

Nye, Alva G. Jr.

Catching Peregrines on Assateague

Aug 19, 1986

Interview

Interviewer: Mr. Nye, would you like to tell us how you got started with the [falcons] on Assateague?

Nye: This story begins back we'll say in the 1930's. I was deeply engrossed in falconry, having gotten my first [peregrine] in 1933. And I was just out of college. It was 1938, to be precise, that Assateague first came to my attention. Prior to that time, we had been getting our [peregrines] for falconry from the cliffs in the eastern part of the country here, including Great Falls, VA, the Delaware water gap, and places like that that had cliffs. This was the typical eastern or Appalachian peregrine that we were using. Then, it was in September of 1938 that I happened to be visiting with a friend and there was a biological survey man there who, with the father of my friend, had been fishing down on Assateague island surf fishing at fox hill levels. In the course of the conversation, they said that fishing was lousy, but that the beach was covered with hawks. So, for sport, they cruised the beach shooting hawks with a 22 Hornet rifle. These hawks, they said, were very, very common, and it wasn't hard for them to find targets. They killed quite a number of them.

When I questioned them about the hawks, they said that they were exactly like the duck hawks that we were training at the time. So, this provoked an immediate interest and the following month, which was October of 38, two of us went down there to just check the island out and also to check out a trapping method if we were fortunate enough to see any peregrines or duck hawks there. We called them duck hawks in the early days, and it's fairly recent that they become widely known as peregrines. At any rate, as I say in October, we went to the beach. And we went down there to check out these hawks which were allegedly peregrines.

As it turned out, they were genuine peregrine falcons. At that time, Assateague Island was just a bare sand strip extending some forty miles down the coast. The only human life out there was the three coast guard stations-one at North beach, one at [Poke's] Island, and the other one down at the tip of the island which I think they called Assateague stations. These were [manned] coast guard stations and were the only regular residents on the island. There was a gun club building at the upper end, above the North beach station. Which, I don't know when it was built, but I'm pretty sure it was there when we first went over. At any rate, when we got down to Ocean City, the only way to get over to the island, -I think this is fairly interesting-was a barge, a flat top barge, which I think in those days, they called a monitor. And we would take a regular conventional car and put it on this monitor and then with a small power boat, tie it alongside the ferry operator would carry us over to the tip of the island which is right opposite the inland up there at Ocean City. We would cross-it was sort of to the back of that where the bay back in there-that he took us across to the tip of the island.

And then, he would drop some steel ramps and we would drive off of this monitor and we were then on the upper end of Assateague Island. Now, mind you, this was in the days when there weren't any four-wheel drive vehicles, and the only way that you could get around on that island was to deflate your tires down to minimal pressures and arm yourself with a good shovel and start on down the beach. It was surprising how well and how few times we actually got stuck in driving down Assateague Island. And as I said at the beginning of this it was a virginal sand island. A strip with typical brush behind it. And we could drive, in the beginning, full length of the island. Although, as it later turned out, we did most of our trapping at the upper end. Wildlife was very abundant. Typically, I guess, the same as it is now. [Just] shore birds and migrating ducks, and in the early fall there were migrating swallows there, mostly tree swallows by the thousands. And of course, one of the things that we look forward to because it sort of became a symbol of when the peregrines were there were the migrating Monarch butterflies and it seem to me that there were many of them down there.

Bald Eagles were common on the island. We used to see them every trip down practically. But at any rate, coming back again now to the first trip down there in Thirty-nine. We drove down the beach and we did verify that there were peregrines falcons sitting about on the sand and on the small pieces of grit and so forth. We thought this was very unusual because we had always associated the peregrines with cliffs, as I said before. And then to see them sitting on the beach like seagulls was really quite startling. Our first efforts at trapping them was a six base type of trap and it didn't work very well because we were in a big hold in the ground covered over on top with sand with a cover. We were, depending on the birds coming to us to catch them.

