

traps were cane baskets with horse hair nooses affixed; the baskets were shaped somewhat like umbrellas. So, it would appear that the most appropriate translation of *bal-chatri* is horse-hair umbrella. This translation does make sense and is the one that should be used.—William S. Clark, 4554 Shetland Green Road, Alexandria, VA 22312.

“GABBOONING” IN PLAINFIELD

How does one become a gaboon? I quote one of Fran Hamerstrom's letters concerning my application to be one: “I have many questions: Is the applicant healthy? Does she eat special food? Is she strong enough to carry a light ladder and climb up to the nest boxes to pull out the falcons to band them etc.? Has she ever taken care of any animals? Wild pets? Other? Has she a driver's license? Does she mind working alone? What does she want to do with her life after she finishes her studies? The research is fascinating, but hard work. Getting up early, heat, mosquitoes, nettles.”

Reflecting on these questions and with no inkling of what awaited me, I sat on a bus to Madison, Wisconsin, in April of 1989. The permission to work for the Hamerstroms had reached me in Germany only 10 d earlier. After a 22-hr journey, I was welcomed by Fran and Hammy in Madison—with slight reservation. Immigration technicalities had caused me to be 4 hr late! We set off without further delay for Plainfield. All three of us had probably envisaged a smoother start to our three-month stint of working together on the “kestrel project”—with fewer mishaps and less tension. Nonetheless, we noted with relief that our plans had been realized. On the way to Plainfield, Fran began telling me, in her direct way, that my work would earn me free board and lodging, but that “such things as lipstick you must pay for out of your own pocket.” I was just able to mumble that my need of cosmetics was not overwhelming, before falling fast asleep for the rest of the 2-hr drive.

We arrived outside of Plainfield, at this ancient, crooked and at first glance rather chaotic house, in the middle of the night. In a trance, I followed Fran to my room with one thing in mind—more sleep! As I lay on the bed, still rather dazed from the journey, and stared at the unpretentious surroundings and the cracks in wall and ceiling, I thought I would never be able to stay the course—a verdict which was soon overthrown.

The world, next morning, had improved enormously. The sun shone on a wonderful countryside and, after a short “scenic tour” of the enormous Hamerstrom estate, my initiation started—not with fieldwork, but with a reading by Fran from one of her books.

Without loss of time I was confronted by one of the Hamerstroms' guiding principles: research and public service. Much has been written about their contributions to the former, and with this issue of the *Journal of Raptor Research* more honors will be added. But the engagement of the Hamerstroms in public service, and their ability to stir enthusiasm for nature in one and all, cannot be overstated. Nowadays it is more important than ever to sponsor interest in our environment. For decades, Fran and Hammy have contributed to this effort enormously, not only with their lectures and books, but with their “gaboon system.”

What is this enigmatic-sounding helper system? In fact it is no great secret. Quite simply, it consists of engaging people of all ages, but principally youngsters, as scientific workers, in which a lack of training is no hindrance. As for “gaboon”—the word stems from an African expression for slave. One quickly learns the essentials for efficient work, for instance distinguishing male raptors from females, banding the birds and writing field notes. Especially in more recent years, nearly all the fieldwork has been undertaken by the gabboons.

As I was fresh out of school, the amount of responsibility given me and the freedom in conducting fieldwork were fascinating. I have since learned to value this all the more, having spent 2.5 years at German universities, interacting with sometimes condescending professors.

Ever since the prairie chicken project, it was necessary for the Hamerstroms to trust their helpers completely, to give them responsible jobs, and to keep explanations and instructions to a minimum. Two persons (not even Fran and Hammy) cannot be everywhere on the booming grounds at all times! As a result, through the years over 7000 helpers were given the opportunity to experience nature first hand and to make the acquaintance of extraordinarily fascinating people.

In exchange, Fran and Hammy have amassed a tremendous knowledge of human nature, together with the ability to evaluate quickly the reliability of the reported observations and to check them themselves if necessary.

For me, work on the kestrel project began by accompanying Fran over the study-area in a VW-Bus. She tested whether I could orient myself to the compass directions and find nests with the aid of a map. We checked a few nestboxes but found no kestrels except for one dead individual at the bottom of a box. I shouted the news to Fran, standing down below, but against the fresh April wind she understood only “kestrel.” She decided I needed immediate help and plunged through the ice-cold, knee-high water in a ditch, which I had already crossed, ladylike and dry, using my ladder as a bridge. Going back, we both balanced single-file over the ladder, laughing. Apart from Fran's agility at her advanced age, and her habit of letting off steam, her disregard for inclement temperature is astonishing.

