minded, and keepers and lairds are pretty particular people who care a bit about biodiversity and unique habitat. Impact hunting is entirely congruent with conservation of agreement has been a defining success, showing how low-grouse numbers, and don’t let your enthusiasm run away too much. Walking and running dogs all day for a single point can be a bit green, and you might encounter some birds that are too young to hunt if the summer weather forced a second clutch after hatch. Having said that, there’s a reason why the Glorious Twelfth is when it is, and shooters don’t want to flush a young covey, because it almost always teaches the hawk a lesson. You might think that in the open expanses of heather moorland, there isn’t much opportunity for mishandling, but much of the upland sporting culture is built around rigorous cooperation between estates, and a view towards sustainability in the longer term. Because of this, practices like greedy bag-filling, unsporting behaviour to the quarry, straying over matches, racing on the hill tracks, erratic hawks and dogs, disrespect to the accommodation, are just a few of the things that vex the protectors of the grouse and traditional highland sport. Our laird has actually descended with his cheque book on (shooting) miscreants, provided a refund, and sent them packing.

So the first thing to realise is that it’s difficult, but not impossible, to find a good grouse moor that will allow falconry. If you manage to locate a moor with a possible agreement to you for falconry, what should you look out for? Naturally, you will be interested in the grouse population, and this will depend on whether you’re happy to walk all day for a couple of points, or whether you want ten points in a short walk from the Range Rover, and home in time for tea and crumpets. Here, financial considerations will creep in, because a well-stocked moor will cost you more because of competition with the shooting market. If the moor has been shot hard, but still carries enough grouse for a hawking let, the birds could still be very juicy and difficult to manage for nice flights off a point. Enlightened estate owners will realise that falconers take much much smaller bags than guns, and create less disturbance, so you could get lucky and be allowed onto a moor that has a few grouse and a bit of early shooting, and this has worked fine for me. Be wary of very low grouse numbers, and don’t let your enthusiasm run away too much. Walking and running dogs all day for a single point on a jump, barren pair is no fun after a week. Tempers get strained, dogs and hawks get disillusioned, and it’s no good for the moor to hunt out the last pairs. By the same token, if you get bad apples in the falconry barrel, so too can the straying over marches, racing on the hill tracks, errant hawks like greedy bag-filling, unsporting behaviour to the quarry, straying over matches, racing on the hill tracks, erratic hawks and dogs, disrespect to the accommodation, are just a few of the things that vex the protectors of the grouse and traditional highland sport. Our laird has actually descended with his cheque book on (shooting) miscreants, provided a refund, and sent them packing.

So the first thing to realise is that it’s difficult, but not impossible, to find a good grouse moor that will allow falconry. If you manage to locate a moor with a possible agreement to you for falconry, what should you look out for? Naturally, you will be interested in the grouse population, and this will depend on whether you’re happy to walk all day for a couple of points, or whether you want ten points in a short walk from the Range Rover, and home in time for tea and crumpets. Here, financial considerations will creep in, because a well-stocked moor will cost you more because of competition with the shooting market. If the moor has been shot hard, but still carries enough grouse for a hawking let, the birds could still be very juicy and difficult to manage for nice flights off a point. Enlightened estate owners will realise that falconers take much much smaller bags than guns, and create less disturbance, so you could get lucky and be allowed onto a moor that has a few grouse and a bit of early shooting, and this has worked fine for me. Be wary of very low grouse numbers, and don’t let your enthusiasm run away too much. Walking and running dogs all day for a single point on a jump, barren pair is no fun after a week. Tempers get strained, dogs and hawks get disillusioned, and it’s no good for the moor to hunt out the last pairs. By the same token, if you get bad apples in the falconry barrel, so too can the straying over marches, racing on the hill tracks, errant hawks like greedy bag-filling, unsporting behaviour to the quarry, straying over matches, racing on the hill tracks, erratic hawks and dogs, disrespect to the accommodation, are just a few of the things that vex the protectors of the grouse and traditional highland sport. Our laird has actually descended with his cheque book on (shooting) miscreants, provided a refund, and sent them packing.