So, what we put our mind to was developing a mobile kind of thing where we could ride the beach until we saw a peregrine and then set up a trap of some kind to lure him into it. And that was the basis for the so called headset method where we learned, we took and buried a man in the sand, covered his head with a grassy cover, handed him a live pigeon in his hands and then the other person willing would take the car away. And then, fluttering the pigeon, the peregrine would see it, usually would come almost directly to it, and when he had a [light] on the pigeon, the person in the sand would slowly reach his hand up out of the sand and grasp the peregrine by the leg. This was a revolutionary way of trapping hawks. Never before used to my knowledge and it was so successful that the first time, we tried it we caught twelve peregrine.

Interviewer: Where did you get that idea?

Nye: Actually, I did not, I really can't describe where I saw it. I learned later that Indians used it out west to catch eagles, but that just seemed to me that I was just really, I really have no particular idea. It just seemed to me if we had a headset and we're under the sand that maybe the bird would come in. And the way it turned out I took on this trip down, I took one out there and it worked very well. And so, we caught birds. From then on, word got out that we were catching the peregrines this way and henceforth, Assateague became the place to go get passage, or migrating peregrines. What's very interesting though is this. That at that early date, we noticed that the peregrines we were catching on Assateague were small. Let me give an example. The birds that we took from the cliffs in the East here, the females usually weighed 38 ounces and the males usually weighed 28 ounces. But we noticed that these peregrines we were catching on Assateague weighed only 28 ounces for the females and 20 roughly for the males. They were [a factor smaller] in weight.

So actually, we took some of those into the National Museum and showed them to Dr. Freedman down there. This was back in the late Thirties. And he admitted that they've seen to be a different race of peregrines. Not like the Eastern birds nesting on the cliffs. But he said, in order to describe them, the nesting site would have to be found and the populations defined and so forth. And actually, this came about when Clayton White, many years later, described *Falco peregrinus tundrius* or the Arctic Peregrine [has] differed from the Eastern Appalachian *Falco peregrinus* *abundus*. But at that time, even in the early days, we knew that that bird that was sitting on the sand there was a different bird. Now a little bit more about Assateague. Usually when we went across in the many trips thereafter. And it was almost a weekly affair for a long time. We banded a great number of birds. We certainly didn't need as many as we were catching. We did let them go as I say, a great number of them. Banded them.

But the coastguard stations were always so friendly. Especially late in the year, the weather sometimes could be nasty so that they were fully manned. And we would always go in the coastguard stations and have hot coffee and hot biscuits and it was really very nice the way that the coastguard people treated us. There on the island. Over the years, the ferry which had taken us initially across, and I really can't remember how many years it operated from the upper end of Assateague. But later it was moved down to Sandy Point. Ferry operated from Sandy Point across, which was just above where the North Beach coast guard station. That's across the bay in the back you know. So, for years then after that, the access to the island was by the ferry across from Sandy Point, right above the North Beach station. And then later the bridge was built, which came across I think in the approximate location.

Interviewer: The ferry was a regular ferry and not that barge type of thing you went across the first time?

Nye: No, I think it was an improvement on it. It wasn't a regular ferry like, now let me think back and try to think that out a little bit. Maybe it was a [small]. It would take about three cars. Maybe it was developed for the purpose. I remember we used to go down there and yeah; I think it was. Because I'll tell you why. We used to go down there sometimes when the rides were there at four a.m. and the men who operated the ferry wouldn't come over till daylight and we tried to get a little sleep in the ferry. And the mosquitoes were so bad. The only place you could get away from them was to go in the control cabin and shut the door. I think, now I wouldn't want to go and positively say it, but I think the ferry and the. It was not the kind of rig we went over on the early days on the monitor at the upper end of the island. If you wanted really information on that sort of thing, the man that operated the ferry's name was [Buddy]. And of course, there was a lot of Buddies out there cause you probably could track it down through them exactly what the ferry was. I think that our early days at Assateague were...we had the whole island to ourselves, as I say, except for the coastguard stations. And the fox hill levels was a tremendous flat, sandy level.

Incidentally, I'm quite amazed at how many changes have taken place in the topography and the vegetation on the island. Now, fox hill levels when we first went there was one huge flat, sand area. You could drive anywhere from the bay to the ocean. It was a couple of miles across and there was no vegetation growing out. I think as I recall the last time I was there; it's been over a year it's been a number of years ago. There was a lot of sand, a lot of grass that grows in there now.

