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John and Vicki Swift

HAWK CHALK Vol. XXXVI, No. 1, April 1997

Tribute to Dave Vance

March 1, 1924 - April 21, 1996)

— by Blake Soule

About a year ago the falconry community and I lost Dave Vance, a great man and dear friend, to cancer. He got his first bird at 14 and never lost the love that he had for birds or wildlife in general until the day he passed away. He was one of the best friends I've ever had despite the 33 years of age difference; for 14 years we hawked together.

Dave served in World War II in Europe as a medic, and after his return continued his interest in falconry and was considered one of the pioneers of early US falconry. Over the years, Dave flew longwings, shortwings and buteos, and was one of the greatest lovers of raptors of all time. His love of birds came first and falconry was second as he put the good of the bird before the fun of the sport — he most always brought his bird to the field overweight for fear that underfeeding would leave the bird weak and susceptible to disease.

Dave spent over two years organizing and laying the groundwork for the legalization of falconry in Tennessee; he's responsible for our enjoyment of the sport in this state.

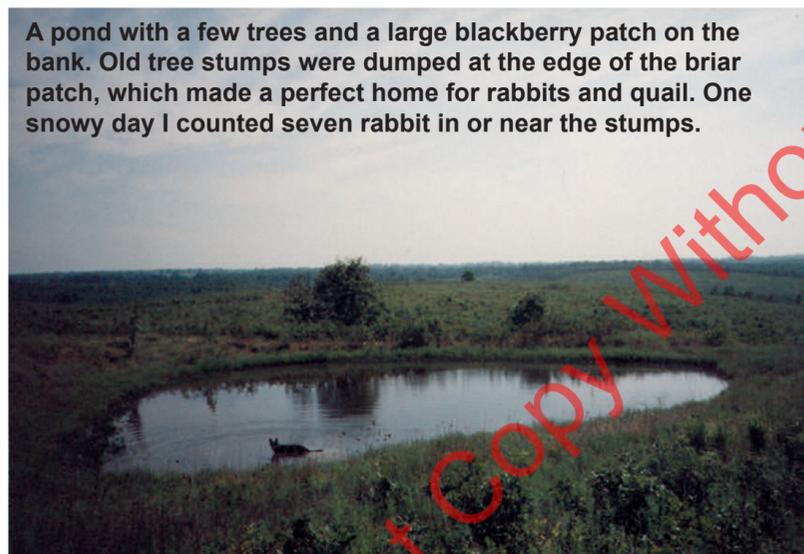
Dave was a NAFA member since 1983. In 1991 I went to my first NAFA Meet with Dave. After flying longwings for around 15 years, Dave had started flying Harris' hawks with me. Neither of us had ever seen a jack chased by a hawk, and as we drove out we talked about how many jacks we would take. We hunted 6 days and drove home shaking our heads. So we returned the next year for another shot, and drove home again with nothing in the bag. We skipped the next year, but returned in 1994. That year on the first morning of the Meet, Dave's bird "Sam" slammed a jack — if you could have seen the



A couple of ol' duffers trying to catch something. From the looks on their faces, I do not think they are having any luck. Dan Cover and Dave Vance.



Dave, Sam, Dolly 1976



A pond with a few trees and a large blackberry patch on the bank. Old tree stumps were dumped at the edge of the briar patch, which made a perfect home for rabbits and quail. One snowy day I counted seven rabbit in or near the stumps.



Dec. 1988. One that did not get away.

look on his face, a 71-year-old man still fulfilling his dreams.

Dave never had success in breeding his Harris' hawks, another of his dreams. The day he came home from the hospital, knowing that his life was coming to a close, he wanted his bed set up in the window so he could see the birds in the backyard. He asked me to put the male and female together so maybe they would breed and he could watch from the window. Dave only lived 10 more days but, on the morning he died, "Sam" laid the first of 3 eggs. After the funeral I took birds and eggs to my home and put the eggs under my bird (who had also laid an egg). The eggs hatched and the offspring fulfilled the final dream that Dave had longed for.

Dave leaves behind four sons and daughters, two stepdaughters and June, his wonderful and gracious wife of 23 years.

Al Nye and Dan Cover (background), Dave Vance with Harris' Hawk on rabbit



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