So the first thing to realise is that it’s difficult, but not impossible, to find a good grouse moor that will allow falconry. If you manage to locate a moor with a possible agreement to you for falconry, what should you look out for? Naturally, you will be interested in the grouse population, and this will depend on whether you’re happy to walk all day for a couple of points, or whether you want ten points in a short walk from the Range Rover, and home in time for tea and crumpets. Here, financial considerations will creep in, because a well-stocked moor will cost you more because of competition with the shooting market. If the moor has been shot hard, but still carries enough grouse for a hawking let, the birds could still be very juicy and difficult to manage for nice flights off a point. Enlightened estate owners will realise that falconers take much much smaller bags than guns, and create less disturbance, so you could get lucky and be allowed onto a moor that has a few grouse and a bit of early shooting, and this has worked fine for me. Be wary of very low grouse numbers, and don’t let your enthusiasm run away too much. Walking and running dogs all day for a single point on a jump, barren pair is no fun after a week. Tempers get strained, dogs and hawks get disillusioned, and it’s no good for the moor to hunt out the last pairs. By the same token, if you get bad apples in the falconry barrel, so too can the straying over marches, racing on the hill tracks, errant hawks like greedy bag-filling, unsporting behaviour to the quarry, straying over matches, racing on the hill tracks, erratic hawks and dogs, disrespect to the accommodation, are just a few of the things that vex the protectors of the grouse and traditional highland sport. Our laird has actually descended with his cheque book on (shooting) miscreants, provided a refund, and sent them packing.

So the first thing to realise is that it’s difficult, but not impossible, to find a good grouse moor that will allow falconry. If you manage to locate a moor with a possible agreement to you for falconry, what should you look out for? Naturally, you will be interested in the grouse population, and this will depend on whether you’re happy to walk all day for a couple of points, or whether you want ten points in a short walk from the Range Rover, and home in time for tea and crumpets. Here, financial considerations will creep in, because a well-stocked moor will cost you more because of competition with the shooting market. If the moor has been shot hard, but still carries enough grouse for a hawking let, the birds could still be very juicy and difficult to manage for nice flights off a point. Enlightened estate owners will realise that falconers take much much smaller bags than guns, and create less disturbance, so you could get lucky and be allowed onto a moor that has a few grouse and a bit of early shooting, and this has worked fine for me. Be wary of very low grouse numbers, and don’t let your enthusiasm run away too much. Walking and running dogs all day for a single point on a jump, barren pair is no fun after a week. Tempers get strained, dogs and hawks get disillusioned, and it’s no good for the moor to hunt out the last pairs. By the same token, if you get bad apples in the falconry barrel, so too can the straying over marches, racing on the hill tracks, errant hawks like greedy bag-filling, unsporting behaviour to the quarry, straying over matches, racing on the hill tracks, erratic hawks and dogs, disrespect to the accommodation, are just a few of the things that vex the protectors of the grouse and traditional highland sport. Our laird has actually descended with his cheque book on (shooting) miscreants, provided a refund, and sent them packing.

Culicoides impunctatus • Autumn 2011 1

A good days hunting:

