



UNDER HER WING

Apprentice learning falconry under the watchful eye of Olmsted County master

BY JOHN MOLSEED
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Anna McBeain had a hard time finding a licensed falconer who would take her interest in falconry seriously enough for an apprenticeship.

"I think it's because I'm young and I don't look like someone who would be into it," the 21-year-old said.

Thanks to a personal recommendation, McBeain connected with Olmsted County master falconer Carolyn Standlee-Hanson, and they've been hunting together for two years.

Falconry is the practice of trapping and training a raptor to hunt wild game, and requires a small-game hunting license from the state.

"Once you hunt with a hawk, you can never go back to a gun," McBeain said.

McBeain's father became an apprentice falconer to help her get started when she was a 15-year-old junior apprentice falconer. Under Minnesota falconry laws, a person must be 21 to legally keep a raptor at home. An apprentice must also work with another falconer. However, to become a general apprentice, she had to find a master falconer.

She first approached Kirk Payne, a master falconer who taught at Quarry Hill Nature Center in Rochester. He was unable to take her on due to family commitments, but he personally recommended her to Standlee-Hanson.

Standlee-Hanson was impressed by McBeain's knowledge and dedication, and agreed to take her on.

Despite rigorous requirements and restrictions, falconry has seen a resurgent interest

in the U.S. and Minnesota. According to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, there are 75 licensed falconers in the state, up from about 60 five years ago.

Just 16 of Minnesota's licensed falconers are women.

'SPORT OF KINGS'

Falconry is an old sport. Paintings more than 4,000 years old depicting people hunting with trained birds have been found in Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq). People have used falconry to hunt for sport or food throughout Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Technology such as firearms propelled other hunting techniques into wider use, and falconry became a niche activity known as the "sport of kings."

Standlee-Hanson chuckled at the phrase as she waded



Photos by Traci Westcott / twestcott@postbulletin.com

through snow-covered brambles and waist-high briar on a farm in western Winona County. She and McBeain had brought McBeain's red-tailed hawk, Minokawa, to hunt on a sunny afternoon in late January.

"This isn't what people are talking about when they say (sport of kings)," she said. "This is what we call 'dirt hawking.'"

They crashed through the brush and thorns to stir up a rabbit or other prey into the open for Minokawa to hunt.

Top: Apprentice falconer Anna McBeain recalls her red-tailed hawk, Minokawa, for a tidbit while hunting Jan. 27 near St. Charles. **Above:** Anna McBeain holds Minokawa after a Jan. 27 hunt in Rochester. McBeain's instructor, master falconer Carolyn Standlee-Hanson, is at right. **Below left:** Minokawa, a red-tailed hawk, is hooded to signal that she is done hunting Jan. 27 near St. Charles. **Below:** Anna McBeain redirects Minokawa to a bait stick to control how much food she ingests while hunting Jan. 27 near St. Charles.

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Southeast Minnesotans describe Beargrease experience

2 residents volunteered with the sled dog race

BY JOHN SIEVERS
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Some people think working like a dog is a good time. One of those people is Rochester resident Noelle Roberts. Roberts recently volunteered at the John Beargrease Sled Dog Marathon. The race, which spans about 400 miles in Minnesota, is the longest and most

difficult of its kind in the lower 48 states. It's a qualifier for the famous Alaskan Iditarod Sled Dog Race that happens in March.

This past summer, a 45-mile hike on the Superior Hiking Trail led Roberts to learn about the Beargrease.

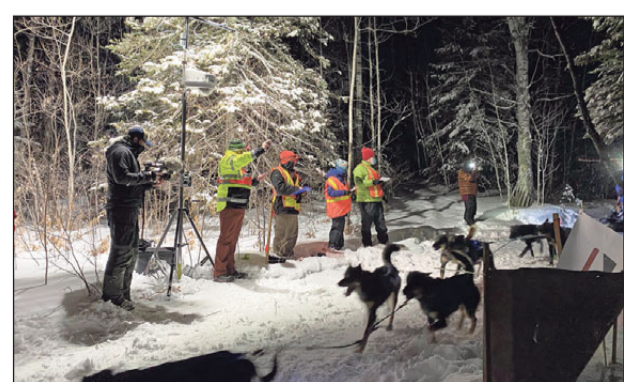
"A part of the trail was different than the rest, groomed wider. It turned out it was a part

of the John Beargrease Sled Dog race. I went down the rabbit hole of learning all about John Beargrease, whom the race is named after, and the history of the race, and there was no going back," she said.

