

FOOT TROUBLE IN GYRFALCON AND ITS RELATION TO
THE SHAPE AND MATERIAL THE BIRD IS KEPT ON

by John Lejeune
6474 Wellington Ave. West
Vancouver, B.C., Canada

Pages have been written on the above subject and the theories of the cause and cure center mostly on the type of material the bird is kept on such as rubber, wood, cement, strawbale, cork, etc.

In nature, the bird rests mostly on rock or wood. However, it changes its location more often and since the profile of the resting place is not equal, the pressure of the bird's weight is seldom applied equally to the underside of the bird's foot. Furthermore, as the bird changes its resting position from one foot to the other the warm footpad is suddenly exposed to the extreme cold of the resting-place. I have watched Gyrfalcon in the wild spending approximately seventy-five per cent of their time for several weeks on steel towers without any trouble to their feet.

My opinion was therefore that it does not matter on what type of material the bird stands as long as it can be kept clean easily. As mentioned in an earlier article, I had tapeworms in a Gyrfalcon and therefore kept the bird strictly on a screen perch for two months whose top was built out of an ordinary 2" x 3" douglas fir. The bird's feet were very healthy and it changed frequently from one foot to the other to rest. In order to improve its condition, I got the idea to cover half of its perch with heavy carpet, so the bird could choose between soft carpet or wood. The bird stood then almost entirely on carpet. After approximately fourteen days, I noticed that the bird always rested on both feet, and on inspection of the footpads I noticed a blister type infection one-quarter inch in diameter without any liquid content under each metatarsal pad. In order to relieve the area of infection entirely of the bird's body weight and supply it constantly with fresh air which I think is also important, I designed a perch cover shown in Figure 1.

In a matter of hours, the bird realized the advantage of having the metatarsal pad between the mouldings. The next day it was seen to rest only on one foot. The same oval mouldings were put on a block and the bird placed on the lawn. Here the bird changed its position frequently and stood once parallel with the mouldings and next crosswise. The center of the metatarsal pad was always without pressure. An antiseptic salve was also applied daily in order to prevent bacteria from affecting the area. After approximately four weeks, the footpad was back to normal. I think that this is the only design where it is possible to have the

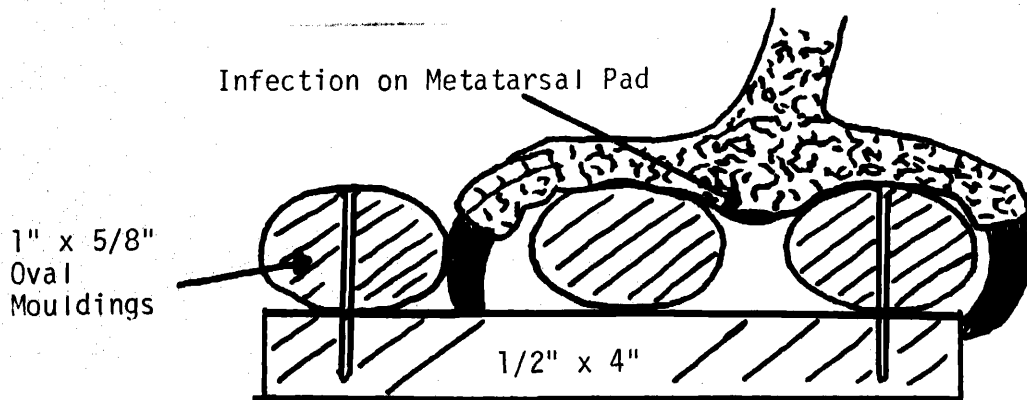


Figure 1. Special perch for falcon with infected feet.

metatarsal pad entirely relieved of the body weight and the weight in a slowly increasing way applied to the remaining areas of the foot. It is my opinion that this is a basic necessity to prevent and in particular to cure any trouble of this nature, and since it is fairly common, I hope that it will be of value to many of the readers.

This incident also seemed to point out that a soft perch is detrimental to the normal foot health of the bird.