Freddie Mackay, 50 years of highland keepering and upland conservation, still going strong.
The red grouse is a type of willow grouse, and is endemic to the British uplands. It is a ground-nesting species that is adapted to living in upland areas with a combination of heather and predator management. Adult pairs form territories, and grouse are generally not big movers from their area of birth, although they can take whomping hits and just keep on going. Your back becomes armoured as their synsacroium fuses up, and they can take whumping hits and just keep on going. Your heather beetle can be a particular problem on damper grouse moors: eggs are laid in sphagnum, and the beetle larvae eat the growing heather shoots. Whole miles of moorland can be devastated by this pest, leaving behind red or grey stands of heather that were once green and purple. The beetle’s main predator is a tiny parasitic wasp, so the beetle outbreaks tend to cycle as a result. Heathens can recover after being “beetled”, but it takes a couple of years, and predisposes the ground to unwanted spread of Molinia grasses, which can dominate the heather and reduce the grouse food supply. Grazing by sheep and deer also needs a careful balance to limit the spread of grasses, and protect the heather. On top of all this, grouse populations can suffer disease cycles when maintained at high density, with the strongyle gut nematode and louping ill from ticks being major constraints of population health. Despite these pressures, it is remarkable how good management can produce a bumper crop of grouse on productive moors. Many of the driven moors shoot thousands of brace each season. In 1888, Lord Walsingham is famous for shooting 1070 birds in a single day on Blubberhouses moor in Yorkshire (which is a terrible waste of good grouse if you’re a gamehawk and, enough to keep most of us happy for a falconry lifetime!)

Dogs

Good dogs are the makers of grouse hawking, so don’t treat this part of the team lightly. The majority of moors demand pointing dogs to allow the sport to happen. Grouse are secretive, ground-loving game birds, so spotting or walking is something that does work better than anything is ‘Skin So Soft’, so book your Avon lady to call, and stock up before your trip, because you’re worth it.

Preparing to set forth.
Almost never feasible. Moreover, the actions of a good pointer are at least half of the beauty and excitement of the whole act. To see a fine English pointer or setter working a moor at great distance, with complete and professional independence, is a sight and activity to behold. Our dogs have to run big to cover large areas after grouse at quite low densities, and they have to want to do this all afternoon, and again tomorrow. We once took an ex-English international footballer, who was mesmerised by the stamina and fitness of just a dog as they chased for hours over hill and daik up boggy ground, before looking calmly onto point. Your dogs need to cover miles and miles of uneven ground to find grouse, so he was wary if you’re unsure of their ranging abilities. HP breeds might seem fast and energetic as they romp across the low ground meadows, but up on the hill the landscape and smellscape are different. I’ve seen dogs that work fine over short beats on the low ground simply lose interest or over short beats on the low ground simply lose interest or energy after 10 minutes of romping about on heather, where the smellscape is relatively monotonous and game is widely dispersed.

Most well-bred pointers and setters will want to cover the ground once fit, so prepare them before the trip with running over soft but uneven and challenging ground; this is important for hardening pups too. The next task is to ensure that they point and flush without error, so the sport and spectacle can be enjoyed. Hot-heads that charge in can spoil a day, though fake-pointers are worse. So make sure your dogs don’t just point, they point game, and then hold the point until you’re ready to serve the hawk. Plenty of exposure to the right game in the right conditions with your sensible control will make a great dog, so don’t cut corners. Partridge are probably better to expose dogs in preparation for grouse, because shifting pheasants can encourage creeping. Sticky dogs are not as bad as creepers or charlies in, as long as they’re pointing game, but the nicest flights can be engineered with a staunch dog thatFlushes on the button from a quiet command. Lots of shouting at the dog to stop creeping, or running about that the dog won’t move, makes for a tigh-holding falcon, as well as distracting enjoyment from the falcon’s flight. There are lots of views on how to create a good pointer, but they don’t train themselves, and however do it you will have a fantastic hunting companion if you create a dog that covers ground intelligently and independently, looks back at you occasionally, and will turn, stop, or return on your command. If he drops deeper when working a downwind beat, and on finding birds will work round grouse carefully, and then hold a point for as long as it takes you to find or reach him, or your falcon to make pitch and position, then even better. Finally, if he will have birds in the air exactly when you give him a cue (‘get ‘em up’), then you’re close to perfection. Of course a drop-to flush is nice too, but we’re all there to enjoy ourselves a bit. Good dogs are the lynchpins of grouse flushing, so make the effort, and don’t be reliant on just one dog. Make sure the runners are getting big meals of good food, and a comfortable, warm, undisturbed bed for rest. If one dog is being used heavily, give him a whole day off every so often to recuperate. Encourage the use of young dogs in your team to let them learn, even if it means your own flight isn’t perfectly controlled. Enjoy your dogs, and marvel at their abilities and dedicated service!