Roberts was one of about 1,000 volunteers who made the race possible this year. She volunteered at the Community Center in

Finland, Minn. Since it was her first experience with a dog sled race, she learned a lot.

"Safety of the dog athletes as a No. 1 priority is iterated often, and you can tell it is a pillar of how the race is facilitated," she said.



Contributed photo

Noelle Roberts helped mushers and dogs at a checkpoint in the 2021 John Beargrease Sled Dog Marathon.

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Wanted: Volunteer weed watchers in Minn.

Winter is a good time to get into the weeds. The University of Minnesota's Invasive Terrestrial Plants and Pests Center is offering a course on invasive weeds in the state.

The center's pesky plant tracker is a course that lets you learn at your own pace about noxious and invasive weeds in Minnesota.

People who receive training can help officials at the center track invasive noxious weeds and the U of M to coordinate efforts to control or eradicate them.

Many weeds are starting to make their way into this area of Minnesota.

"We know that both wild parsnip and Japanese knotweed exist in the Rochester area, so it will be convenient to collect data on a weekly basis," said Abbie Anderson, program coordinator.

Although most of the state is under a blanket of snow and a polar vortex of arctic cold, the Minnesota



GREENSPACE
John Molseed

Department of Agriculture announced last week that noxious weeds on their eradicate list were found last year in Winona and Olmsted counties. The list is MDA's list of plants that cause the most harm to public health, the environment or property. State law requires that plants on that list be destroyed.

MDA announced that cutleaf teasel was found in Dakota and Olmsted counties.

Teasels form large, dense stands that choke out native plant species, which reduces forage and habitat for native species and reduces plant diversity. The plants produce 7-foot-tall dense, whit blossoms that bloom in July



Contributed photo from the MDA

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture announced that cutleaf teasel was found in Dakota and Olmsted counties.

through September.

Before they were confirmed in Dakota and Olmsted counties, they have also been found in Blue Earth, Carver, Fillmore, Freeborn, Hennepin, Houston, Mower, Ramsey, Steele, Wabasha, Washington, Winona and Wright counties.

MDA also confirmed Palmer amaranth was found in Winona County.

That weed is native to the Southwest U.S., and quickly takes root and grows in moist, fertile soil.

Palmer amaranth will successfully compete with

crops growing at up to 2 to 3 inches per day, reaching up to 8 feet tall. The weed has been documented to cause up to 91% of yield losses in corn fields and 79% of yield losses in soybean fields. One catch is that it slightly resembles native Minnesota pigweeds such as tall water hemp.

If you want to know the difference and make a difference as a citizen scientist, the center offers multiple volunteer opportunities.

Pesky plant tracker training takes a total of about four to six hours. From about March through October, trackers are asked to take a few minutes each week to visit sites and track noxious or invasive weeds.

John Molseed is a tree-hugging Minnesota transplant making his way through his state parks passport. This column is a space for stories of people doing their part (and more) to keep Minnesota green. Send questions, comments and suggestions to life@postbulletin.com.

Falconer

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Minokawa perched in nearby trees, watching. "She's doing her job," Standlee-Hanson said. "We just need to do ours."

According to Philippine legend, Minokawa was a hawk large enough to swallow the sun. McBeain's Minokawa has a wingspan of nearly 5 feet. She'll get new adult feathers, but at a year old, she's likely at her full size.

The master-apprentice pair trapped her in October, and they trained her together.

Under Minnesota law, falconers can only use birds bred in captivity or trap raptors in the wild that have left their nest but aren't old enough to be part of the breeding population.

Standlee-Hanson said an older bird likely wouldn't be receptive to training. A young bird is still learning to hunt and is more easily enticed with an easy



Apprentice falconer Anna McBeain, right, Richard Hanson, and his wife, master falconer Carolyn Standlee-Hanson, walk to a new hunting spot Jan. 27 near St. Charles.

meal.

"There's no incentive once they're already feeding themselves," she said.

About half of young raptors don't survive their first year on their own in the wild. The red-tailed hawk Standlee-Hanson caught last fall had a respiratory infection similar to pneumonia when she caught him.

