

## Trained Falcons Scare Pest Birds Away

Brad Felger uses birds to chase birds from grapes, blueberries, cherries and other high value specialty crops. His Airstrike Bird Control sends in a crew of falcons with a handler to provide all-day control, seven days a week.

"We set up on site with perhaps five birds and an RV with housing for a handler and the birds," says Felger. "The handler will fly one falcon at a time, chasing birds off."

He stresses that constant surveillance is a must with pest birds like starlings and sparrows that gather in large flocks. With a falcon or other predator flying overhead, they don't dare land. Even a lack of birds in an area will warn other birds away. Without a falcon on site, it's a different story.

"The pest birds fly around, and if they see scout groups of birds safely eating at a site, they land," explains Felger. "We can chase off big flocks after damage starts, but the best time is when birds are just starting to show up."

The goal is not to actually catch the pest birds, but simply to scare them and keep them constantly in the air. Because they need so much protein every day, they will move on if they can't eat. Of course, that

means they only fly as far down the road as they need to find food.

Felger points out that the starlings and other pest birds are actually beneficial throughout most of the year. Once the grapes and other fruit sweeten and ripen, they turn from bugs to attacking the fruit.

"It's best if we arrive as the fruit is starting to ripen and stay throughout harvest," says Felger. "I've seen people pull the program during harvest, thinking they were fine and then get hammered on the last part by birds. It doesn't take long for the birds to figure out the falcon has left."

Felger and his falconer and falcon crews (he has up to 20) work with vineyard owners and other fruit producers throughout California, Oregon and Washington. They also work with landfills and industrial sites.

He gets calls from other parts of the country and would like to expand. He hopes to create a regional network of associates he could refer work to. The problem is finding people who know how to work with falcons. Felger, for example, has been working with them since the 1970's, until recently largely as recreation.

"You can have the best birds and job



**Brad Felger trains falcons to chase birds from high value specialty crops. A crew of falcons with a handler is used to provide all-day control.**

opportunities, but if you have inexperienced people, you're doomed," he says. "We are trying to get the best falconers we can, but we are also training some with less experience."

Felger says costs vary by job. He notes that the best alternative protection available for bird damage prevention is netting. It can cost \$500 per acre per year plus labor for setting it up and taking it down. Even then it often doesn't prevent damage.

"I've seen starlings land on nets in such numbers they collapse the nets and pick the grapes through the netting," says Felger. "Our price comes in considerably less, and it keeps the birds away."

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## Hawk Platforms Help Provide Gopher Control

Old utility poles fitted with nesting platforms attract hawks and reduce the gopher population. Each breeding pair can be credited with removing up to 500 gophers per season.

"The ferruginous hawk is considered an endangered species in Alberta," says Brandy Downey, senior species-at-risk biologist, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development Department (SRD). "The nesting sites help the hawks, and they help the ranchers who put them up."

Downey works with ranchers and other landowners interested in establishing nesting sites on their property.

Once a location has been found, the SRD works with utility companies to install poles. A triangular or rectangular framework is fixed to the pole 10 to 12 ft. above ground. A steel mesh or wire lattice is fastened to the framework to provide a nesting platform.

Downey says the design seems to be working. Four nesting pairs established themselves on the 6 poles she helped set up this year.

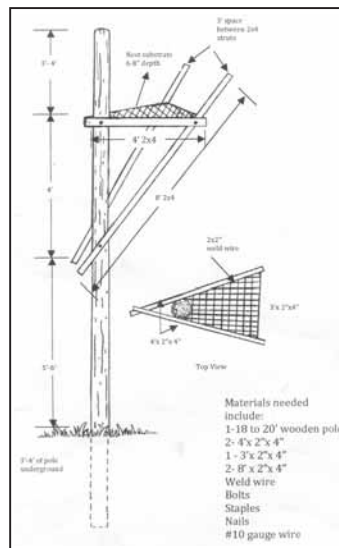
Locations are picked on prairie land with healthy gopher populations. The 18 to 20-ft. poles are placed at least 800 yards from cliffs, trees and other artificial nesting platforms. A good site avoids roads, power lines, oil/gas developments and farmyards.

Downey encourages ranchers and landowners with ground squirrel problems to contact her. Information is also available on websites of cooperating organizations.

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**Utility poles fitted with nesting platforms are used to attract hawks. Brandy Downey works with ranchers to establish the nesting sites on their property.**



## How To Grow Your Own Square Melons

It seems like every year there's a news story about how the Japanese grow square watermelons because they take up less space in a refrigerator. This year we decided to look into how they do it.

It turns out Japanese producers simply place growing watermelons inside tempered glass cases, and sell them for up to \$125. But Do-it-yourselfers can make their own cases with six 8-in. squares of 3/8-in. plexiglass, four gate hinges, two hinged clasps, and flathead machine screws with hex nuts. If you use thinner plastic, beef up the corners with angle iron or aluminum angle.

One square needs a 1-in. hole drilled in the center and a slit cut to one edge of the melon's stem. Drill pilot holes and attach the hinges and clasps on the top and bottom squares with the machine screws/hex nuts. When the melon is small, slip it into the



**To grow square watermelons, Japanese producers simply place growing melons inside tempered glass cases.**

box and as it grows it will take the square shape.

FARM SHOW readers may prefer a simpler option described in *The Old Farmer's Almanac for Kids, Volume 2*.

It suggests hanging a small melon (one that grows to 5 to 15 lbs.) into one of the holes in a rectangular cement block. When the melon is ripe and snugly fills the inside of the cement block hole, break the block and remove the melon.

## Used Bale Wagons Still In Demand

Round hay bales may dominate, but there's still plenty of demand for small square bales, particularly in the horse hay market. That means there's also a demand for bale wagons. Harry and Tony Vanee, who run a New Holland dealership in Ft. Macleod, Alta., have been selling them since 1967. They usually have 25 to 30 used pull-type and self-propelled bale wagons on hand.

"We fix them up and go through them in our shop so they are guaranteed to work properly," Tony Vanee says, noting that they run ads to buy used equipment to keep plenty of used New Holland models on hand in addition to the new ones they sell.

"Our area is semi-desert so there's very little rust on these machines," Vanee adds. "We have some 30-year-old machines for sale and the metal on them is in great shape."

Typical repairs include changing bearings and straightening bent parts, as well as going through all the parts of the self-propelled models.

Price depends on age and condition. Pull-type models range from \$5,000 to \$18,000. Most hold 105 bales, but one model holds 160 bales. The self-propelled bale wagons



**Harry and Tony Vanee sell pull-type and self-propelled small square bale wagons and usually have 25 to 30 on hand.**

run between \$20,000 and \$90,000 and hold 160 bales. With new self-propelled wagons selling for more than \$125,000 (U.S.), the used wagons are sought after.

"We ship them all over the place," Vanee says, noting they have had buyers from Europe and the United Emirates. They also have bale wagons in a warehouse in Ohio to ship to U.S. buyers.

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