

Excerpts From:

*TRAINING SCHEMES FOR ACHIEVABLE DREAMS*

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a) Progressive Thinking

It may seem that some traditions can actually get in the way of your goals. One of my pet peeves is when I hear people say, "That's how everyone else does it." or, "That's just how it's always been done." Falconry is rich with tradition, but progressive thinking is what allows us to break new ground and advance our sport. There have been many breakthroughs in training strategies, and some great advances in falconry equipment. However, so many of the things we do are still outdated and mired in tradition.

Why do we tie our birds to the rings on bow perches? Have you ever really thought about it? Probably not. We've just always done it that way. Everyone does it that way. No one really ever questions the practice. The experts and the old-timers do it that way. Why would anyone want to do it another way? It's traditional. .. but.. . Is it the best way?

We all know when we put a bath pan in front, or behind, a tethered bird, it tends to get polluted with feces rather quickly. That's why most of us put the bath pan to the side of the perch. Now, if the hawk is tethered to the ring on the right side of the perch, and the bath pan is on the left side, how is the bird supposed to get into the pan to take a bath? Anyone who has watched a bird jump off the perch, with the idea of getting to the bath pan, knows that it (sometimes) does not

bate with the force necessary to carry the ring over the perch to the other side. It simply steps off the perch and walks to the bath pan. I don't know about you, but I get very frustrated when I see a bird trying desperately to get into a bath pan only to be disappointed by a short leash.

So, what's the answer? Buck tradition and cut off the ring. I tie my hawks to the vertical post on the side of the perch. I tie the bird long enough that if it bates straight across the perch it will not touch the opposite post with its tail. The bath pan is placed on the same side that I tie the bird.

The pan is positioned far enough away that the bird can get fully into the bath, but cannot get wrapped around it. This system is also a clear and consistent communication to the bird, in that it can only travel the length of the leash in the bate. If the bird were able to carry the ring over to the perch, the bird would receive mixed signals as to how far the bate can take it.

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b) Clear Communication

I am very careful not to let the bird see what type, or amount, of food I am offering in the glove. I keep the food hidden until the bird is standing on the glove. This is an important step in creating a quick response to the lure or the glove. Most of us have been in the situation where our hawk is sitting in the tree and won't come down. First, we offer it a small piece of food on the glove. When that won't work, we up the ante and offer a bigger bribe. Before long, we are offering everything in the bag. The bird finally comes down and what happens? We quickly exchange our large offering for a smaller morsel (we compromise our clear communication). This, of course, causes more problems next time you offer a large reward because the bird has learned not to believe you. Remember, clear communication is the key to successful training. If you offer a big reward, you should provide a big reward.

Teach your bird to come to the glove, not to the food, and you will have much more control. The bird has no opportunity to decide what amount of food warrants a quick response. Also, if you vary the type and amount of food in the glove the bird will be much more interested in finding out what the reward will be. It's much like children receiving a treat when they come home from school. If they always get the same treat every day, even if it is their favorite treat in the world, their motivation for hurrying home will eventually diminish. They will always know that the same old treat will be there whenever they get home. If, on the other hand, they occasionally get a special treat, or extra treats, they will be more likely to hurry home every day. Consistency in reinforcement is a liability in any training program.