

Love since childhood

by Vadim Gorbatorov

Since childhood, as long as I can remember, predatory birds have aroused my admiration and great interest. I was about three or four, perhaps, when I experienced this acute feeling for the first time. There was a war: my father was at the front, and my mother spent whole days at work.

I, like most children, was at kindergarten from the morning until late at night. One day, before the New Year, while the children slept, adults brought stuffed birds from some museum to decorate the rooms. When I woke up, I was amazed: real birds! So close! They sat but did not fly away. A hawk on a branch with open wings; a kestrel; a buzzard and an eagle owl. Sharp claws, crooked beaks, lively shining eyes and a thin

pattern of plumage. For the first few first minutes it was scary, but then I grew bolder and even touched these strange still birds.

At home, I tried to draw them and then, in the morning, I was in a hurry and hassled my mother to go to the kindergarten.

I remember one more incident from my childhood. I was ten at the time. It was a dry, warm autumn and everyone was digging potatoes. When I went home from school, a bird was sitting on some potato-plant waste which had been thrown onto the fence of our house. I moved closer, but the bird did not fly away. Yellow eyes, striped chest, long tail – it was a sparrowhawk! Slowly, I put my schoolbag full of books on the ground and took another step forward . . . s

The hawk tried to break away, flapping its wings, but could not fly. Somehow he had become tangled in the wilted potato roots. I rushed to him and tried to grab him and, for a fraction of a second, the bird was in my hands, but then it escaped and flew away. To this day, I remember the wind whipped-up by the beating of wings, the yellow eyes of a hawk and mottled plumage.

By the age of fourteen, I already knew of several raptors' nests in the surrounding forests and purposefully went to them with binoculars and a notebook. I drew them, climbed the trees, kept records and collected the remains of their prey. Thanks to the patience of my parents and despite cramped conditions, our home became shared with all manner of living creatures, including many representatives of the subgenus of birds of prey, whilst I tried to feed and heal them – and constantly painted them.

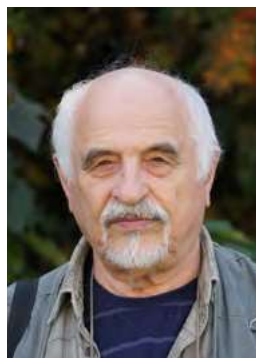
Later, already in adult life, predatory birds still remained at the centre of my interests. I met with zoologists, travelling with them on expeditions which allowed me to observe and paint birds of prey in their natural habitats in different geographical areas. I drew captive birds in aviaries and zoos.

In the seventies, falconry began to revive in Russia, primarily in Moscow and St Petersburg. Without experience or knowledge, blindly and alone, enthusiasts, in love with birds of prey, took their first steps. Together



with them I trapped wild hawks, helped to train them and went hawking. Sometimes, some of the falconers left their hunting companions with me for a few days and then I could not only make sketches, but could also quietly create more elaborate drawings. I took care of the hunting bird, fed it, carried it on a glove and cleaned its accommodation.

I did not become a falconer. This occupation requires too much energy and time! However, as before, as in childhood, everything that is connected with birds of prey excites and fascinates me. This topic has become one of the predominant themes of my artistic career and, to the best of my ability, I try to convey in my works my admiration for the beauty of birds of prey and show the romance of the ancient art of falconry.



VADIM
ALEKSEEVICH
GORBATOV

An internationally recognised painter, graphic artist, and book-illustrator, Vadim was born in 1940 in Moscow and studied art and industrial design to PhD level, going on to teach at the Stroganov State Academy of Art, Industrial Design and Applied Arts where he had previously studied. He spent 17 years as Russian TV's Head of Graphics and Illustration, but in 1987 decided instead to pursue his vocation as a freelance wildlife artist. Vadim's work, inspired by extensive field research, frequently focuses on field-sports, and is well-known to falconers for its vivid depictions of modern and historical hawking. He has illustrated publications from Flint and Sorokin's *Falcon on the Glove* (1999) and Fedorov and Malov's title on falconry *Sokoliniaya okhota* (2005) to Remmler and Hollinshead's *Memoirs of a Hunter* (2009). Vadim's stunning illustrations are also inspiring younger audiences in Stacey Patterson's educational books *Fidget's Freedom* (2006) and *Fidget's Folly* (2012), and feature in galleries, museums and private collections around the world.

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