



chicken

**Not Your Ordinary
Falcon Ambassador**

Chicken: Not Your Ordinary Falcon Ambassador

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Chicken: Not Your Ordinary Falcon Ambassador



Chicken is a star in more ways than one. First, he is the star of the flying team at the Bird of Prey Sanctuary in Kwazulu-Natal South Africa. He has been resident here for the past 10 years. It's been a wonderful decade for him, for us, and for the many audience members who 'ooh' and 'aah' over his amazing fly-overs. But things didn't start off so rosy for this majestic Lanner Falcon.



In the beginning...

Chicken was brought to the Raptor Rescue hospital, located on the same property as the Sanctuary, by a couple of kind rafters who saw a sickly young bird on a river bank. Tests showed that he had been organo-phosphate poisoned, which is sadly a common occurrence here in South Africa for birds of prey.

However, Chicken's strong will to live and the dedicated care provided by licensed animal rehabilitator Ben Hoffman meant that after eight months in hospital (which is a very long time for any animal to recuperate), Chicken was deemed cured. However, his poisoning left him in a too-weakened state to be able to hunt on his own in the wild. Therefore, it was decided that the best thing for him would be to remain at the Sanctuary and join the education flying team where he could continue being fed and cared for by Ben and his wife, Shannon.



His name

Although he has grown up to be a particularly beautiful falcon, when he was still in hospital recovering Chicken would make, well, sounds that the barnyard animal would. So the name stuck. Luckily however, after a rough start, his flying has improved so no one would compare him to his moniker!

Like other Lanner Falcons, Chicken is capable of great speeds. Larger than their Peregrine cousins, Lanners are more generalist in their hunting behaviour and are widely dispersed throughout Africa and parts of Europe. And while not on the endangered list, their population globally is thought to be dwindling. This is due primarily to human interference, by shooting and poisoning them, as they are thought to interfere with human activity. Also, because of their great speed, Lanners often hit power lines, resulting in injury or death. So it's lucky for Chicken, and for his human friends, that he is safe at the Sanctuary.



Master of the skies

Chicken is flown by Shannon for the education of members of the public. He only allows Shannon to work with him, as in fact he has never forgiven Ben, the man who saved his life, for sticking him with all those needles! Chicken has a strong personality and isn't shy about letting people know what is on his mind. He also lets other animals know who's boss.

On a recent day, a huge Brahman bull wandered into the Sanctuary and found to his delight a pond to quench his thirst. Despite the size difference, Chicken let the big mammal know who ruled the roost by swooping down (a typical falcon move) and bopping the bull on the head. It is this very swooping motion that wows audiences on a daily basis.

In the show Chicken wears a radio transmitter so he can be located easily. This is necessary as he can fly so high that he becomes virtually impossible to see. Yet with his eyesight, which is about eight times that of a human being, he is able to keep Shannon in view.

Shannon uses an aerial lure, which is a padded piece of leather attached to a string, to entice Chicken to return. He makes several high-speed passes over the audience, which is thrilling to see to say the least. He is eventually rewarded with food, which he seems to bow over, but which is a typical falcon motion of

mantling over his prey, so that no one else (read: another predator) could take it from him.

So, with his physical beauty, strong personality, and determined will to live, Chicken is an impressive and important Falcon Ambassador. He is living proof of the need to protect this indicator species at all costs. Lanner Falcons are apex predators and an integral part of the food chain. If their numbers diminish, devastating knock-on effects will occur.

Let's ensure that Chicken and his fellow Lanners can lead safe lives, free from destruction of their habitats and the persecution they face at the hands of some. May Chicken continue to astound audiences for many years to come!



Learn more about

CHICKEN

and his work with
Shannon Hoffman

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<http://www.nikela.org/portfolio/fly-birds-of-prey-african-bird>