



RATHFINNY WINE ESTATE WELCOMES TEAM OF FALCONS TO PROTECT GRAPES



For Immediate Release // Rathfinny Wine Estate has welcomed a specialist falconry team to protect its grapes during the critical final month of ripening. From dawn to dusk, trained falcons, hawks and even a Chilean Blue Eagle will patrol the skies above the Sussex Estate, keeping hungry pigeons, crows and seagulls away from the precious fruit.

The process begins with the swift Peregrine Falcon — native to the UK and the fastest animal on earth, capable of reaching speeds of over 200 mph — flying high to clear the skies. Harris Hawks and the Blue Eagle then sweep across the valley, deterring birds from returning. A Merlin — the UK's smallest bird of prey — can be deployed to dart between the vine rows, flushing out smaller birds that could damage the crop.

This innovative approach replaces the plastic netting previously used to protect the fruit, which lasted only five seasons and did not align with Rathfinny's sustainability goals as a certified B Corp. By flying the birds in rotation during peak feeding times, the falconry team keeps pests away without harming the local environment.

The sight of falcons soaring above the Estate is also a reminder of Rathfinny's historic past: the Sussex skies once witnessed the Battle of Britain, and the Estate still bears traces of that history, with bomb craters and the site where a German bomber came down.

Visitors to Rathfinny during harvest will have the chance to witness these majestic birds in action while enjoying a glass of Sussex Sparkling in the Tasting Room, at The Hut, or while visiting the

Cellar Door shop. Members of the Rathfinny Reserved Club will also be treated to an exclusive falconry display on 15th October.

Falconry is an ancient tradition that dates back over 4,000 years to Central Asia. In Britain, it rose to prominence during the 7th and 8th centuries among aristocracy and royalty. The majestic Gyr Falcon from the Arctic, for instance, was so prized that it was often used as a diplomatic gift between European and Middle Eastern leaders. Henry VIII was a very keen falconer, with the sport becoming an integral part of his court and a major Tudor status symbol.

ABOUT THE BIRDS

The birds have been especially bred and trained for the falconry and are managed by expert, licensed handlers.

PEREGRINE FALCON X GYRFALCON HYBRID

Specialist hybrid birds are often used in falconry, bringing the attributes of different species together. Peregrine Falcons – found across the UK – are the world's fastest animal, reaching speeds of over 200mph. It is an aerial-hunting specialist, taking on birds in the air.

The Gyr Falcon is native to the Arctic and is the largest species of Falcon on Earth. In its natural habitat, it usually hunts mammals on the ground such as Arctic Hares.

Breeding these birds together makes an ideal choice for bringing birds up from the vines. With great speed and agility, they can channel the birds off the Estate. Larger than a normal Peregrine, these hybrid falcons can deter birds twice their size, such as seagulls.

PEREGRINE FALCON X APLOMADO FALCON HYBRID

The other hybrid is a Peregrine crossed with the South American Aplomado. A smaller falcon known for its acrobatic hunting style, it hunts smaller birds and large insects. When bred with the Peregrine it is the perfect size to ward off pigeons and is also small and agile enough to go in between the vines if needed.

MERLIN

The UK's smallest bird of prey is fast and agile, able to chase down small birds. Merlins are a type of falcon and are extremely fast and agile, twisting and turning in the air as they hunt. They are specialists at flying in between the vines, flushing out smaller birds who might be settling to eat the fruit.

HARRIS'S HAWK

Native to the Americas, the Harris's Hawk helps patrol the edges of the Estate to keep birds away from the grapes. A slightly slower bird, it uses up less energy than the falcons when it flies, meaning it can go for longer and is easier for the team on the ground to keep an eye on and control.

CHILEAN BLUE EAGLE

Otherwise known as the Black Chested Buzzard-Eagle, it plays a similar role to the Harris's Hawk, although larger. Its intimidating presence is enough to keep pigeons and crows away. As the name suggests, this bird is native to South America.

QUOTES FROM SARAH DRIVER, CO-FOUNDER & CO-OWNER:

"In the past we have used nets to try and protect our grapes from birds, but as a B Corp company we're always trying to reduce our environmental impact and the plastic nets need replacing every 3-5 years and require lots of small plastic clips to keep them in place. This year we're trialing a falconer who we hope will be more successful in keeping the birds away from our precious grapes. Luckily there's currently plenty of food available in the hedgerows around the Estate for the birds to enjoy."

ENDS

For more information and access to imagery please contact

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NOTES TO EDITORS

ABOUT RATHFINNY

The East Sussex grower-producer was established in 2010 by husband-and-wife team Mark and Sarah Driver and is dedicated to producing some of the world's finest vintage sparkling wine from a single site vineyard in Sussex, England. Since its inception, sustainability has been an important part of Rathfinny's DNA, culminating in achieving B Corp certification in 2023.

Once a working farm, Rathfinny planted their first vines in 2012. Fourteen years later, the single-site vineyard now encompasses more than 230 acres of primarily Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Pinot Meunier grape varieties, situated in the landscape of the South Downs National Park. All vintage wines, the Rathfinny portfolio comprises the *2019 Classic Cuvée*, *2019 Blanc de Blancs*, *2020 Blanc de Noirs* and *2019 Rosé Brut*, all matured in the bottle for a minimum of 36 months in bottle.

Alongside producing wine, Rathfinny Wine Estate attracts a wealth of wine tourism, offering vineyard tours and wine tastings hosted at its RIBA-nominated Winery. Guests can also enjoy the wines paired with the excellent gastronomy at the Michelin-recommended Tasting Room restaurant, Flint Barns Dining Room restaurant or The Hut, Rathfinny's alfresco wine bar. For the full experience, guests can stay at the comfortable Flint Barns accommodation or Rathfinny self-catering Cottage, nestled within the vines.