



ABILENE

Convention and Visitors Bureau

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Falconers and Birds of Prey Gather in Abilene for their 29th Annual State Field Meet – January 15-18, 2010

Abilene, Texas: Birds of prey have captivated human hearts for untold centuries. If you are one of those captivated, the Texas Hawking Association (THA) invites you to a different kind of hunting sport. THA will present a virtual cornucopia of visual delights at their annual field meet in Abilene, Texas over the Martin Luther King weekend (January 15-18, 2010). Throughout the weekend, the lawn of the meet headquarters at the Whitten Inn – Expo Center will be covered with a host of hawks, falcons, and a few eagles along with falconers from across the United States. That is, when they're not out and about the Abilene area hunting with their birds.

Falconry, the sport of taking wild game in partnership with a wild bird of prey, is a time-honored, traditional hunting method that dates back to the very beginning of recorded human history. Today, falconry is practiced by an estimated 3,000 men and women throughout the United States. The THA annual field meet is their once-a-year get-together.

The annual field meet is NOT a competition, nor is it a falconry exhibition. It is largely a social gathering where falconers can meet other falconers from the far corners of Texas (and the country) to exchange information, share experiences, purchase falconry equipment and hawking “furniture” from a variety of falconry craftspeople, and discuss training methods and falconry

standards. Along with the basic camaraderie between falconers, the annual meet provides a venue for the annual Texas Hawking Association business meeting where issues pertaining to falconry on the state level are discussed and decided. “This event generates \$66,250 into Abilene’s economy and comes at a time when the tourism business in Abilene is slow,” says Nanci Liles, Executive Director of the Abilene Convention and Visitors Bureau.

END:

Below is a fact sheet and also suggested news features.

FALCONRY FACT SHEET

FALCONRY IS:

- Hunting wild game in partnership with a bird of prey.
- A time-honored, traditional hunting method that dates back to the very beginning of recorded human history.
- The most highly regulated hunting activity in America, requiring both State and Federal falconry permits (in addition to local hunting licenses), along with a two-year apprenticeship period under the supervision and guidance of an experienced falconer.
- The primary force behind restoring the peregrine falcon from the brink of extinction. Falconers were the first to notice the decline in peregrine populations, and many falconers donated their own birds for the successful captive breeding and restoration programs that allowed the peregrine falcon’s removal from the Endangered Species list in 1999.
- Practiced by both men and women.
- A non-consumptive form of hunting and resource utilization. Falconry has no impact on populations of wild birds of prey, nor does it impact game populations. Falconry birds continue to do what they did in the wild, only with the addition of a human partner. Additionally, most birds taken from the wild are returned to the wild to join the breeding population.
- Based upon centuries-old tradition while also including cutting-edge technologies such as radio telemetry.
- Based upon sound resource management and conservation.
- An intimate form of bird watching. Through a mutual bond of trust and respect, falconers are allowed to observe, and participate in, a dynamic aspect of Nature’s circle of life.

FALCONRY IS NOT:

- A competition.
- About keeping birds of prey in captivity for the purpose of exhibition. Falconry birds are released nearly every day and can choose whether or not to return to their falconer. The bird can fly—the falconer cannot.

- About starving a bird of prey into submission. Quite the contrary. A falconry bird is a fit, healthy athlete capable of performing at the utmost peak of its physical abilities and endurance.
- About keeping an exotic pet.
- A weekend-only, when-you-get-around-to-it activity. Falconry requires a daily commitment to the bird's health and wellbeing that includes regular hunting.

AVAILABLE NEWS/FEATURE STORIES

For more information, or to arrange an interview, contact:

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- **A BRIEF HISTORY OF FALCONRY:** Although its origin is uncertain, falconry is an ancient activity, with earliest available records dating back to at least 722 B.C. in what is now modern-day Iraq. Records of trained goshawks introduced to Japan from China date back to 244 A.D. European records emerged in 400 A.D., indicating that falconry was limited primarily to royalty and the upper classes. Falconry most likely traveled to the New World with the Spanish exploration of Mexico in the early 16th Century. However, the first reports from Hernando Cortez' expedition into Tenochtitlan (now Mexico City) cited the availability of raptors for sale in the markets of Montezuma's Aztec empire.

The first falconry club was formed in North America during the 1930s, but disbanded during World War II. Individuals continued to practice falconry through the Post-War period and the North American Falconers' Association (NAFA) emerged in the 1960's. From there, state organizations formed, including the Texas Hawking Association (THA) in 1970. Today, THA boasts over 270 active members who are deeply interested in raptor conservation and promoting falconry through community outreach programs.

- **PEREGRINE DELISTING:** Falconers played a huge role in the formation of the Endangered Species Act and the restoration of the peregrine falcon that resulted in the delisting of the peregrine falcon from Endangered classification. It was falconers who noticed the rapid decline in peregrine falcon populations during the mid-1960s. Falconers pushed for the creation of the Endangered Species Act that protected the peregrine falcon (and other species like Bald Eagles) so that steps could be taken to rescue the peregrine falcon from the brink of extinction. Falconers developed captive-breeding programs. Many falconers donated their own birds to the restoration of the species through captive breeding.

- **TEXAS HEROES:** Texas falconers are among the most respected in the country. Among the many Lone Star personalities are John Karger and Gary Brewer.

John Karger, of San Antonio-based Last Chance Forever, regularly presents a falconry-based, common sense conservation program in partnership with Texas Parks and Wildlife (Expo) and at local Renaissance Festivals and other community events. Last Chance Forever is one of the country's foremost raptor rehabilitation centers.

Gary Brewer, the colorful East-Texas boy from Chandler, virtually invented squirrel hawking with redtails. He is the author of the highly respected how-to book, "Buteos and Bushytails" that is a must-have for any falconry library. Gary is a regular visitor to Abilene and can most easily be found in the field with his redtail hawk, his Jack Russell terrier and a horde of friends and apprentice falconers, searching out squirrels.

- **CRAFTSMEN OF ANCIENT ARTS:** The art of falconry includes the mastery of several ancient crafts—some of which have remained intact since the beginning of recorded human history, and others that have been affected and updated by modern technologies. Renowned craftsmen in leather working (hoods, jesses, leashes, etc.), wood working (falcon blocks), metal working (blocks and perches) and bell making are typically in attendance at a THA meet.

- **CUTTING-EDGE TECHNOLOGIES:** While much of falconry practice has remained unchanged, falconers also take advantage of cutting-edge technologies in radio telemetry and Global Positioning Satellite technology to reduce the chances of losing their bird(s) in the field. A falcon down on quarry can easily become a meal for a passing golden eagle, redtail hawk, or great-horned owl. It happens in the wild every day. Telemetry, and knowing how to use it, is often a matter of life and death for the bird.