Falconry (also known as “Hawking”) means training raptors in the pursuit of wild game and hunting wild game with raptors. Falconry includes taking raptors from the wild to use in the sport and caring for, training, and transporting raptors held for falconry. "Raptor” means a bird of the family Falconidae (examples include peregrine falcon, gyrfalcon, or American kestrel), the great horned owl, or a bird of the family Accipitridae, other than the bald eagle (examples include Northern goshawk, Cooper’s hawk, or red-tailed hawk).

Falconry is an ancient sport with recorded evidence dating back to paintings made in Mesopotamia over 4,000 years ago. Historically, falconry has been used to catch prey for sport and food throughout Europe, Asia, and the Middle East with peak participation during the 17th century. However, due to the advent of guns and other modern weaponry, the sport quickly fell out of favor, but was revived in the late 19th and 20th century at which time it was introduced to North America.

Is falconry right for you?

You may have become interested in falconry because a book or a movie or even a commercial made it seem cool, glamorous, or intriguing. But before you go any further, you should ask yourself, “Is falconry right for me?” If any of the following apply to you, falconry may not be the right sport for you.

If you want a pet, then falconry may not be right for you.

Raptors are not pets, and they do not behave like parrots. They are predators, and as such they are inherently dangerous and are forever wild. Raptors taken from the wild are always considered “wild raptors” and cannot be sold, but they may be gifted to other falconers. No matter the amount of training, raptors always retain a degree of independence which often proves frustrating for the falconer. A falconer must realize that someday their bird may revert to the wild. Each time the falconer throws a prize hawk into the air, it may not come back. Nothing but tolerance ties a hawk to a human and sometimes precious little of that.

If you are interested in taking a lot of game, then falconry may not be right for you.

Successful hunting is not the main purpose of falconry. If it were, satisfaction would be low. The average hawk takes 30-50 flights before it catches anything, and chances are when it does catch something, it is only a mouse. The real thrill of hunting with a raptor is watching its magnificent flight.

If you are under 18 years old, are your parents willing take the time to get involved?

Parents or legal guardians must sign permits and state that they are willing to take responsibility for all activities that occur under their child’s permit. That includes hunting with the raptor, as well as, care and maintenance of the raptor. For children under 16 years of age, the raptor must be housed at the facilities of a permitted adult falconer, which is why we encourage a parent or guardian to become a falconer, too (if that is not possible, the raptor can be housed with the sponsor if that sponsor is willing to take the bird, but that may require frequent travel to the sponsor’s facilities). **Falconry applicants that are under 18 years of age should review this packet with their parents prior to taking the exam.**

If you have very limited free time, then falconry may not be right for you.

Are you willing to devote a minimum of one hour per day all year long to falconry? Will family, career, or travel obligations conflict with these time requirements? During the hunting season, the raptors should be flown regularly (about an hour a day); they need food, water, and daily weigh-ins all year long; they need to go to the vet regularly; and they need their facilities cleaned regularly. Raptors have specialized diets, so their food must be purchased, caught, or raised (and for storage, the food must be cleaned, cut, and frozen). For every hour spent in the field, there are a hundred hours spent in the care, maintenance, and training of the raptor.
If you have very limited disposable income, then falconry may not be right for you.
The sport of falconry is not cheap. In order to get a falconry permit, you must, at a minimum:
1. **Build a mews**—usually an insulated shed or large portion of your garage or house. The mews must have a door so it is accessible by humans, window(s) with vertical bars, perches, and water dish. The mews must be large enough for the intended raptor to spread its wings and fly without hitting the walls if untethered or flap its wings without hitting the walls if tethered. The mews must be secure enough to protect the raptor from predators, domestic animals, and poultry and other livestock. The mews must protect the raptor from the cold and wind during the winter months and sun and heat during the summer months.
2. **Build a weathering area**—think outdoor kennel, but with vertical bars, roof, perches, floor, and water dish.
3. **Purchase the required equipment or materials**—jesses or the material and equipment to make them, leash and swivel, bath container, and appropriate scales or balances for weighing your raptors.
4. **Purchase a Giant hood or similar container**—think dog carrier with a perch for transporting the raptor.
5. **Purchase, raise, or capture appropriate food**—raptors have restrictive diets. Their food must be purchased, raised, or captured during the hunting season.
6. **Visit a vet**—whether the raptor is caught in the wild or obtained as a captive bred animal, they should still be seen by a veterinarian regularly (many regular vets do not see raptors, so a specialist or a vet at The Raptor Center may be your only option).
7. **Obtaining a raptor**—even “free” raptors taken from the wild will cost you time and possibly money for travel and hotels (the best places to trap a raptor may not be local to your residence). And raptors that have been captive bred can cost hundreds if not thousands of dollars depending on the species and gender.

If you have a short attention span, then falconry may not be right for you.
Have you been reading through these cautions or only skimming them? Are you already bored? If so, falconry is probably not your sport. In order to even get a falconry permit you must
1. **Study for the falconry exam.** You will be required to independently study and do library research from multiple sources of information such as books, regulations, other falconers, and on the internet.
2. **Find a sponsor.** A sponsor must be a current Master Falconer or General Falconer with two years’ experience with a bird as a General Falconer. The Minnesota Falconer’s Association (MFA) may help you get in contact with a local falconer, but many potential sponsors try to dissuade prospective falconers from the sport unless they demonstrate a very serious interest in falconry. The best place to find a sponsor is at one of the MFA’s meets where falconers get together to talk shop and fly their birds. You should take the time to travel to several meets, get to know the falconers, and learn from them before advancing your quest to become a falconer. Sponsorship is a two year commitment for the sponsoring falconer—they do not like to waste their time and they would prefer not to commit themselves to someone they do not know. They are doing you a favor, appreciate it and learn from them.
3. **Trap your bird.** Because raptors are not hanging around, waiting to fly into your trap, you may not catch one on your first trip out. You may not catch one on your second or third trip out either.
4. **Training and Maintenance.** Once you trap your bird, it probably will not like you. Training a raptor takes time and trust. In addition to feeding and cleaning up after the bird, you should expect to spend at least an hour each day training and/or hunting with the bird. Some hawks require a full year of training before they are ready to hunt.

Are you still interested?
Congratulations, you may just have what it takes to become a falconer!