

EXCLUSIVE OUR GIRL GERALDINE ENJOYS A BIR



ACE: Harris hawk Marta shows off her amazing aerial ability with trainer Tommy Byrne at the Woodlands Falconry in Tullow, Co. Carlow

IT'S ROGER FI

MEET THE natural born killer with an extra feather in her cap.

As our exclusive pictures show, Marta the harris hawk happens to be deadly at... tennis!

Never mind the fact that a birdie is something you normally find in golf; this one is more likely to ruffle the feathers of Venus and Serena Williams as she grabs a tennis ball in mid-air.

Powerful

Grasping the ball in her powerful claws, she performs an aerial ballet before serving it back to her trainer, falconer Tommy Byrne.

He rewards her with a tasty tidbit - a dead baby chick. The fearsome bird of prey is designed to swoop on hares, foxes and lambs. At two pounds four ounces she can carry four times her weight, so a tennis ball is chickenfeed to her. Marta is top of the pecking order at Woodlands Falconry near Tullow, Co. Carlow, and I was chuffed when she decided

Incredible tennis-playing hawk serves up a real t

By GERALDINE COMISKEY ● Pics: CIARAN MacGOWAN

to use my arm as a perch. I bribed her with a sliver of meat and she was my feathered friend for the rest of the day.

All I had to do was tap my arm and she landed on it, but I was reminded how powerful a predator Marta is when she cocked her head and looked skyward at some distant speck in the distance. When it came closer I realised it was a seagull. Earlier, as Tommy carried her out of the falconry, only a leash attached to her anklet stopped her from savaging some rooks. "She's partial to crow," Tommy revealed. "But they are junkfood."

He feeds her on chicks, hares, frozen white mice which he buys from a petfood supplier, and even roadkill. "My fridge would vie with Jeffrey Dahmer's when it

comes to shock value," he laughed.

I had felt goosebumps when I first met the The Birds. Walking into the yard reminded me of the Hitchcock movie, but instead of a flock of beady-eyed seagulls, I was eyeballed by hawks, falcons, owls, a golden eagle - and a parrot.

Exotic

Most of them were tethered to perches on a raised circle in the middle of the enclosure, the rest were in cages. Twenty feathery heads turned to watch me as I walked in.

Moments later I was holding a lannor falcon. The yellow rim around her dark eyes looked like exotic eye-make-up and I could see why this bird has been prized in her native Africa and India for thousands of years.

Despite her good looks, this bird is not exactly a dainty

eater. She can carry four times

gobbles down chicks, quail and As she began inspecting my

hear humans were not on the m

ened out of my encounter with In fighting terms he's just a

powerful wings flexed, he look Berlin's Brandenburg Gate. It was easy to see why the ma

emblem of powerful regimes fr

ancient Romans, to the Nazis. James, though, was a total ger

me, decided he wasn't feeling p

Still, I was glad the thick suede

his deadly claws, which can pier