Kind of looks like a meadow so to speak. Much of that grass, sand areas has disappeared. Matter of fact, we used to get most of our peregrines in the fox hill, most of them in that fox hill level area. [We used to do] seen 'em there. They seemed to like that opened sand condition, but then in recent years, I think Dr.

Wardsman, catching a great number down on what he calls the wash flats, which are way down at the end of the island. And to me, has sort replaced what fox hill levels were in the early days when we were there. I think they have the wash flats are still retain a visage of a huge sand area. Although Dr. Ward told me in recent years, it too, was growing up in this grass, and more than before. I think that the peregrines do like and open expanse of sand, where they can see all around well.

Interviewer: So how do these peregrines hunt? Do they sit and wait till they see something?

Nye: Well sometimes they do. Lots of times, they soar over the beach. You've seen them soaring. I had a couple of remarkable notes here on birds, on the peregrines. Incidentally, one of them falconers, a doctor, did considerable research on the peregrines there. That was Dr. Heinz Main [spelling?], on their food habits. In other words, he would, every time we caught a peregrine, we would save the casting from that peregrine and turn it in. And he had these castings analyzed and believe it or not, one of the favorite foods of the peregrine are on Assateague Island were the [flickers], the Woodpecker, see the Flicker. One day incidentally, we saw a peregrine sitting on a front beach. That is, the beach comes up maybe fifty feet in the edge of the water. It's kind of a high crown there. And there was a beautiful peregrine sitting right on that, and the sun was just barely coming up the ocean in the East. And we watched her. And all of the sudden, she took off and headed right straight east out over the ocean. Wings just going steady, and we knew that she had seen something out over the ocean. Now we put the, we almost lost track there with naked eye, but we put the binoculars on. And we were using satellite fifties then. And she was out there and all of a sudden, well out into the range of the glasses, she started [hawking] something over the ocean.

And after about three or four stoops, she caught whatever she was [flying] and came back in, carried it into the front beach where she proceeded to eat it. And we were wondering what in the world was out over the ocean at least a couple of miles out there. Ya know that she saw. And so, when she finished eating, we went up and picked up the feather, and it was very interesting. It was a flicker. Now what in the world that flicker was doing out over the ocean a couple of miles, I do not know. But Hines incidentally indicated that their favorite food during that was Flickers, if they could catch them. Although, somebody else told me later, who did some more analysis of the peregrines there, that the Haggard [spelling?], seemed, Haggard, that's an adult bird. Let's put it, I was using it in falconry terms. Adult peregrines seemed to prefer shore birds, whereas the immature young birds seemed to prefer passerines [spelling?], migrating there at the same time. There's no shortage of food there, on Assateague. I remember once a little anecdote. Which, we were trapping, and we had brought along a cage full of English sparrows. And we were practically in the middle of Assateague of the big levels, fox hill levels, we called big levels and fox hill level are synonymous. In the middle of fox hill levels.

And some way or another, we were finished. We were going to use the sparrows for trapping [Marlins], and we didn't have any luck. So, we let the whole bunch go. And there was a pretty stiff wind blowing and these sparrows would take off and hit the wind and go away with it. And there were so many peregrines sitting around that flat that I don't think one sparrow got out of that [unknown] levels before a peregrine come across there and grabbed it.

Now, speaking of numbers of peregrines, I think it's important to tell you that in my notes on this, and incidentally, if there are specific questions that you have or anyone else has, about any aspect of this, I do have these very detailed notes that I made on every trip down there from about 1938 up into the Forties. After that, the place got so popular and there was so many people going down there that I

abandoned going down there anymore. As a matter of fact, I turned what little trapping I did after that down to the Virginia Beach area, along the coast down there.

Interviewer: How many people were catching falcons down there in those early times?

Nye: Well, there would be fellows from Philadelphia and fellows from New York. And what I did not like about it was that it got to be a social event where they would come down to catch hawks for fun. And I didn't believe in that at all because the peregrine's too wonderful a bird to be mishandled or caught by people who wouldn't really treasure the bird and take care of it. I feel very strongly on it, still do. And I did then. But the thing I didn't like about it was that too many people were getting to turn it into an October trapping fest. And would go down to Assateague, put up their tents, and catch a bunch of peregrines which they didn't need in the first place.

