

Buying a Parker-Hale

➔ RIFLES

Q I have been offered an old Parker-Hale bolt-action rifle for deer stalking. The asking price is cheap, so I am tempted, but I don't want to waste my money if it is not a reliable rifle. Do you think it is worth buying?

A Between the 1960s and 1980s, Parker-Hale, along with BSA, was the backbone of bolt-action rifles. Parker-Hales were regarded as strong workhorses and included a diverse range of models, from lightweight to heavy-barrelled varmint rifles. They offered all the attributes of the classic Mauser action but were redesigned with a modern British touch.

The Mauser-based action incorporated the conventional strong

dual locking lugs of the bolt up front and had an extra safety lug at the rear. The full-length non-rotating extractor maintained a positive feed and extraction of cartridges. These remain good attributes, but the older Parker-Hale rifles have fallen out of favour because more modern designs are available.

There are a lot around but they can vary in condition. This means you need to check the bore for corrosion and pitting, as well as the trigger and safety function. While the wood stocks can be nice walnut, check for cracks around the stock screws and pistol-grip area.

It is also important to make sure the rifle has scope mounts because original Parker-Hale mounts can be expensive to buy second-hand now.

These rifles are a good choice if you are looking for a cheap starter gun or want a bit of nostalgia. **BP**

What's in a name?

➔ WILDBIRDS

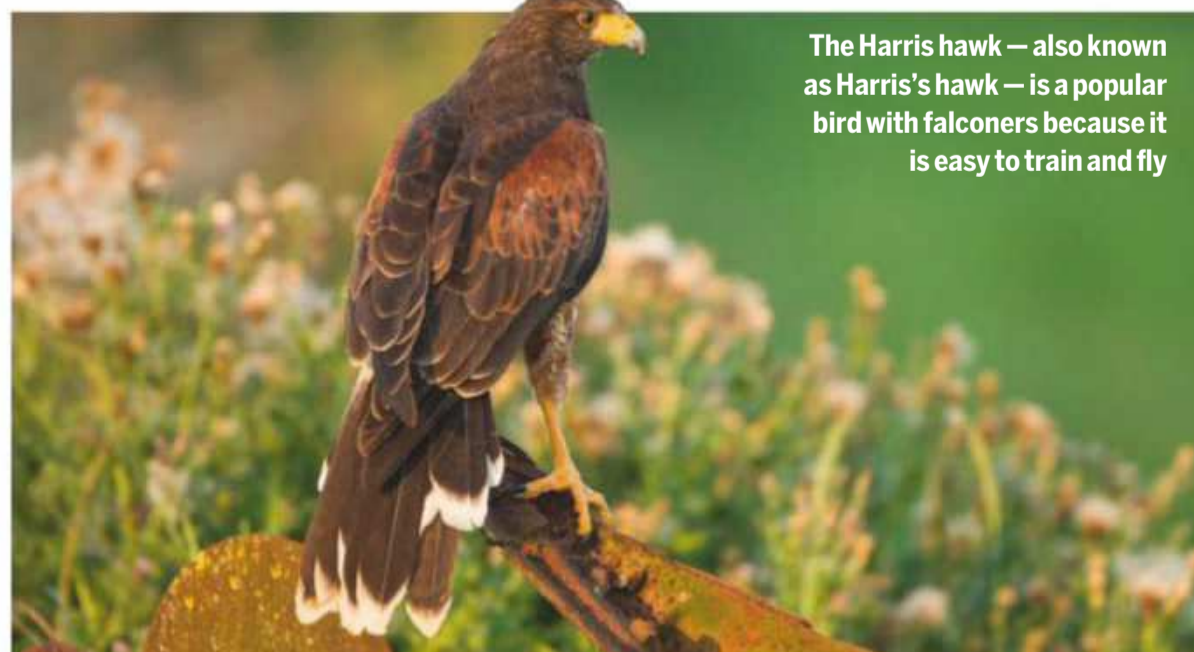
Q A friend of mine thinks the Harris hawk should be known as Harris's hawk, but I'm not sure if he's just showing off his grammatical skills or whether he really does have a point. What do you think?

A Your friend is right. In fact, in some parts of the world it is known as Harris's hawk, but here in the UK we tend to drop the extra "S" at the end.

This hawk – a popular bird with falconers because it is easy to train and fly – takes its name from Edward Harris, a wealthy amateur naturalist of English descent who was born in

New Jersey in 1799. He became friendly with the American ornithologist, naturalist and painter John James Audubon, and joined him on a number of bird-collecting expeditions.

There is no record of Harris actually encountering the hawk that bears his name, but Audubon illustrated it in *The Birds of America*, calling it Harris's buzzard "after my friend Edward Harris Esq", who had also supported him financially. Harris did, though, collect a specimen of a sparrow that was also named after him and is still known as Harris's sparrow. However, Thomas Nuttall, an English ornithologist and another friend of Audubon, had already discovered the bird a few years before. **DT**



The Harris hawk — also known as Harris's hawk — is a popular bird with falconers because it is easy to train and fly

Native Britain

Plants, flowers and fungi of Great Britain at a glance

Latin name: *Tragopogon pratensis*

Common name: Goat's-beard

Other names: Jack-go-to-bed-at-noon, shepherd's clock, meadow salsify, oyster plant, noon flower

How to spot it and where to

find it: A master of disguise, goat's-beard hides on railway embankments, roadsides, commons, forest margins, field margins and wasteland by closing its bright flowers and pretending to be a grass. It blooms only in the early hours of the morning and at midday closes up to blend into the background. It also closes up if rain is approaching. Once the flowers have died, they form large fluffy seed heads in a round "clock", rather like those of the dandelion, which at first glance the flowers resemble. The seeds are carried long distances through the air, aided by their fluffy "parachute", and their oily surface allows them to travel further.



Interesting facts: The reason for the common names of this biennial are obvious and "tragopogon" translates as "beard of a goat", but the "pratensis" in its scientific name means "found in a meadow". The roots of goat's-beard were once eaten as we now eat parsnips, and the young stalks were cut into lengths and eaten like asparagus, to which their flavour is said to be similar. The young leaves can be treated like spinach but older ones exude a bitter sap — the plant's defence against grazing animals. As a member of the chicory family, the roots can be roasted and ground as a coffee substitute. A decoction of the root was used to treat liver disorders.