

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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From Reader Review Falcon for online ebook

Paul says

Raptors are at the pinnacle of evolution, from the huge eagles that soar in lazy arcs, the hawks that use all their guile and cunning and the falcons that are the Exocet missiles of the avian world; this book is the story of the falcon.

Humans and falcons have had a long history together, young birds were collected and trained for sport and hunting for millennia and it still carries on today in particular in the middle east. But it is a tempestuous relationship, there have been points where we have driven them to almost extinction. Thankfully they are making a comeback, partly as people are more aware of the natural world and care about it, but they have been moving from their original clifftop eyries to the heights of city skyscrapers, and what was once a rare sighting now is commonplace. Macdonald explores how they have entered our culture, given names to aircraft, been venerated way back to Egyptian times and were even used for secret missions during World War II.

Macdonald is better known for H is for Hawk, but she actually wrote this volume first. It is an interesting account of these beautiful but deadly creatures and is full of fascinating facts and some quite amazing pictures. In particular, I liked the photo of a skydiver alongside a peregrine and learning that at full chat when they reach speeds in excess of 200mph, they make a whistling sound as they cut through the air. Great little book, one for all lovers of raptors.

Bruttins says

4 words: naturalize sublime Awe elaborate

Radwa says

Bonnie says

This is a lyrical look into the relationship of man and bird. For millennia, people have thrilled to the sight of falcons, soaring and diving at amazing speed. Some have painstakingly worked to develop a relationship with young birds and trained them to hunt. Around the world and through the years, various cultures have developed stories, myths and sometimes cults around the falcon. This book skims through them. It also looks at how people's admiration for this beautiful and amazing bird saved the Peregrine Falcon from extinction. And, how the falcon continues to fascinate and is becoming part of our modern culture.

Abu Hasan says

Warrick says

A mixed bag. It's like McDonald bundled up all her notes and research for the wonderful 'H is for Hawk' and got someone to publish it.

Good for her. But read 'H is for Hawk'. Not this.

Unisauros says

I found this book very easy to read and educational at the same time. :)

Tharwat says

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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 sakar 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 is 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 not 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 presevation 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 by 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.