Interviewer: What would they do with them [when they got them]?

Nye: Well, so they gave their friends or maybe turned a few loose and some they may have kept. But I hated to see them go down there and catch birds and they give them to people. If they were getting what they wanted individual, that's one thing. But to take them home, and of course birds weren't protected in those days. There was not really was of controlling it except to just let them know you didn't like it. But then it got to the point where it was just too many people running around that beach. And so, after that point, I quit going down there.

Interviewer: How many peregrines would you see in a day down there?

Nye: Well, I was gonna tell you that there were bad days and good days. I think that there were plenty of days when we saw over sixty. In one day. And then there were other days that...For example, I'm looking at a page here from notes that I put together in 1945. This covers 1939, 40, 41, 42, 43, and 44. It's very interesting, and this data, I don't hesitate telling you, is that we caught, in that period of time a total of one hundred and three peregrines in those years. And of the 103, fifty-eight percent. Well, let's put it, let me put it, I don't want to put it in percentages. [I'll] put it in numbers. Out of the 103 peregrines caught, 60 were passage females, that means immature females. First year birds. Twenty-five were first year males, [tersels] we called them. And there were seventeen [haggard], that's adults, and seventeen [haggard] females and one [haggard tarsal [in that...Now incidentally, I'm gonna give you that data, that's summarized, I think, in that paper I'm gonna give you there and the [total] picture. And incidentally, those are the parties of people that were on the beach and the dates they were there. I had very detailed records on those years. Those early years.

Interviewer: So after '44, you didn't go down anymore?

Nye: Oh, I went down maybe three or four times more after that, but it, as I say, it was so crowded, and it became so competitive. For example, you could go to fox hill levels, and they started using, at this time...Well if you're interested in the trapping, I think this is part of it. You ought to know this. I told you how the headset was developed. In other words, that was something that I personally thought of. That thing that went over your head and you buried in the sand, and you held a pigeon. Now what happened was this. In other words, you'd drive along the beach till you saw a peregrine. Then you'd stop the car, dig a flat hole, put the man in it. Cover him all over with sand, put the headpiece on it. Hand him a pigeon with a short piece of string that he held just below the sand out in front of him. With me? And then the other fellow would drive the car away. The many in the sand would then flap the pigeon a few

times. The peregrine would see it and would come over and [light] on the pigeon. Then the man would slide his hands up out of the sand, grab the peregrine by the legs and throw the headset off and come up out of the sand. Then the fellow whose been watching, who had driven the car away, would return up the beach. You know, and so forth.

And that was the end of the episode. Now what we found was this. What we found was that many times when we were digging the hole, the peregrine is sitting out on the beach two hundred yards away. For no reason at all, it wasn't frightened. It would just take off and leave. And here we are just digging like crazy, trying to get ready to trap it. So, then we had the idea, what we need was something that would anchor that peregrine until we were ready to catch him. So, we developed what is known as the quote "throw out pigeon." And there we'd have a pigeon with a ball of cord on it, as big as a tennis ball. So, when we saw a peregrine, we'd throw a pigeon out for the peregrine to take and the ball of cord would, of course, drag into the ground. Then the peregrine would come over and [light] on the pigeon. And the peregrine would kill the pigeon immediately. They're very quick at that. They, unlike other hawks, a peregrine will grasp the vertebra column and break the neck. Immediately.

