

# Whitney

A few weeks ago, I visited master falconer Nancy Cowan, founder of the New Hampshire School of Falconry, in Deer- ing. Cowan met her husband Jim, at age 17, when he was an avid animal lover. She a horse- woman, later a dogsledder. Soon after they met, Jim became a falconer, but falcon hunting was not legal in New Hampshire. In 1984, Jim initiated a falconry bill, which eventually passed in 1988, making New Hamp- shire the 46th state to legalize falconry.

In 2005, Nancy Cowan found- ed the New Hampshire School of Falconry. Her first student was Sy Montgomery. Montgom- ery, a confirmed vegetarian, described the surprising way

in which the hunt took hold: "At that moment, there is no room in my soul for the quail's pain and fear. I am flooded with the hawk's elation...I realize that I want, more than anything, for this hawk to catch it."

In her introductory workshop, Cowan brings her falcon out of its mew (cage). The hooded falcon perches calmly on the heavy leather glove adorning her left hand. In their forward to Cowan's book, "Peregrine Spring," Montgomery and Eliza- beth Marshall Thomas explain: "When hooded, it's like their souls are turned off. You take off the hood and the soul returns to the bird." Montgomery: "To be in the gripping gaze of that bird was like looking directly into the sun."

Falconry is an ancient art. For centuries, western European society's social classes were indicated by the type of falcon

owned by a king, duke, or lord. In fact, we use falconry phrases every day. "Cadger" refers to the falcon's perch. Falconers, too old for hunting, were given the task of carrying the cage into the field – hence the term "old cadger."

"Hoodwinked" refers to the hooded hawk, likening covering a bird's eyes to blindfolding a person to tricking someone.

Cowan explains the partner- ship she develops with her falcon. "Not to hunt with a falconry bird is to deny what they are. Hunting is the strongest instinct they have...It cements the part- nership." Cowan also explained that falcons help humans and the environment through "bird abatement."

A few days later, I experi- enced bird abatement first-hand when I visited the Terranea Re- sort in Palos Verdes, California, and met full-time falconer Joe

Roy III. When he and his falcons are not touring the grounds of this seaside resort each morn- ing, Roy is hosting educational demonstrations with his birds of prey to educate the public about the immense importance of falconry as a green environ- mental protection tool. In six years, Roy's falcons have killed just one seagull, but their daily presence keeps the entire resort free of seagulls and the pollu- tion they cause. Bird abatement programs work effectively in airport hangers, even at Wim- bledon, where one celebrated falcon named Rufus keeps the courts free of seagulls.

Birds teach us reverence for life, for a world much larger than the world contained within human vision. No creatures on earth show us our limitations every day better than the birds.

Montgomery: "When we see a bird in flight or let our hearts

soar on the notes of its song, the mystery of the world wells up before us – a mystery we long to embrace rather than conquer."

Montgomery said it best in her response to Don Stap and his book *Birdsong: A Natural History*, where he writes that "birdsong is like light stream- ing through the keyhole of a lost world." Montgomery: "But perhaps it is not so much a lost world that I long to glimpse, but a strange parallel universe – where creatures made of air and cloaked in feathers share with us the capacity for language, an appreciation for music, and even the ability to dance."

For more information, see: [www.nhschooloffalconry.com](http://www.nhschooloffalconry.com).

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