

## A NEW TETHER SYSTEM FOR CAPTIVE RAPTORS

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**Abstract.**—Several types of jesses are used to restrain captive raptors. The Hollywood jess described here has been tested on six species during two decades. Like the Aylmeri jess now in common use in North America, the Hollywood jess consists of a removable rolled button jess and an anklet. Unlike the Aylmeri anklet, however, the Hollywood anklet can be removed and reattached without restraining the bird. This anklet makes the Hollywood jess the safest of all jesses. It can also be used repeatedly on different individuals and allows for the bird to be released in its pen or to the wild without encumbrances.

### UN NUEVO SISTEMA DE TRABAS PARA RAPTORES CAUTIVOS

**Síntesis.**—Varios tipos de trabas son utilizadas para controlar raptores cautivos. La traba "Hollywood" aquí descrita se ha probado en seis especies a través de dos décadas. Como la traba "Aylmeri" de uso común hoy en Norte América, la traba "Hollywood" consiste en un amarre enrollado de botón removible y una tobillera. Sin embargo, a diferencia de la tobillera "Aylmeri," la tobillera "Hollywood" se puede remover y reconectar sin aprisionar al ave. Esta tobillera hace de la "Hollywood" la más segura de todas las trabas. También se puede utilizar repetidamente en individuos diferentes y permite que el ave sea liberada en su albergue o en la naturaleza sin estorbos.

For research, rehabilitation, reintroduction and other purposes, raptors are often restrained with leashes and jesses (falconer's term for straps attached to the bird's leg). Two types of jesses (the traditional and the Aylmeri) are in common use. A third type (the snap-on) is recommended by some (McElroy 1977:93) and denigrated by others (Beebe 1992:169).

The safety of captive and released raptors took a dramatic leap forward with the advent of the Aylmeri jess two decades ago (Beebe and Webster 1970:50). The Aylmeri consists of two parts. First, an anklet (often called a bracelet in falconry books) that is affixed to the leg by a grommet, and second, a removable button jess. Two types of rolled button jesses are available. The first is a perch jess with a slot near the trailing end to which a leash is attached. The second is a slotless jess used while the bird is free in its pen or while it is being allowed to fly free. Using a slotless jess prevents the delinquent (overnight escapee) falcon and the migrant (lost long-term) hawk from snagging the jess and hanging.

With the Aylmeri, however, some minor problems remain. First, to attach the grommet on the Aylmeri anklet, the bird normally has to be manually restrained; second, for photography purposes, the anklet is difficult to conceal; third, to remove the anklet requires that it be destroyed (i.e., by cutting the leather); fourth, to allow a bird to escape with the anklet attached jeopardizes its life to a small degree because the grommet can be snagged and the bird left hanging; and fifth, to leave the Aylmeri anklets on an incubating raptor can result in the grommets causing egg abrasion and occasionally egg breakage (R. Rogers, pers. comm.).

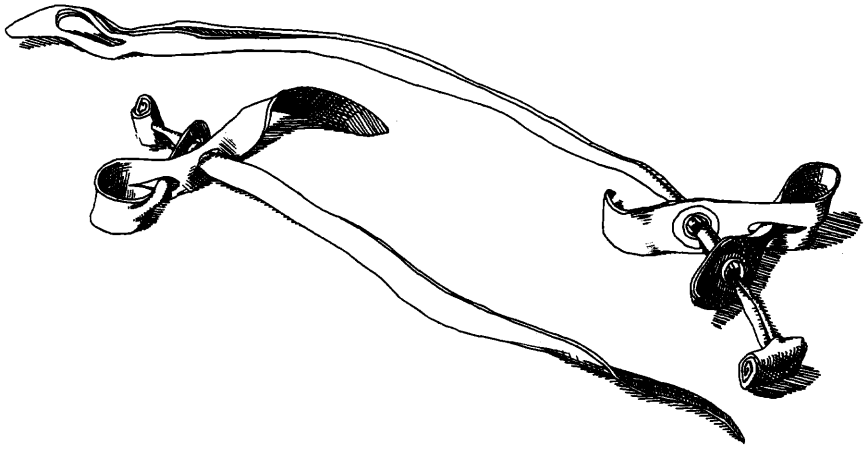


FIGURE 1. Hollywood jess. Upper: slotted, perch jess and ankle with grommets. Lower: slotless field jess and ankle without grommets.

My novel jess system, first designed in the early 1970s, has several advantages over both the traditional jess and also the Aylmeri jess, now mandated for use in some states. It is also more secure than the snap-on jess (which can also snap off), and has the advantage that it can be installed and removed without casting (restraining by hand) the bird. As it allows for photographing raptors without any encumbrances, I call it the Hollywood jess.

#### HOLLYWOOD JESS

The Hollywood jess described below is much safer than the traditional jess (i.e., it has no slot [for the swivel and leash] waiting to be snagged) and is slightly safer than the Aylmeri because escapees can remove not only the button jess, but also the Hollywood ankle. It also avoids the problems of damage to egg surfaces. An added advantage, to those who keep birds short-term, is that the Hollywood jess can be used on several birds in succession. Finally, it is a better choice for long-term restraint of raptors with feathered tarsi because the ankle can be removed to allow replacement of tarsal feathers while the bird is untethered in an aviary.

Two styles of ankles and two styles of button jesses are illustrated (Fig. 1) for the Hollywood jess. The ankle passes through itself and is held in place not by a grommet, as for the Aylmeri ankle, but by the button jess itself. Remove the ankle (to allow the raptor to fly free without encumbrances) merely by removing the button jess, then pulling firmly on the trailing end of the ankle. If threading the ankle during reattachment is a problem, you may wish to install grommets as in the upper part of Figure 1.

Install the jesses by threading the ankle through itself then inserting the button jess. To attach jesses to a fresh caught (i.e., wild) bird, it is

usually best to restrain it. A dangerous alternative is to leave the bird unrestrained and attach the jesses in a darkened room. Under these circumstances, a second person is needed to control light, to distract the bird, and to apply first aid.

To change jesses on a bird which has been in captivity long-term and which allows close human approach, you may still wish to wear gloves on both hands and, for eagles, even goggles. First, remove the far jess by pulling on the rolled leather button, all the while restraining the bird with the near jess. Then insert the new jess (i.e., the slotless field jess) through the anklet, grasp it, then remove the perch jess (slotted) from the second leg and replace it with a field jess. The bird is now ready for short-term release. If, however, the bird is to be released long-term or photographed, proceed as above, but remove the anklets also.

To reattach the perch jess at the end of a flight, and if the bird is wearing field jesses, restrain one leg while changing the opposite jess, just as for the Aylmeri system. The only difference for the Hollywood jess in this process is that the perch jess must pass through two holes (or two grommets if you are using the upper jess in the drawing) rather than one. Threading the tip is something of a problem even with the Aylmeri, but is made simple by using both hands as the bird feeds and/or by tapering and stiffening the jess tip. Stiffening can be accomplished by folding and gluing the tip. With use, jesses become naturally stiff as they lose their oils and become saturated with blood. Reattachment is easiest if the bird is feeding on an elevated perch where you can work mostly from behind and beneath, and thereby avoid the hazard zone with all but your hands.

I have used Hollywood jesses on both Golden (*Aquila chrysaetos*) and Bald (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) Eagles, a Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*), a Harris' Hawk (*Parabuteo unicinctus*), and both Prairie (*Falco mexicanus*) and Peregrine (*F. peregrinus*) Falcons. I highly recommend it for the reasons stated above and have experienced no real disadvantages.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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