So, the peregrine would kill the pigeon, and then he would start to plume it, or pluck it. In the meantime, we would be digging a hole over here. Now we had him out there on a pigeon. So, we put the man in the sand, with a pigeon. Then the fellow driving away would drive right over and [flush] the peregrine off that, which he hadn't eaten cause he hadn't had time. He'd pick up that particular throw out bird, it was called. Put it in the car and take off down the beach. In the meantime, the peregrine would circle, say what happened to the pigeon I just...And all of a sudden, he would see the pigeon being fluttered by the man in the sand. The peregrine would then come in immediately to the pigeon in the sand and the guy would catch it. So that was the genesis of the "Throw out pigeon", which was an anchoring device. Okay. Now, the third step was this. We got an idea that if we put nooses on a leather harness and threw out the same pigeon with a ball of cord, that we'd have a chance of snaring the hawk in those nooses when he came in to take it. So that give rise to what we call the "harness pigeon" or the "noosed pigeon." You would throw out the pigeon with the. When you saw a peregrine, you'd throw out the harness pigeon. The peregrines would grab it. In the meantime, you'd dig a hole in the sand. Then the man driving the car would go over and try to flush the peregrine. Well, in about ninety percent of the time, roughly, the peregrine's feet had tangled in those nooses, and he could not carry the pigeon and the ball of cord. So, we'd simply be dragging it across the sand and the man in the car would jump out then and pick up the peregrine. And then in the meantime, the man over...he'd go back over to the man in the sand, and he'd come out of the sand and the [hunt was over]. Now that "harness pigeon" idea is so effective, and because people got tired of, when you buried in the sand, you got sand in your ears, you have sand in your hair. So, they didn't like it. So, from the trapping today is almost entirely "harness pigeons." So, you can do it this way, you throw out a pigeon with a harness on him. You got a ninety percent chance of catching him. If you don't catch him, you go over there and pick up that pigeon.

And you throw another one out. And you got ninety percent chance again, you follow me? So sometimes you might have to throw out two or three harness pigeons, but you'd catch the peregrine almost certainly every time. And that's the way that the banding's being done today is that the trapping, you know for the birds is [unknown]. And it's quite interesting because none of these techniques, the headset or the harness pigeon were ever used in the hundreds of years that they trapped birds in the middle Ages. You know, they used an old thing we called a [Bow Net]. And it's, they seemed to develop a Bow Net, a net on the ground and it had serious drawbacks, but they never really improved on it. They

just stopped there. Even hundreds of years over there. And here we upstart Americans, [that] falconry was not really known until this century. Here we have developed these trapping techniques that are so effective.

Interviewer: So, the [harness] with the nooses was your idea?

Nye: Well, it was, I will claim credit for the harness with nooses. I will take, I contributed to it. There were some other that had input to that. [There were too unknown] really to mention. But different guys would say do this and do that. But the headset I think was primarily the method that I used. But I contributed on the other, of course. But that's it [on Assateague]. But the other thing I also want to just leave this thought with you. That when we first went over to Assateague Island 1938, it was an absolute virginal piece of real estate. Like somebody once said, it was nobody out there but the birds and God and us and that was about it. And so, we saw wildlife and we saw peregrines in numbers that were absolutely as it totally was wild and not bothered by humans. It's very difficult to assess Assateague Island today, in numbers of peregrines for example, because of human pressures on the beach. I mean the upper ends got parks on it and so forth.

Now the back end of the island, but even it has changed. I told you earlier that much of that big attractive, flat sand areas aren't there anymore. It's grown up in so much grass in those areas that I think the birds are probably...I flew that area about two years ago and just below Assateague as you work down the coast there, there are some islands that are just sandy and flat. I have an idea that the peregrines are probably preferring those open sand areas that some of those islands have to the growing up of Assateague now.

Interviewer: Why do you think they like that better?

Nye: I think it's, if I had to guess, I know they feel more comfortable, and they can see three hundred and sixty degrees around them for anything that might be bothering or something like that. A peregrine just doesn't like to sit down in grass. There's one other thing that I would like to say that Assateague...This is an important point in the ecology of the peregrine falcon in this country. As I said before, up until the development of Assateague, and we went down there and found these. Indecently, all of them out there, it's very interesting. Ninety-eight percent of all the birds we ever caught on Assateague were tundra peregrines, this light variety, ya know. It's very seldom that we ever get a heavy bird, which would indicate and Appalachian peregrine. So, it's really a migration route of the Arctic peregrine, [tundrias], coming down this way. Now what's very interesting to me is that prior to 1938, falconry was growing at this time. And it was new, but I mean, there weren't many people only about 3500 in the country today.