Hawks

Most of us will have our own ideas for what makes an ideal gamehawk. For me, a good tiercel peregrine is hard to beat as a stylish match for grouse, and about matched for weight. A good confident tiercel is a perfect match for red grouse. Hawks have eyes, so if you want to return next year, or care about the good name of good falconery, then all of the group need to have the same careful attitudes. The dynamic within the hawking team is also very important. Gamehawkers can be a funny lot, evidenced by a quick glance through the ridiculous arguments and clashes on any web forum, so be careful if you don’t want competitiveness or jealousy to spoil your holiday. Days out with Roger and Mark Upton exemplify to me how a positive and polite attitude keeps everyone happy, and returning year after year to enjoy great sport. Even when things go badly wrong, there is never any judgmental sniping, just an acceptance that things don’t always go right, and celebrations when they do. Personalities are under bigger pressure up there when falcons are away from home and indulging in emotionally-charged activities! Add a good splash of alcohol and some late nights, and things can turn sour over a week or two, which is the last thing you want on holiday. If grouse are thin on the ground, or hawks or dogs aren’t flying or working to expectations, then we can all get a bit obsessive, so easy-going and positive attitudes are very important to stop the gloves flying about! When a deep Atlantic low comes past, then the cabin fever can really test the group dynamic. Last year we endured a storm that ripped at the heather for four days, even preventing us from weatherhawking. There was a lot of putting about and looking at tree branches to see
At the end of the day: Dave Myatt, Bob Green and Nick Curry.

really see what she's capable of, so for me, and for both eyes and intermewed falcons, it's more top-down than bottom-up in preparation for the grand tour. Either way, any check may work better initially when you return home from the moor and she’s fighting fit and confident; look out the low ground and put some fresh batteries in your trimmers...

Practise

The big day has arrived. You’ve settled into your cottage, the keeper’s mentioned a covey or two are about, and the forecast is set fair: let's get out there and enjoy the sport! Load up the hawks and dogs, put some beer and chocolate in the cool bag, and head for the high ground. Choose a beat that has a bit of lift, but beware that hawks can be busy late in a good updraft if they’re unfamiliar with rising air. Now we’re grouse hunting! For me it’s the pinnacle of game hawking because, with an experienced team and the reduced number of variables, you can really actually enjoy and absorb the whole spectacle. No distracting woodpigeons, stray game, dog walkers, joggers, tractors, cars: you know where the birds are, and that the dog’s not lying. You actually have a modicum of control.

Your star pointer has been out of sight for some time, so we spread out a bit to check for her. As I climb the hill, I cross the road and see him backed on point on the top of Snoble Hill, where there is a patch of good heather and often a covey. He’s staunch, and an old stag who knows the game, so I don’t hesitate and risk jumping the covey, and back off. No fiddling with jessies, leashes or whistles, it’s off with the hood and I release the single clip to her anklet. A bounding look around her new landscape, a mate and a mouse, and then off she goes, baring into the cool breeze and mountian up and up into the cool blue. Now we can relax and be confident that the grouse will hold until we flush, so take your time if she knows the game, and move slowly into a position to watch the swoop and control the dog. Soon she’s just a black spot flickering very high above, and she can see for miles and miles. She knows exactly what’s going to happen, and she’s a natural climber. Try not to get at the dog to hold, or rush about swinging your arms in a pan in case she’s distracted. Play it cool, like Geoffrey Pollard, and keep her guessing! Now it’s up to you for once to steer the flight, because the grousse will react according to where the falcon is above them. They prefer to escape into the wind, but won’t want to fly tight under her, and where you stand doesn’t make much difference. A downward flush will allow a faster swoop and a higher chance of her killing. An upward flush will bleed off swooping speed, especially at the bottom, and give the grouse more anchorage in the air to outmanoeuvre the hawk, but it might encourage an even higher pitch next time. Depending on whether the hawk needs killing confidence, I usually flush downward if the pitch is making me smile, and upward if I think she could do better. Today, it’s her first flight of the trip and she’s at a lovely commanding height, so I call the flush quietly when she pushes well ahead of me into the wind. The dog is on the covey in a flash and they carry on at her request until you return home from the moor and she’s fighting fit and confident; look out the low ground and put some fresh batteries in your trimmers...

