BOOK REVIEWS

AN EAGLE TO THE SKY. By Frances Hamerstrom. Iowa State University Press, Ames, 1970. xxi+142pp. $4.95 (Hard cover.)

Few people have ever had the opportunity to view a golden eagle soaring in the heavens much less share with it bed and board. This extraordinary book, written by Dr. Frances Hamerstrom of Plainfield, Wisconsin, describes in delightful Hamerstromian tones an intimate relationship with the "king of birds" and the unusual bond that developed. While the text relates many observations on behavior—of both eagle and man—it also reveals a haunting love story that could only be written by someone in close harmony with nature.

This book brings out a philosophy rapidly disappearing from American culture and illustrates our failure to fully grasp the significance of an ecological conscience. AN EAGLE TO THE SKY is interlaced with the kind of wit and humor designed to drive home an ecological viewpoint, a technique developed by the author through years of relating with the natural community. The documented information on rearing and breeding of golden eagles is of scientific value and should be useful in further development of techniques to perpetuate this endangered species.

Selected passages reflect on the author's ability to share her unique experiences with a compassionate and understanding husband who provides just the right amount of encouragement. A clue to this interwoven relationship is found in the book's dedication passage which reads "To Frederick who has competed for my affections—and appearance sometimes to the contrary, successfully—with an eagle".

The book is divided into two parts. Part I is an indepth account of Chrys, an adult golden eagle, and the cooperative efforts developed with Fran Hamerstrom to rear a family of eaglets. Throughout the section the reader rapidly identifies with the problems of parenthood. There is the ritual of "stick play" and nest building by both Chrys and Fran, of pacing the floor and of singing lullabies to a somewhat suspicious bird. While Fran admittedly could not carry a tune, fortunately she could remember two lullabies.

There are anxious moments as Chrys lays her first egg—not in the carefully constructed nest of sticks and breast feathers, but upon the frozen sands of central Wisconsin where the prairie chicken has found sanctuary. The successes and failures of additional breeding seasons unfold in succeeding chapters where Chrys gains a new mate—a tercel named Grendel. Artificial insemination, hot water bottles, incubators and adoption all play important roles in Chrys' life. While failures are inevitable, each episode strengthens our knowledge and adds to the sunny domesticity with Chrys.

Part II evolves as an emotional, heart-warming story about Nancy, a young tick-infested eagle "sprung" from captivity and certain death and reared in the sophisticated of Hamerstrom's Eagle Rehabilitation Center.
This section does not dwell on domestic affairs but instead spins an intriguing web of experiences about Nancy with whom Fran shares "the wind, the wilderness and the hunt".

Again, words are carefully chosen to project the relationship that is formed between man and nature. Here, the reader experiences the flying of an eagle in yarak — topnotch condition. Choice phrases reflect Fran's attitude about life: "Next I scrubbed the kitchen floor (just where it needed it) . . ." Other phrases give way to a husband's subtle reaction: "Frederick had the bad grace to stand by his car laughing".

An extremely humorous section of the book reads like the silent movie days — so I'm told. Here, several moviemakers attempt to capture on film a fox hunt with the golden eagle. It makes the reader wonder where man got his intelligence.

As the final chapters unfold, with decisions made and promises kept, the reader begins to understand the strength of an eagle and of her companion. Thus it is with a gesture of trust and affection that a remarkable lady sends an eagle to the sky.

This book is generously illustrated. The artist Deann De La Ronde through her sketches shows remarkable insight into the ways of an eagle. Perhaps this is because she spent several months with the Hamerstroms — observing, listening and learning.

For those who have had the delightful opportunity to become acquainted with Fran Hamerstrom and her golden eagles, this book will rekindle fond memories. For those who have not met Fran, AN EAGLE TO THE SKY is an introduction to a rare and cherished experience. I highly recommend it.

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PIGEONS AND SPIKES

Many methods have been devised to curtail the use of buildings by pigeons, particularly in the large cities. Vertical metal barbs are available from commercial manufacturers for placing on ledges to discourage pigeons from roosting (Anon. 1948. Control of vagrant domestic pigeons. Fish and Wildlife Service, Wildl. Leaflet 254:3). Recently a lady in Madison requested information on how to keep pigeons away from window sills. It was suggested that nails be driven through boards and the boards placed on the sills. The principle is ancient as I chanced to discover. In describing the temple in Jerusalem during the siege of the city by the Romans, 70 A.D., Josephus wrote: "On its top it had spikes with sharp points, to prevent any pollution of it by birds sitting upon it" (W. Whiston. 1868. The works of Flavius Josephus. Philadelphia. II:385). He also mentions (p. 382) that there were "many dove-courts of tame pigeons." These were built by Herod the Great after he became king of Judea in 37 B.C. He rebuilt the temple completely so that the spikes were probably installed at the time.—A. W. Schorger.
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