So, back in those days, we were probably talking about 25, 50, or 100 maybe, coast to coast, in the Thirties, at the most. But some people, we were taking rather, some birds at that time from [unknown], okay? But beginning in 1939, when we start catching the beach birds, the [tundrias], to my knowledge, the effect on taking the birds from cliffs thereafter was practically zero. There may have been the occasional bird taken here and there. But as I've told you maybe earlier, that the passage birds are far superior for training and falconry than an [Ayes] or a [Nestling] is. So, with the development of Assateague, it contributed tremendously to American falconry because it provided a source of these wonderful passage peregrines, and it really did not affect the cliff birds that nested in the eastern United States. The reason I stress this is that I've heard from time to time, people say that the falconers were

taking the birds off the cliffs and were a factor in maybe a decline in the Appalachian birds. This is not the case at all. Really, the passage fall trap tundra birds were the backbone of falconry from then on.

Interviewer: So, after 39, say, the falconers got almost all their peregrines from the beach?

Nye: From Assateague or from beaches. Now they later opened up other beaches. They found tundras going town along the coast. They found tundras on Padre Island down in Texas, and so forth. So, the tundras have easily fulfilled the needs of falconers over the years, and as I say though, but Assateague was the first. Assateague Island has a unique place, extremely unique place in the history of American falconry because it did contribute that particular thing. Well, I think we covered most of it. I'm trying to think of anything else.

Pause

Interviewer: Did you catch any other species down there besides the peregrine?

Nye: That's an interesting question. As I mentioned earlier, the Bald Eagles were there. We used to see Bald Eagles on the beach regularly. We caught a few [marlins], not very many. I don't recall the exact number, but it wasn't very many. [Marlins] were ... Oh incidentally, let me just comment on the hawks and things over there first. The Bald Eagle was actually, very common there in the 30's. The [marlins] at times, there were days when the [marlins] were everywhere. We'd see a few [kestrels], not as many as you'd think. And also, one winter trip down there, we saw, and we caught in the headset method a Snowy Owl. We saw a number of Snowy Owls on this particular trip. Now generally speaking Marsh Hawks or [Harriers] were common. We'd see them working the back beach particularly, But what to me is very interesting is the absolute minimal number of the [sipitors] that we'd see on Assateague Island. You know, across the bay, over in Cape May. It's a tremendous concentration point for [sharp shins], Coopers, and birds of this kind [sipitors]. But on Assateague, we very seldom saw an [sipitor]. My guess is that once they crossed the bay, they would filter down the forested area over on the other side of the bay. But they certainly were not, many of them, on Assateague at that time. So, I guess Eagles, Marlins, {Kestrels}, Marsh hawks or Harriers, and of course peregrines were the main birds on Assateague; the main [unknown], the main parts that we saw on Assateague.

Interviewer: Did you have any evidence of fire on the island?

Nye: No, never. Never. The only natural catastrophe or calamity would be sometimes we would encounter conditions when we went there where the water would wash over the, [Like the] from the front beach. And I recall the time or two when fox hill levels, or sometimes we called it the big levels, was pretty well a wash after a Northeastern. Other than that, I don't recall any fires on the beach at all. And I was just trying to think as we talked when they disbanded the coast guard stations, those three stations that were there. But I just don't remember that. But other than that, I don't recall any abnormal fires for sure.

Interviewer: Did you see the ponies and the [inaudible] out there?

Nye: Oh yeah, the ponies were there. But you know, I don't recall that we saw many deer in the early days there. Although I understand now that deer are quite common on Assateague and around [Chincoteague], too; the [unknown] whitetail. But, in the early days,

no, we just didn't see em. I don't think they were there. There were lots of foxes on the island and rabbits, but I don't recall seeing any deer there at all.

Interviewer: Did you see people hunting foxes down there?

Nye: No. I personally did not. No. No. I really saw, even in the duck season the few times we were there, I didn't see that much hunting, even in the [lines that rush off there] on [bay side]. But I guess it was a [fair month], but we didn't see too much of it. Always worried me a great deal though frankly because I knew that the peregrines were flying by those duck lines, and in those days, there was no good hawk but a dead hawk. So, I'm afraid that there was a considerable toll. I'm really so glad that we don't have today the shooting that was so common when I was young.

