

D'S EYE VIEW OF DEADLY AERIAL PREDATORS



WATCH THE BIRDIE: Carol Fitzpatrick, Geraldine Corniskey and Tommy Byrne with golden eagle James



KILLER QUEEN: Geraldine with African owl



BEAUTIFUL: Barn owls at the falconry



MAJESTIC: Birds of prey on show at Woodlands

FEATHERER

Great for visitors with some fowl play at falconry

own weight, and usually... rings, I was relieved to... although I nearly chick-... the golden eagle... therweight, but with his... like the statue on top of... ic bird was chosen as the... the Aztecs, Mayans and... He looked imperiously at... dish and just nuzzled me... inlet protected me from... he hide of a deer.

He can carry a fox, sheep or small deer in his talons, but has no need to hunt because Tommy feeds him on prime cuts of venison, hares and baby chicks. He felt feather-light on my arm, despite weighing half a stone.
Tommy explained: "Birds are lighter than they look as their bones are hollow. They need to be light and aerodynamic".
Flexible
Their flexible wings with multiple layers of angled feathers are nature's very own masterpiece of engineering and put to shame even the most sophisticated aircraft.
At 14 years old, James is no spring chicken, so I was not surprised to hear he had an interesting past - as a TV star.
OK, he's not be in the same league as Oscar winner Saoirse Ronan - who officially opened the falconry earlier

this year - but James was filmed for National Geographic and BBC wildlife documentaries. "They strapped a camera to him to see how he hunts," Tommy revealed.
James is one of just five golden eagles in captivity in Ireland. The majestic birds, which died out 100 years ago, have just recently been re-introduced to the country.
Tommy also has a selection of native Irish white-tailed eagles, red kites, a scary turkey vulture called Princess, and two fluffy African Spotted Eagle Owls - Charlotte and The Professor.
While most of his birds are imported, Tommy plans to breed and release some of the native species into the wild.
The dad-of-three has kept birds of prey for 20 years and comes from three generations of bird men.
"My father and grandfather used to raise poultry and my father raced pigeons," he explained.

He trains falconers (£500 for a five-day course) but points out that anyone who wants to buy or sell birds of prey must apply to the Parks and Wildlife Service for a licence.
Tommy's first job as a falconer involved scaring other birds. "I used to do pest control on landfill sites. I'd drive around with a hawk and whenever I'd spot seagulls picking at the rubbish, I'd fly the hawk at them. But I got fed up, it seemed an undignified job for a bird of prey."
Hatched
He set up Woodlands Falconry in the grounds of Rathwood House and Garden Centre with the help of Rathwood's owner Pat Keogh. It's €5 to enter and there's no time-limit on visits. Tommy and his assistant Carol Fitzpatrick also bring visitors on woodland walks with a falcon on their wrist.
Woodlands Falconry in Tullow is open Wednesday to Sunday, 10.30 to 5pm, and can be reached on www.woodlandsfalconry.com. Tommy is also running a competition on Facebook to name the next baby owl.
Now that's a case of counting your chickens before they have hatched.