

CONSERVATION

Falconry Sport Allowed

Falconry is now permitted in the United States, but few people are expected to practice this ancient sport of hunting with birds of prey—By Barbara Tufty

► CHANGES IN BASIC hunting regulations for ducks, geese, doves and other migratory game birds permit using falcons to hunt and bring down these birds.

This is a Federal Government permission, however, pointed out a member of the North American Falconry Association. In order for such hunting to be legal throughout the nation, permission must be authorized by each state.

Until the recent change announced by the Fish and Wildlife Service of the U.S. Department of the Interior, the use of birds of prey to take migratory game birds was prohibited.

Forms of quarry such as mice and other rodents were considered legal prey for those few people who persevere in the rare sport of falconry, in which a trained bird of prey is used to hunt game birds and various animals such as rabbits, squirrels and even foxes.

The swift, strong hunting birds sits on the gloved wrist of its trainer until the right moment comes to pursue the prey. The bird strikes its victim with sharp talons, usually instantaneously breaking its back. The bird is trained either to wait with the prize or to return to its master.

The ancient sport of falconry may be more than 4,000 years old, historians and falconry enthusiasts estimate. Earliest records show that falcons were among the presents given to princes in China about 2205 B.C.

The sport was practiced in Europe about 400 B.C., and introduced into England about 860 A.D. During the Middle Ages, falconry was at its height of practice and popularity, with specific rules about what class of persons could hunt with which type of bird.

For instance, the eagle could be used only by an emperor, gyrfalcons were flown only by kings and queens, the peregrine could be flown by an earl, a goshawk was permitted to a yeoman, a priest could fly a sparrow-hawk, and a kestrel could be flown by a sportsman of the servant class.

In America today there are 200 to 300 persons interested enough in the unusual sport to be members of the North American Falconry Association, stated U.S. Air Force Maj. H. H. D. Heiberg, a member of the Association. This interest does not necessarily include actual practice in hunting,

but does include reading and collecting some of the fine literature, history and old prints on the sport.

The Falconry Association has members scattered throughout the United States and Canada, Maj. Heiberg said. Active interest in falconry may be diminishing because of the vast amount of time and patience needed to train and maintain such birds.

The falcon is a highly sensitive and intelligent individual, and needs constant attention all year round. Unlike other birds and animals, the falcon cannot be kept in a cage, but must be secured on a perch by proper leg bracelets and ties—jesses, swivel and leach, in the lingo of falconry.

The bird should be taken out-of-doors each day, in the sun when it is cool and in the shade when it is hot. At night it must be set on its perch indoors. Its menu when not on a hunting expedition consists of horsemeat, beef hearts and other lean meat.

One of the aims of the Falconry Association is to prevent wanton shooting and harming of these proud birds and to instruct people about the benefits they bring, such as keeping down the population of field mice, rats, snakes and other farm pests.

Some states recognize the importance and value of the sleek birds and completely protect all types of birds of prey. Other states regard them as vermin and permit indiscriminate shooting. Laws in these latter states need to be set up to protect the fast dwindling birds, said Maj. Heiberg. Use of certain pesticides is also decreasing the birds' ranks.

The new changes in the migratory bird hunting regulations will not much affect falconry practice, Maj. Heiberg believes, since so few persons are seriously enough interested in pursuing the difficult sport.

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Nature Note

The Common Rat

► The common rat, *Rattus norvegicus*, is the most hated and feared of the domestic pests perennially plaguing mankind.

It is fierce, cunning, and quick to learn, and is known by a variety of names, including Gray Rat, Brown Rat, Wander Rat, House Rat, Wharf Rat and Norway Rat.

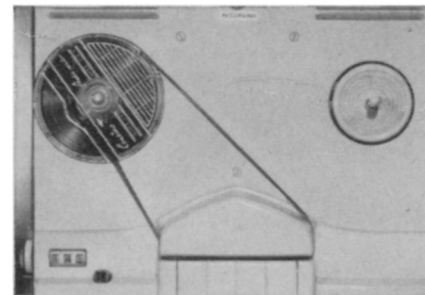
Originally a native of Eastern Asia, it has followed man throughout the world, dwelling in his buildings and living on his food.

Most pervasive of the 550 recognized kinds of true rat, the common rat has overcome all other domestic rodents in areas which it has infested. Except for the tropics, it has largely displaced even the black rat, *Rattus rattus*, which carried the Black Plague throughout the world in the Middle Ages.

In the Western World, rats are no longer the menace they once were. Even today, however, there are more rats than people in North America, despite modern sanitary measures.

Rats usually are found in older buildings, particularly in filthy or abandoned structures, and around docks, storehouses, and garbage dumps.

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