He more than likely would have died in the wild.

After several veterinarian visits and some training, that bird, named Tamale, is slowly putting on weight and learning to hunt.

Standlee-Hanson said Minokawa has been a fast learner and an effective hunter.

"She's one of the top three red-taileds I've

worked with," she said.

IN FOR THE KILL

While Standlee-Hanson and McBeain were trying to flush prey from the brush during the January hunt, Minokawa spotted a gray squirrel in a nearby tree and dove in for the kill.

Minokawa caught the squirrel at the base of a tree. The hawk had



Photos by Traci Westcott / twestcott@postbulletin.com

Minokawa is named after a hawk in Philippine legend.

its talons firmly around the squirrel, but the squirrel had one of the hawk's legs in its teeth.

McBeain hurried through the brush and killed the squirrel to reduce risk of further injury to the hawk. McBeain then offered Minokawa fresh meat to distract her from the squirrel, which will likely be used for training.

After the hawk ate, McBeain placed a hood over its head. The bird puffed her feathers as she perched on McBeain's gloved arm.

"That's a sign of contentment," McBeain said.

"The hood shuts them off, so to speak," Standlee-Hanson added. "She's no longer in hunt mode."

McBeain plans to continue her training, build experience, and expand her raptor repertoire with a kestrel. For her, falconry is more than a hobby.

"I wouldn't recommend it to everyone," she said. "It's going to be a lifestyle — not a hobby."

Beargrease

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She said it felt like a reunion of welcoming people passionate about the North Shore, the dogs, embracing winter, and showing up for each other when needed.

During the race, Roberts helped make sure road crossings were safe for the passing dog sled teams, helped get bales of hay to handlers for the dogs to rest on, and helped stoke fires to provide the racers and their teams with warmth.

Kirk D. Weber, a Stewartville resident and Rochester Fire Department captain, coordinated the checkpoint in Finland where Roberts volunteered. He first went on a mushing trip in Alaska in 2013, and has been in love with the sport of dog sled racing since then.

Weber is on the Beargrease board, and helps out with the race any way he can. He helped maintain the website, registered mushers, and coordinated a checkpoint. Before the race was finished, he'd driven over 1,000 miles.

"I followed the race and ensured we had people at all of the road crossings all the way to Grand Portage," he said.

The John Beargrease Sled Marathon began in 1980, and is named after the mail carrier who made deliveries between Two Harbors and Grand Marais between 1879 and 1899. His father was Moquabimetem, an Anishinaabe chief. Depending on the season, John Beargrease would use canoes and horses to deliver the mail, but his legacy as a musher has never been



Contributed photos

Noelle Roberts, of Rochester, recently volunteered with the John Beargrease Dog Sled Marathon.

forgotten.

With only four dogs, he once made the trip in 28 hours. Today's modern mushers with lighter sleds and as many as 16 dogs can't complete the race much quicker.

This year's Beargrease Sled Dog Marathon first-place purse of \$3,000 went to first-time musher Erin Letzring, who finished the race in 32 hours, 43 minutes and 35 seconds. She was followed across the finish line just 7 seconds later by Ryan Redington.

Weber said the dogs who run the Beargrease aren't the big fluffy dogs you might see in the movies.

"It is really hard to explain how quiet and beautiful it is out on the trail when a team goes by — all you hear is the runners gliding across the snow and the breathing of the dogs," he said.

Roberts marveled at the drive of the dogs working together and described them



Lights mark the John Beargrease trail.

passing by silently at almost 8 miles an hour as "eerie." But before the dogs leave the chute and head back out on the trail, they are anything but silent.

"It was full of squeals, yelps, howls and barks," she said. "The dogs amp themselves up. Almost like their own little locker room with a pre-game ritual. They 'popcorn,' where they jump up and down in excitement," she explained.

Since the fall, Weber has been working with local mushers Damon Ramaker from the Deep Root Kennel in Fountain and Cindy Gallea from Snow Crest Racing in Wykoff.

"We hope to have the team ready for Cindy to have a successful Iditarod," he said.

While Roberts was dog tired after her all-night volunteering shift on the



Noelle Roberts helped keep fires going to warm mushers and their dog teams

Beargrease course, she said she plans to do it again next year.

For Roberts, volunteering

"felt like being a part of something bigger that felt meaningful, special and historic."