When I first arrived in Plainfield in April, she trotted to the nearby pond every morning to bathe. She visited us barefoot in sandals in Germany in January, 1991, then on she went to Africa, which Hammy had always refrained from visiting because of the heat. Hammy was of more even temperament altogether, but precisely because of his unflappable personality he was no less lovable.

Perfectly composed, Hammy showed me how to band a bird—demonstrating on the dead falcon we had found! That was the extent of my introduction! Within days I was on my way alone through the marsh when I discovered a nestbox that contained my first live bird. Once again high up on the ladder, I quietly dropped the “hole-plugger”—a sponge on a long stick, used to cover the nestbox entrance—thinking I wouldn’t need it. I grasped my first falcon safe in my right hand, and was all set to carry it down the ladder to the bus for banding and weighing. At that moment I spotted a second falcon in the box. Quick as thought I plugged up the nestbox hole with my right elbow. Number two was safe in there, at least. But now the first bird took firm hold of my left hand and so we stood for awhile, swaying atop the ladder—I suppose you could call it a vicious circle. With aplomb worthy of a circus actor I raised one leg and managed to whip off a shoe to plug the hole. During the next days, Fran never tired of repeating the story again and again, while Hammy merely smiled and asked me how many limbs I had.

Such unforeseen situations occurred frequently, so that improvisation was the rule rather than the exception. The frequent wracking of nerves and need to adapt were gladly suffered as a price for independent work. Fran and Hammy had realized, early on, that “spoon-feeding” and control would never have taught the gabboons to act spontaneously and independently in unusual situations—which are always cropping up when one is dealing with animals. With their antithetical methods they achieved dedication to the “own” project and keenness to work. Perhaps only those who have experienced a similar training can appreciate the procedure.

Nevertheless, it wasn’t that the gabboons were left without any possibility of help, and faced with intractable problems. The Hamerstoms were always available to answer questions—except for Fran when she was busy writing one of her books—and of course they expected to be given the most detailed reports on all aspects of the project. There followed comments which ranged from severe criticism to heartfelt praise. Fran and Hammy always volunteered their frank opinion, and expected a high performance in their gabboons. This made the work in Plainfield wonderful, but also wonderfully strenuous!

That the working atmosphere was so open and personal was surely because the gabboons and the Hamerstoms lived together in this beautifully quaint house in Plainfield. It was the life of a family, and friendships developed fast.

Yes, I learned a great deal in Plainfield: to wash up silver cutlery separately from the stainless-steel variety, not to put fork-handles of bone in water; to nap after lunch, to give vegetables not water to mice, to charm an owl into cheerfulness and a thousand other golden “household-rules.”

Above all, however, I learned to act independently and on my own initiative, and I have the firmly rooted knowledge that people work all the more efficiently the more freedom they are given.—**Sabine Strecker, Moosbachstrasse 11, 7801 Buchenbach, Germany.**

WHY ARE YOU REALLY HERE?

There has been a recent flurry of activity in governments and universities to encourage women in science, yet some women were in science long before these special programs. It is this aspect in part we wish to discuss. Neither of us has remained in ecology but both of us are still woman scientists, perhaps in part owing to the Hamerstoms. We both had some interesting discussions, particularly with Fran, about women and their role in biology.

THE GERRARD STORY

“Why are you really here?” This is the question that Fran Hamerstrom asked me when I first met her, over twenty years ago. The question was not new to me, as many who worked in wildlife had asked me this before. The difference this time was that Fran was a woman and the others had all been men. Fran wanted to know what was going on in my life that I had showed up at her Plainfield, Wisconsin farmhouse wanting to know about her mews and about eagles. On the other hand, the men had all wanted to know what ulterior motives I had for being in the field, and they insinuated that I used my interest in wildlife biology in order to find a husband. The question, coming from Fran, was a refreshing change. The question was directed at me as a person, not as a genderized object.

That night Fran and Hammy and I talked about why I was “really there” and their enthusiasm and direction, in addition to caring and thoughtful interest in me, drew me closer to them. The next morning Fran showed me the “kestrel circuit” as we went out and banded young kestrels. That afternoon, she asked me to clean the refrigerator as the dead owl stored within had maggots. It was my first “test” and I was determined that Fran and Hammy would find no reason to judge me less highly than anyone else, male or female. Indeed, after this first test I felt totally accepted, not only as a person, but as a woman in science, one who could “hold her own.”