

"Help, I've lost my bird!"

A BRIEF GUIDE TO SEARCHING FOR YOUR BIRD OF PREY

Imagine your bird has just flown off or is no longer paying attention to you. The sickening panic sets in! What should you do now?

All sorts of thoughts may run through your mind:

"I'm so embarrassed"

"People will think I'm not a good falconer"

"I forgot to put the telemetry on"

"Where do I start? Which way should I go?"

"If anyone finds out they'll make fun of me"

"It was too fat to fly, but I did anyway"

Okay it's time to be calm and rational. You need to do all you physically can to find your bird. No one knows your bird better than you, and every minute counts.

It is our duty as falconers to track and reclaim our lost birds. Any falconer worth their salt should want their bird back with every ache of their heart. All the time, effort and training we put into our birds should equal one thing - our desire to be reunited with our birds.

There are many reasons birds can get lost but remember:

Your bird's welfare and potential death is on your head, so do your best to find them!
At least then you can rest in the knowledge that you've tried everything.

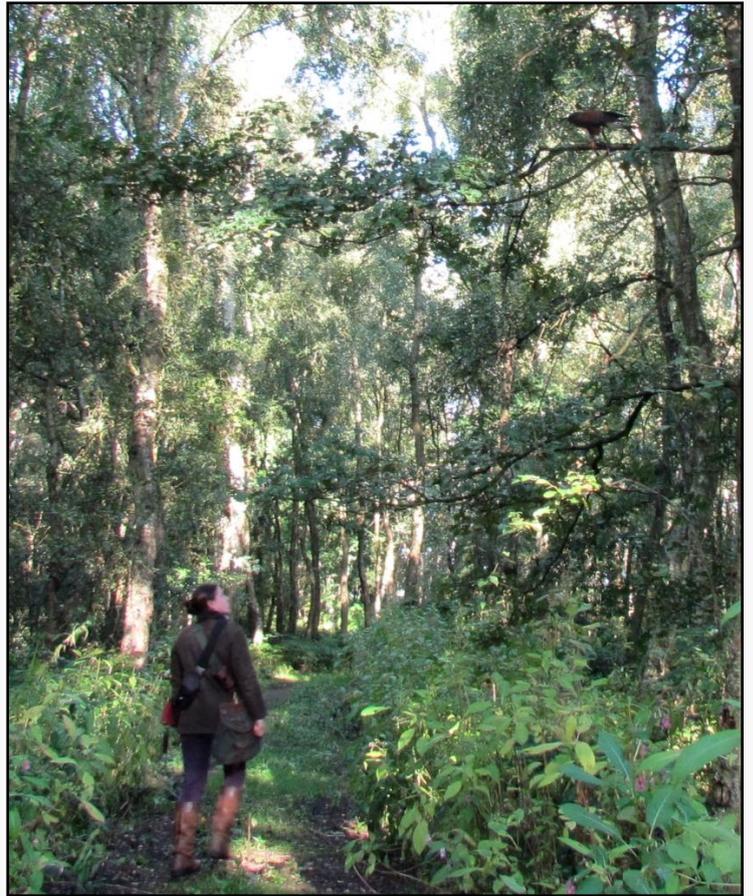
TURN ON YOUR TELEMETRY

It should go without saying that you should always free fly birds with working telemetry on. However there are also some situations where birds are lost when not wearing telemetry - escaping out of aviaries, equipment failures, being let go of when carried etc. All of these scenarios are largely avoidable, but they do happen.

If you have working telemetry on the bird then your chance of being reunited swiftly and safely is much greater. Telemetry is easily accessible these days, and second hand sets can be bought at low cost. At the very least buy a working transmitter so that someone else with the correct receiver would have a chance of tracking the bird for you if it did fly off. There is simply no excuse for flying birds free without it.

If the bird does not have telemetry on then you need to use some field craft. Look for obvious indicators to where it may be. Was it chased off? Are there corvids mobbing it where it has sat up in a tree? Which way is the wind blowing, so what direction has it flown in?

And remember, a bird wearing bells will also be easier to find!



FOLLOW YOUR BIRD AS SOON AS POSSIBLE

On realising your bird has headed off in a direction that is not planned, get after it! Don't just stand there watching it fly away. With the exception of soaring eagles and high flying falcons which may travel far quite quickly, most falconry birds will not just B-line away from you.

Sometimes when birds fly out of sight of you they can get disorientated, especially if they are flying in a new location. Most hawks and owls will move tree to tree and you should be able to get after them fairly swiftly.

Quite often they will only move a few trees or buildings away at a time. Unless you are flying in strong winds, the bird is initially unlikely to go too far from you – which means you have a reasonable chance of tracking it.

Even though it may feel futile there should be no reason for you to stop searching until dark! If it sits up in a tree on nightfall at least you will know where to start next morning. Remember your bird's vision is generally much better than yours and they may spot you too.



BE HONEST ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED

It's understandable that people are often embarrassed or worried about alerting other people that they have a bird missing. Sometimes it is down to their own pride, or it may down to the potential worry of backlash and horrible comments from other falconers.

If you want what's best for you bird it's time to suck it up and let people know you need help!

Many people lie about the circumstances of their birds being lost. But remember the more you try to lie, the quicker you will spell out a death sentence for your bird. It's that simple. Do you really want that on your conscience?

Tell others what actually happened when you lost your bird and then they will have a much better ability to form a good plan to help find it. Falconers are often a resourceful and helpful bunch, so make them aware.

CONTACT THE INDEPENDENT BIRD REGISTER

Alert the Independent Bird Register by phoning 0161 790 5613.

Even if your bird is not registered it may have been spotted or even retrieved already. The IBR can also quickly advertise that your bird is missing to a large network which will help put more eyes in the sky!

If you are not registered with the IBR, once your bird is reunited sign it up, so that it can be traced quicker in the future.

www.independentbirdregister.co.uk



ALERT PEOPLE ON LOCAL FACEBOOK GROUPS AND OTHER SOCIAL MEDIA

We all know how positive the power of social media can be, and how quickly posts can go viral. Often your local community is a great starting point for birds that have gone off the radar. There are plenty of local community Facebook groups so let others know what is happening.

The more people that are alerted in the area that you lost your bird - the more chance of sightings, which could quickly give you some great leads to track your bird.

You can also contact your local radio station to put out an alert, and put up missing bird posters in the area you last sighted it with simple and clear descriptions of what the bird looks like. The more noise you make about your lost bird, the greater chance you have of being reunited.

DON'T GIVE UP BEFORE YOU'VE EVEN STARTED

I'll repeat it...**do not give up on your bird**. Everyone goes through a range of emotions from hope to despair in those first few minutes and hours.

It's very easy to panic and think "it's probably miles away now." The reality is – it usually isn't. You just have to get out on the ground as much as possible and check everywhere.

A FEW TIPS TO HELP PREVENT LOSS OF YOUR BIRD

- Use working telemetry and bells
- Secure your bird to your glove with a falconer's knot when carrying it between perch/box/scales etc.
- When preparing your bird to fly put telemetry on your bird BEFORE removing the rest of its furniture.
- Use double door systems on your aviary/mews to stop your bird flying out over your shoulder.
- Check the bird's furniture regularly for potential wear and tear which will lead to equipment failure.

Not all situations will end positively but if you do all in your power to look for your bird then you will be giving them the best possible chance.

