

In my field experiences, which cover many years, I have noted that the call of a Sparrow Hawk appears to be limited to a high-pitched series of shrill killey-killey-killey sounds, quickly repeated three or four times. This little creature angrily gave this call when being transferred to the enclosure. Because of this cry she was quickly dubbed "Killey". During the days which followed I spent considerable time in or about the enclosure and was pleased to note a gradual change in her behavior. Instead of bristling up her feathers when I approached, she not only remained calm but consented to perch on my hand at times when food was proffered.

Within ten days or so Killey's tail had grown to full length and by then she was making short flights from perch to perch within the cage. Soon it would be time to consider her release. When freed she must be strong enough to pursue and to kill if she were to survive. I watched her development and general behaviour closely during the last few days and by July 25 decided to let her go. It was a fine day with a strong westerly wind. Placing her in a small carrying-cage, I proceeded to the Wolfville Ridge, a stretch of high ground overlooking the picturesque Gaspereau Valley. I placed the cage on the ground with the entrance door wide open, retreated a few yards, and waited. A moment later Killey emerged, deftly hopped to the top of the cage and faced into the wind. She shook herself vigorously and nodded her head a few times. This head-nodding is characteristic of all falcons and nobody seems to know why they do it. For a long moment she perched there. It was as though she realized the great moment had arrived and hesitated for fear that she would be unable to cope. Then suddenly, as though acting on impulse she raised her sharply-pointed wings and lifted, only to be blown sideways momentarily. I fully expected to see her land in the tall grass near-by. But my suspense was short-lived. She struggled a moment, and quickly rose to a 100 feet or more. She hovered overhead, the tips of her wings quivering in true falcon style. Then, as though caught off-guard and out of control she was carried away in a wide arc for 200 yards or more and I thought she was gone. But she mastered the situation and slowly began to beat her way back finally reaching a point directly above where I was standing.

And as I watched with mixed feelings of anxiety and admiration it seemed to me as though she were looking down enquiringly and in fancy - asking "how am I doing?" Her control was marvellous and I wondered at the strength she had so quickly acquired in those breast muscles, flabby from disuse as they must have been, to enable her to buffet the gale so masterfully as she was doing. Higher and higher she ascended and was last seen when caught in another wide sweep and carried beyond the range of my vision.

Robie W. Tufts
adapted from:
Blomidon Naturalists
Society Newsletter
Vol 2(3), 1975.

The Natural History Society of Prince Edward Island Newsletter is published eight times per year. If you have seen something unusual, please share it with us. It is important to have your observations recorded where others will learn of them.

Society Address

P.O. Box 2346
Charlottetown
Prince Edward Island

Phone - 894-9595

Membership Rates: Regular - \$3; Student - \$1; Family - \$4

Newsletter Editor

c/o Kathy Martin
Biology Department
University of Prince Edward Island
Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island

Phone - 892-4121, ext. 253

The Natural History Society gratefully acknowledges financial assistance from the Department of Tourism, Parks and Conservation which enables us to distribute newsletters to schools as well as to our membership.