



Falcon

Helen Macdonald

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A sacred god, a military tool, an erotic symbol: the falcon is a natural wonder of speed, power, beauty, and ferocity that has become embedded in human cultures in myriad ways. Helen Macdonald's *Falcon* examines the diverse symbolism and roles attached to the falcon throughout the centuries.

Macdonald presents a cultural and natural history of the falcon that spans the globe and several millennia. Her wide-ranging survey considers the many facets of the falcon, including conservation efforts; the sport of falconry; and the use of falcons in secret military projects by the Third Reich and the U.S. space program. *Falcon* also explores the rich imagery of the falcon over history, including the veneration of falcons as gods in ancient Egypt, their role in erotic stories, and even the use of falcons in advertising to promote photocopiers and jet planes.

Filled with illustrations and a wealth of fascinating facts, *Falcon* will be an enjoyable guide for ornithologists, amateur birdwatchers, and nature lovers alike.

Falcon Details

Date : Published March 15th 2006 by Reaktion Books (first published 2006)

ISBN : 9781861892386

Author : Helen Macdonald

Format : Paperback 208 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Animals, Birds, Science, Biology, Natural History

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Nigel Bamber says

A fascinating and wide-ranging account of the natural and human cultural history of these magnificent creatures.

Fox says

By the author of *H is for Hawk*, *Falcon* is a deep dive into the history and symbolism of - primarily - the peregrine falcon. While forays are made into the gyrfalcon and saker falcon, the peregrine becomes a perfect symbol for falcons as a whole. Through the peregrines depredations due to hunting, and eventual extinction in America due to DDT, we can learn about the fate of other falcons. The success story of *The Peregrine Fund* and advent of falconers to save the species is an all too pertinent tale. So much good can come from dedicated work to restore a species - will that happen once more?

Helen Macdonald understands the falcon as only one truly in love with the species does. She traces it as a symbol of aristocracy, of wilderness, of the natural, the urban natural, and as some seductive part of the self. We see ourselves as falcons, and yet falcons could so easily do without us. Doesn't that tell us everything about our relationship to the wild? The partnership between human and falcon in the sport of falconry is also addressed, as is the sheer depth of its history over time.

This is a valuable, fascinating, and eminently readable book. I highly recommend it not only to fans of *H is For Hawk* but also all those with an interest in nature and our relationship with it. This book sums it all up so beautifully through one of the most arresting and fascinating of species.

PJ Ebbrell says

Good reliable read about Falcons.

Thomas says

Falcon, published before the more successful *H for Hawk*, is a bit of a victim of that fame. It feels somehow false to publish this in connection. Despite the similar topic, *Falcon* is a very different book and it's easy to see why Macdonald didn't have much success with it. It is purely a non-fiction text on this wonderful creature, first describing and analysing the bird itself and then looking at its relationship with humans and with society. Later Macdonald discusses the bird's symbolic significance, its role in war and themes of conservation and preservation. The author writes with passion on her subject, but the very personal, emotional side of her relationship with these animals doesn't come through like in *H for Hawk* making the book quite dry and no doubt disappointing for fans of her moving autobiography.

The symbolic analysis is, however, very interesting. Macdonald seems to want to save the birds from the long list of evil connotations they have accumulated over the centuries; war, hunting, aristocracy, nationalism, fascism, capitalism. She approaches it with a touch of irony, pointing out that falcons are neither territorial nor warlike, and they are not domesticated in the way other animals are. She tries to give them

their autonomy back, separating them from the men who would use their image in the pursuit of war or other ambitions. Instead she wants to see them as symbols of the wild, of a world long gone, connecting them briefly to an idea of Athurian Britain; in many ways she attempts a Tolkien-esque preservation of a lost ideal in both her books.

The details of falcon conservation and the story of the peregrine's reintroduction to the wild is very interesting, although dully told in parts. By the final chapter on urban falcons I found my attention waning. Falcon is a very specific niche book, interesting in its way, but in the next book Macdonald found a way to relate her fascination to her own persona in a way that reached out effectively to readers as well. 4

Jerry Brabenec says

Macdonald gives us an overview of the role of the falcon in human cultural history more than an ornithological text, and it's fascinating. There is a lot about the association of the falcon with nobility, hunting, and war throughout history and also a lot about the contemporary renaissance of the peregrine falcon population and their taking up residence in city centers. It's a pretty quick read. A lot of it is quite profound and some of it comes off more like an interesting trivia collection.

I'll remember 2015 as "Jerry's Year of the Raptor", hearing and seeing great horned owls in the nearby woods in the depth of winter for the first time in 20 years, watching the peregrine falcons at the University of Michigan rear their young, identifying an osprey nest along I94 near DTW, watching a red tail hawk fly across our street with a squirrel in its talons, and two bald eagle sightings. Pretty good for southeast Michigan.

Now I drive by Burton Tower and that transmission tower on I94 and think of how I'll be watching them in the spring waiting for the raptors to come back and reanimate them. The ospreys are probably in Cuba or French Guiana.

This book and Paul Johnsgard's "Hawks, Eagles and Falcons of North America: Biology and Natural History" are the books that have enriched my knowledge of these birds so far.

Michael Schrader says

"Biografie" ist natürlich Quatsch, denn derartiges bezieht sich ja für gewöhnlich auf ein einzelnes Individuum, nicht auf eine ganze Tierart wie hier. Treffender wäre vielleicht ein etwas sperrigerer Untertitel gewesen wie etwa "Kulturgeschichte der Beziehungen zwischen Mensch und Falken", denn darum geht es in diesem Buch (das übrigens 10 Jahre vor "H wie Habicht" erschienen ist), und wie schon in "H wie Habicht" legt Helen MacDonald hier ein großartiges Buch vor, allerdings gänzlich ohne die sehr persönlichen Passagen, in denen sie in "H wie Habicht" einerseits ihre Trauer über den Tod ihres Vaters verarbeitet und andererseits ihre eigenen Erfahrungen mit der Habicht-Haltung beschreibt) die dem Habicht-Buch seine ganz besondere Note gaben. "Falke" ist demgegenüber nicht mehr und nicht weniger als ein hochinteressantes und sehr gut lesbares Sachbuch über Falken und die Falknerei als kulturgeschichtliches Phänomen. In den Kapiteln über die Naturgeschichte des Falken, über seine Abrichtung, über die Mythen, die sich um ihn drehen, über seine Nutzung für Jagd und militärische Zwecke bis hin zur Bedrohung durch Umweltgifte und

Zerstörung von Lebensräumen durch den Menschen und das Phänomen des "urbanen" Falken schafft es Helen Macdonald ihre Leidenschaft und Faszination für diese wunderschönen Tiere auf den Leser zu übertragen. Wenn es nicht so eine Schnapsidee wäre, würde man sich am liebsten auf den Weg zur nächsten Falknerei machen und versuchen, sich selbst so einen Vogel zu besorgen.

Fred Langridge says

An absorbing history of falcons and of humans' interactions with them.
