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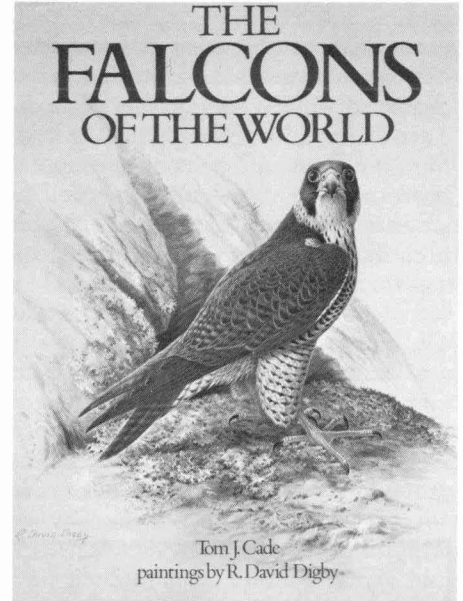
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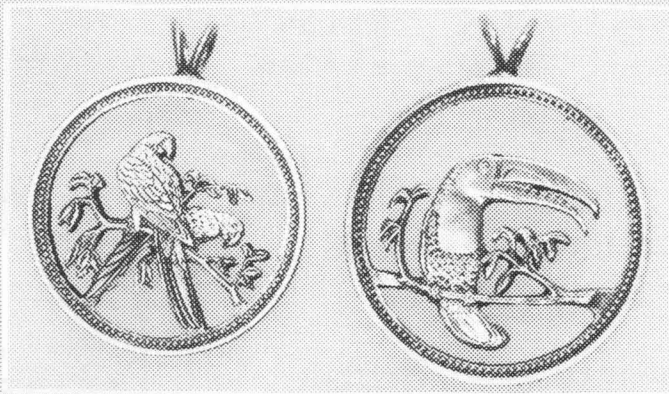
by Sheldon Dingle
Norco, California

Those of you who have spent time in the wilderness have surely observed the solitary soaring of some large bird of prey. Even you who live in rural areas or in the suburbs of a city have probably seen an occasional raptor swooping over a field or sitting bolt upright on a post.

Birds of prey are fairly common and they range over most of the habitable earth—the Antarctic and a few islands ex-



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cepted. There is something about a raptor that is unmistakable. You never mistake a kestrel for a crow nor an eagle for an egret.

Although you know a bird of prey when you see one, it is quite another matter to know exactly *which* raptor you are observing. I have myself watched eagles in the mountains of Nevada, hawks in the wilds of Mexico, and owls in Alaska. There is even a kestrel nesting in a stand of trees on my own property. Despite my interest and the numbers of raptors around, I'm afraid I don't really know much about these unique birds—nor, I suspect, do you.

Fortunately for we interested but uninformed bird watchers, there is a new book available that can add a great deal to our knowledge. The volume is *The Falcons of the World* by Tom J. Cade. It is published by Comstock/Cornell University Press and retails for about forty dollars. It is a rather large book, twelve by nine inches, containing one-hundred-eighty-eight pages of text and paintings. It is divided into two parts.

In Part I, Dr. Cade discusses a variety of subjects—special characteristics of the genus *Falco*, classification, feeding adaptations, size and flying performance,

hunting success, falcons and man (a particularly fascinating section) and several other pertinent subjects. An added blessing in this volume is Tom Cade's excellent writing style. He is able to explain unfamiliar concepts and details with a clarity that does not exhaust the reader. Many a night I read *Falcons of the World* for pure pleasure long after I should have retired.

In one instance, Cade explained that to capture and kill prey, falcons often use their feet differently than do the hawks and owls. The falcons often rise above their prey, then go into a stoop (a power dive sometimes approaching 200 miles an hour) and strike the prey with their feet. The blow has force enough to stun a bird or kill it outright. The prey is then caught in the air or retrieved after it has been knocked to the ground. This technique, of course, could be employed only by a swift and spectacular flier.

The falcon is, indeed, one of the most agile and acrobatic fliers in the world. Words, as Cade mentions, fail to convey the impact the falcon's aerial maneuvers have on an observer. J.A. Hagar's account (in Bent, 1938) probably comes closest to conveying an adequate verbal impression. Describing a peregrine's courtship display, Cade quotes Hagar, "... again and again the tiercel started well to leeward and came along the cliff against the wind, diving, plunging, saw-toothing, rolling over and over, darting hither and yon like an autumn leaf until finally he would swoop up into the full current of air and be borne off on the gale and do it all over again. . . . Nosing over suddenly, he flicked his wings rapidly 15 or 20 times and fell like a thunderbolt. Wings half closed now, he shot down past the north end of the cliff, described three successive vertical loop-the-loops across its face, turning completely upside down at the top of each loop, and roared out over our heads with the wind rushing through his wings like ripping canvas. Against the background of the cliff his terrific speed was much more apparent than it would have been in the open sky. The sheer excitement of watching such a performance was tremendous; we felt a strong impulse to stand and cheer."