Preparation

So you’ve booked a moor, you’ve got a good falcon and dog team, and your best buddies are coming. Excellent! What should we do to prepare before the trip? We can probably all agree that your dogs should be losing their summer shape and hardening up, as well as shopping and returning nicely to the whistle. But we won’t agree on how to prepare falcons for grouse in the early season. Of course it also depends on the length of your trip, and the background of your hawks. Some people prefer the bottom-up approach of doing the basics, and then working fitness, attitude and pitch into the hawk over each successive grouse flush. Certainly this does work, but it can take time. Others prefer top-down, attaining fitness over each successive grouse flush. Certainly this does work, and possibly end up with only ten or twelve flights, which isn’t much for the hawk to really condition itself into a star performer. Two weeks of decent kite work before your trip will clear out the muscling fat, open up the lungs and vessels, calm her pent-up anxiety a bit, and create the appetite of a lion. My hawks enjoy the kite, and it’s a relatively controlled method of flying at pitch, so I can put them up to it at a higher condition after the moult than I might if I was starting to go hunting. Sheahn Hayes advocates ‘the double’, or ‘we’re going home and doing high jumps’, but he’s hardcore and I’m a slack-mettled Brit, so I let them get away with just one lift each day. One of the potential downsides of kiting a falcon before the hunt is that it makes the hawk fitter and a bit more outstanding-looking than a bottom-up trained falcon, and thereby creates an increased danger of success on check. But when you’re going the check should be minimal, so you might strive for some Pincheresque flying style in the big skies of her ancestral home. Up there you can slacken the trim and

if any kill was coming, between poking about in equipment boxes. We even went for a drive out to visit an RSPB reserve (there were more birds on our moor!) At times like this it’s worth feeling up early and trying to do something else, but that isn’t easy because often the wind dies down later in the day. So pick your team right and, like me, you will enjoy first-rate company on top of the sport.

about fitness or condition constraining the hawk’s potential. I’ve done both, and some hawks perform better with some work on pre-trip fitness, while others don’t seem to need it. I usually fly my hawks only once a day, which doesn’t provide a huge number of potential flights in, say, a fortnight trip. You may lose a couple of days to weather or the Sabbath, and possibly end up with only ten or twelve flights, which isn’t much for the hawk to really condition itself into a star performer. Two weeks of decent kite work before your trip will clear out the muscling fat, open up the lungs and vessels, calm her pent-up anxiety a bit, and create the appetite of a lion. My hawks enjoy the kite, and it’s a relatively controlled method of flying at pitch, so I can put them up to it at a higher condition after the moult than I might if I was starting to go hunting. Sheahn Hayes advocates ‘the double’, or ‘we’re going home and doing high jumps’, but he’s hardcore and I’m a slack-mettled Brit, so I let them get away with just one lift each day. One of the potential downsides of kiting a falcon before the hunt is that it makes the hawk fitter and a bit more outstanding-looking than a bottom-up trained falcon, and thereby creates an increased danger of success on check. But when you’re going the check should be minimal, so you might strive for some Pincheresque flying style in the big skies of her ancestral home. Up there you can slacken the trim and

