



The article: [The Lucky Ones](#) was published in *Animal Tracks Magazine*, V. 1, #1

Name? Brad Felger

Occupation? Farrier in San Luis Obispo county – maintaining care of horses’ feet with shoeing, trimming and basic cleaning.

Falconer, with Air Strike Technologies – is hired by local vineyards, hotels and other agricultural businesses to decrease the number of pest birds at their location. With a flying falcon in the area, pest birds such as seagulls & starlings will avoid that location thus, protecting crops they would otherwise feed on.

How Long Have You Worked in the Animal Field? Started horse shoeing in 1983, Brad has been a falconer since before 1970, and began using this skill for bird abatement 12 years ago.

What Path Led Brad to this Work? After a boyhood of keeping lizards, bugs and other reptiles Brad’s fascination with the animal world progressed until one day he purchased a falcon from the local pet store. Not knowing their purchase was illegal until afterward, Brad and his mother turned themselves into the Fish & Game Department. After some crying and providing useful information against the illegal transactions the pet store was involved in with the pet trade, Brad was allowed to keep the falcon under one condition - he needed a falconer’s license. Not yet the legal age of 16 to do so, his Mom stepped up to the plate and obtained a license until Brad was eligible. (No longer legal to do so, falconry requirements are strict and closely abided by. If over the age of 16, you are required to pass a test provided by Fish & Game, have a Master Falconer sponsor you for 2 years, and have adequate housing and equipment before obtaining a bird. Contact the Department of Fish & Game for more details.)

Best Part of Your Career: As a farrier, Brad has come across many ornery horses. He enjoys the days he can improve a horse’s quality of life by maintaining proper foot care. Brad also admits the enjoyment he receives from working hard at something he’s good at.

Air Strike Technologies is focused on bird abatement - discouraging pest birds from the area without actually destroying them, by use of chemicals, shotguns or other methods routinely used. With the use of falcons, you can have better results without the noise and destruction. Brad says he loves being so close to nature when he’s out in the field with his birds; the use of falconry is non-intrusive, quiet and natural. He distinctly points out the difference between falconry as a hobby and when he is ‘working’ – on a job there is a purpose, a goal. When having a good time with his falcons off the time clock, Brad enjoys the sense of freedom and inner peace through falconry; to have a bond with his birds of prey and be allowed to watch them do what they were built for. “I don’t enjoy killing things, but do enjoy letting Nature do what it’s supposed to do.” The balance of the Earth depends predator/prey relationship.

What’s the Worst Part of Your Career? Remember those ornery horses mentioned earlier? Bending over

all day, with your clients kicking you is on the top of Brad's list as his least favorite part of his day. The horses don't seem to be as appreciative for his labors as important as his task is!

Luckily, in all the years he's been involved in falconry, Brad has only lost three of his birds although none while doing bird abatement. Understandably, the death of a falcon is by far the ultimate worst part of his career: nothing could be far more tragic or disappointing.

What is Your Daily Workday Like? Everyday is different, flexibility being the key. Between shoeing horses throughout town, Brad travels to a winery or a blueberry farm to fly his birds about the property. Not actually hunting for the pest birds, Brad and the falcon 'play' with a leather balloon lure. Released several hundred feet in the air, the bird finds it exciting to chase after the lure which Brad assists in making a challenge, hence, increasing the duration of the game. This is physically and mentally stimulating for the falcon, but also demonstrates a predator/prey behavior keeping away - and I mean far away!

Once returning home in Atascadero, he is then responsible for the feeding and general care of 29 birds. Although only a few are used for bird abatement and two for his personal falconry uses, the remainder are involved in a captive breeding program. Each year there are several clutches of newborn falcons who will be used for future breeding, falconry, bird abatement, or educational programs. Oh, did we mention that other aspect he finds throughout his weeks? Brad occasionally provides an educational aspect to schools or clubs about the importance of the ancient history of the sport, and the intense responsibilities in being a falconer.

What is Your Advice to Those Interested in Your Field? As a falconer, Brad suggests weighing the costs heavily before dedicating yourself to such a responsibility. Caring for a falcon requires a lot of work: daily weights need to be recorded, daily training sessions, cleaning, feeding, housing maintenance, paperwork for licensing and legalities through both Fish & Game and the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Services, veterinary care, financial obligations for all the above and necessary equipment. . . and very important is the time and passion for the sport and your bird.

Please contact Brad Felger with any questions on bird abatement, falconry, or as a farrier: 805-391-0444

Air Strike = when a plane encounters a flock of birds creating an extremely dangerous situation for the jet. Hence, falconers now provide services to clear runways, at airports before a plane is 'prepared to land.