Pause

Interviewer: What day was that?

Nye: This was on September 23rd, 1943; the first trip in 1943. It always been my desire to fly down the island just before the trapping season to see what the place looked like from the air, and also attempt to see if they're any falcons there. This desire became a reality on Thursday when a friend of mine, a Navy pilot, (And I was in the Navy at the time) agreed to make the trip down to the island and take me along. We had a considerable difficulty in getting hold of a navy ship, but finally, we got one -- A training aircraft and so forth. And we flew on down about four o'clock. You getting this? And we'd come [inaudible] about the weather. For the past few days had been relatively warm with high temperatures at night. However, last week, we had temperatures for several days and we dropped around fifty in the early morning. And in the day, the temperature dropped to thirty-eight one morning. I felt that this cold snap should have brought quite a few birds to the island. We flew at a thousand feet in the duck line of Ocean City. The day was sunny and visible. And visibility was fine.

We arrived at Ocean City at five in the morning, five o'clock in the afternoon, where we did a [inaudible], and those are shipped down and proceeded to cruise midway between the front beach and the telephone poles at an altitude of approximately fifty feet. And it indicated speed of a hundred and twenty-five miles an hour. From this altitude, everything was clearly visible on the front beach as well as the phone poles, and I had no trouble spotting my first peregrine sitting on a stick near the front beach. I notified Ward and pointed to the bird, and we made several steep turns and passes at the bird which succeeded in flushing him, who flew to the marshes to the West. We then flew on down the island. It was very easy from the air to see Ostrich were there resting on the pole together with three Bald Eagles, which were seen down the other levels. Right at fox hill levels, I spotted a beautiful gold [tarsal] sitting on a phone pole. And we made several dives at the scoundrel, passing within fifty feet of where he was sitting, and we were not able to flush him. This seems rather strange because you would think that all the noise [and center] of the plane would frighten him. Apparently, these hawks don't mind airplanes at all while automobiles are skittish to them. Considering the time and the fine views we had of the entire island, it was surprising that not more hawks were seen. A total of four were all that we observed. We cut back into the salt flat several times. We saw nothing back there at all.

Of course, it is highly possible that it was late in the afternoon and that the peregrines were fed up and retired to the inland of the island to spend the night. Well, the biggest problems we had in flying the island at such a low altitude was that at avoiding the damn seagulls, which we flushed from the surf. I

feared that one of them would fly into the prop. The only other real incident of interest, and I say that with a great deal of reservation, was when the gas tank ran out in the left wing, and we had to make a quick switch to the right wing tank. We noticed several cars fishing on the front beach, and when we passed over head at such a low altitude, the people all waved and one or two made an effort to get in their automobile just in case. It certainly was a grand sight and a wonderful experience to have to be able to fly over the air [and be awarded so much] pleasure in trapping falcons there every fall. We know the [inaudible] of the ferry was operating between the mainland and the island was the same as usual. We spent about a half an hour actually cruising around the island and then we returned to the North beach coast guard station where we veered sharply to the west and began to climb. Levelled off at a thousand feet and headed for Washington. The return trip from the island took forty minutes flying time and I still got home in time to have my dinner before dark.

Incidentally, I took quite a few pictures while I was there. I had them developed. It sure was a hell of a job manipulating that camera because every time I got ready to take a shot, Ward would throw the plane into a steep bank, and the next thing I knew, I'd be upside down trying to find out where the hell the beach was. And I ended up more than once to take a picture of myself. As a matter of interest though, I was able to see at a thousand feet, pigeons that were flying around barnyards without any difficulty at all, and therefore, I believe that on many occasion when our trained falcons go up in the air, and simply go out of sight above us, they are probably in the vicinity of two or three thousand feet. My brother

Bob is joining me today, September 24th, and the two of us are driving down the island from [

unknown]. And I just hope to goodness I see that gold [tarsal] that I saw sitting on the phone pole as fox hill levels because he and I are gonna have a little rendezvous. Well, that's the story on the flight, and so forth.

Interviewer: Thank you very much Mr. Nye.