}
tracking hawks in this huge landscape where roads might be few and far-between. Kiteing preparation will help a bit to encourage climbing, and can be a useful recall tool across those wide spaces of the uplands. In the early days, don’t be too worried about position over the point: aim to flush when she is at her highest, and this will be your critical call. While she’s learning the game, it’s far better to have her high and out to the side, than directly overhead but low. With eyasses, it’s usually best to flush the lowest and flush early in while she’s still pumping, rather than waiting too long and watching her go ‘fizzy’. As long as she is high enough to stoop down, it’s usually best to bank the lesson and flush early on while everything is very predictable to your hawk, which is what you don’t want. Try and avoid obvious cues of how the flight and flush are going to happen. Of course you can’t blame the hawk, as she thinks that the closer she is to the point, and just a bit upwind, is the best place to catch a grouse. A few downwind flushes off the point into the falcon’s feet before the grouse get properly going will not encourage those big pitches. Grouse can be caught this way if your dog is good and you get the timing just right, so be wary of this unless you want a near hawk. It’s especially relevant if you’re flying a grouse rookie, when the first few flushes are going to be very influential for your hawk. So once she’s had a grouse to taste, be prepared to flush for a lesson rather than a kill in the early stages, and you will reap the investment later on. If your hawk hangs on the point too tightly, then flushing the grouse into the wind should stop her killing from a low pitch. Although the flush is still a reward, it’s not nearly as incentivising as a kill.

Grouse will almost always try to fly into the wind to beat a falcon, because it works. You might think that heading the point will encourage the grouse to fly downwind, but the most important thing to crowding grouse during the flight seems to be where the hawk is overhead, and grouse will fly right past your ears to escape into the wind. Grouse can row into a wind like no other game bird I’ve seen, and can do this at the bottom of a high falcon’s stoop and still sometimes pull away. So if your hawk is hanging tight in a manner that displeases you, flush as she flies forward to the point, and make sure she sees the birds, gets a hit of a stoop, but the grouse pull away and escape. It takes a lot of steel to do this, when you might otherwise bag your first grouse, but if you want a high flyer my advice would be to make things testing to start with if there are opportunities ahead. On the other hand, if your hawk needs some killing confidence, then it’s your call.

Something that can affirm tight flying even further, is re-flushing grouse that have dumped into cover if the hawk is right on their tail. Sometimes it can help to station people during the flight near patches of likely cover, like streams, bags or reed beds to discourage dumping in the first place.

Again, it’ll be your call whether to re-flush a grouse, because sometimes it will do indelicate and provide a second sporting spectacle, and might even be needed to encourage the chances of a kill for a rookie that has had a run of bad luck, while at other times it will negate style in your gamehawk, waste a good grouse, and encourage disobedience to the lure. Damaged grouse should probably be re-flushed so they are not left to suffer if they cannot be picked up by the dog. If the grouse has out-flown the falcon and then dumps, it’s won fair and square, and your hawk wasn’t good enough, so give it fair sport. It’s a great lesson to the hawk to be out-flown for a good distance by a grouse. If my falcon has flown high and done everything right, and the grouse dumps before she gets down to have a crack at it, then I will usually encourage a remount and repeat attempt. I realise that this makes her a bit less obedient to the lure. Often, grouse will simply repeat the dump, especially if there is appropriate cover about, and if you suspect this is going to be the case then it’s a good policy to re-flush the grouse into the wind when the hawk is out of position downwind, which should encourage the grouse to fly to escape. At least then the hawk is beaten fairly, and it’s a good lesson. Roger Upson likens dumping grouse to naughty street kids who know where all the hidey holes are, and scuttle down them under tight pressure! It’s amazing where grouse will escape to, down holes, under hanging hags, up to their nests in streams. These tactics obviously help escape from wild peregrines. Hopefully you won’t see too much of this and the grouse will outfly your hawk and encourage her to mount even higher and swoop even faster next time. By the time you get to the end of your trip, everything should be in full swing, and you’re hopefully enjoying great sport and everything will go right on your last day. Then it’s time to tip the keeper well if things have gone great, pack up your kit, and clean up the cottage (hopefully you’ll have a few grouse feathers to sweep up). Unforgettable isn’t it? It’s not to reality... at least there might still be the remnants of a summer further south.