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Athene and Burrowing Owls

The grey English winter had broken. Patches of green oak covered hilltops, their crowns like bunches of broccoli. Turned soil in fields the colour of chocolate would become hectares of yellow rapeseed by summer. Along a peaceful river you could smell chlorophyll rising from the grass, so different from Australia – no brown snakes, scent of eucalypt, yellow wattles or dead leaves crunching. It was strange to see a Southern Boobook there.

For many years, at Newent in Gloucestershire, Jemima Parry-Jones had run the National Birds of Prey Centre, and she had one of the biggest raptor collections in Europe. She successfully bred many of them and her father, Phillip Glasier, was England's favourite falconer. Jemima took over the Falconry Centre from her father in 1981. His book *As the Falcon Her Bells* led him onto movie sets to meet stars and English royalty and the book sparked a falconry obsession in quite a few American, British and Canadian children. The obsession nurtured falconers' clubs in North America and Europe, but the sport was suppressed in Australia, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden. They still sold falconry books in these countries, but the practice was illegal.

This hilly part of England had narrow lanes through grey stone villages and narrow alleyways. In slashing wind Jemima swung the lure in a wide circle, her skirt flapped around her legs. The Lanner, an African falcon, played with the lure, rose vertically above Jemima's head, flipped over using the wind as a tool and speared down to cut the lure out of the air.

The Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo*, meaning 'horned or hooting owl', a bigger cousin of the American Great Horned Owl, was next on show and the subject of a strange conservation story. Gamekeepers had shot Eagle Owls out of the United Kingdom,