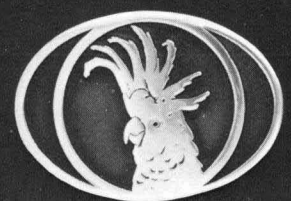
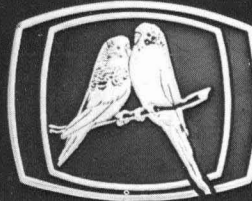
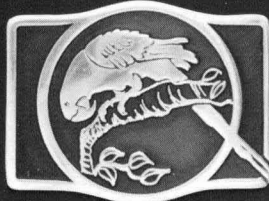
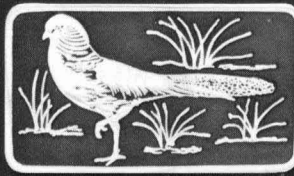
It seems fitting, too, that Dr. Cade is an experienced falconer. His brief history of falconry is very interesting and has the genuine ring of authority. Cade is, himself, a falconer carrying on an ancient tradition of association between falcons and man. Although Cade claims not to be a philosopher of the hunt, he is a deeply thoughtful man. He has obviously reflected long and carefully on his own relationship with falcons and hunting. His conclusions are startling and profound.

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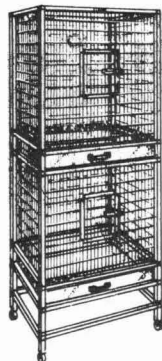
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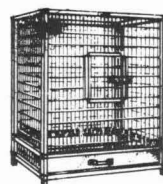
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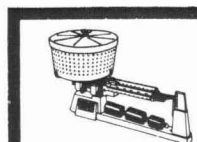
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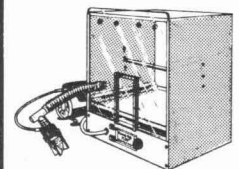
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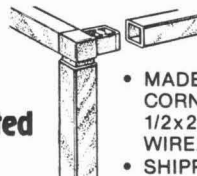
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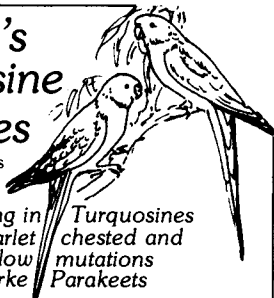
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I'll not even try to recapitulate his thoughts here, but I strongly recommend you read them for yourselves and meditate upon them.

Whether he knows it or not, Tom J. Cade has altered radically the ancient relationship between man and falcon. From the dawn of prehistory to the period of the Second World War men and falcons have worked out their association without much effect on the status of the wild populations of breeding falcons. From about A.D. 500 to 1600, falcons were in high regard and were among the most valued possessions of the aristocracy in Europe and in the Near and Mid East. From about A.D. 1600 to the early part of this century, falcons were often persecuted and considered vermin. Neither situation likely had any strong effect on the falcons of the world.

By the end of the Second World War, however, the advent of the new technology of synthetic chemicals and the wholesale destruction of the earth's natural environment began to put pressure on the falcons. Many species suffered serious declines and the peregrine in North America became endangered. At last, man's affairs had actually wrought a negative effect on the world's falcons.

The falcons' dismal future caused concern and dismay among conservation groups but they offered little hope regarding the situation in general and the peregrine in particular. As recently as 1972, McNulty voiced the majority opinion saying that captive propagation of peregrines would be "so difficult that it cannot repopulate the wild or provide birds for fanciers."

The falconers of the world took issue with that stance. Dr. Cade became a pioneer in raptor breeding. Since 1973, says Cade, seventeen species of *Falco* have been bred in captivity, not to mention many other raptors. He gives credit to the falconers. "Only falconers have had the sustained motivation and the technical skills to succeed in a difficult task, and no one will ever be able to tally up the time, effort, and personal expense that all the private breeders in the world have put into what has become a truly global occupation [occupation in the sense of devoting time and expertise to the task]."

The extraordinary success in captive breeding falcons has led Cade to say, "It is probable that all species of falcons can be bred in captivity . . ." He adds, "This remarkable conclusion means that no species of falcon *has* to become extinct." What an extraordinary option. Cade ends Part I with some very encouraging speculations regarding the falcon's future.

This brings us to Part II of the book—

Species Descriptions. Cade's classification admits twenty-nine species of falcons and each one is treated in this section. Each account is a free-style essay allowing the full range of Cade's engaging writing style. He generally discusses characteristics, distribution, movements and habitat, food and feeding habits, breeding, and status of the bird in the wild and in captivity. Many anecdotes and personal experiences enrich and bring to life these essays.

As a perfect counterpart to Cade's lucid commentary are R. David Digby's magnificent paintings. Each species is illustrated with a full page, full color plate of the very highest quality. Digby brings together to great advantage his more than twenty years of falconry and his long experience as a master bird painter. Altogether, there are forty full page and four double-spread paintings in the volume.

It has been said that this book has been produced by the best possible author and the best possible artist. I concur wholeheartedly, and sincerely recommend that you acquire this classic and give it an honored place in your library. ●

Avian Research Awards

The Avian Research Committee of the American Federation of Aviculture is proud to announce that funds are available for research grants in 1983. Areas of primary interest include avian nutrition, infectious diseases, disease control techniques, diagnostic procedures, incubation and artificial insemination techniques, field studies and general avicultural techniques.

All proposals will be reviewed by committee members and consultants knowledgeable in each field. All proposals must be scientifically sound and feasible. Preference will be given to members of AFA.

The deadline for receiving applications is May 1, 1983. Grants will be awarded at the AFA National Convention in Chicago, August 18-21, 1983. All grant recipients will make brief quarterly reports to the research committee. Results will be reported in the AFA "Watchbird."

A brief letter of intent should be submitted with a request for application forms to Susan L. Clubb, DVM, 5122 SW 128 Pl., Miami, FL 33175.

Any donation large or small will be appreciated and will go directly into the research fund. Send your donations to: AFA Special Research Fund, P.O. Box 1568, Redondo Beach, CA 90279. ●

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