

IS FALCONRY RIGHT FOR ME?

Issues to consider before becoming a Falconer

Falconry (also known as “Hawking”) is a hunting sport that uses trained raptors to hunt wild game. Falconry includes taking raptors from the wild and caring for, training, hunting with, and transporting those raptors. "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 (examples include Northern goshawk, Cooper’s hawk, or red-tailed hawk) with the exception of the bald eagle which is not allowed in falconry.

Is falconry right for you?

You may have become interested in falconry because a book, a movie, or even a commercial made it seem cool or interesting. But before you go any further, you should ask yourself, “Is falconry right for me?” You may want to reconsider getting into falconry if any of the following apply to 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 realizes 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.

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

Taking game is not the main purpose of falconry. If it were, satisfaction would probably be pretty low. The average hawk takes 30-50 flights before it catches anything, and chances are when it does catch something, it may only be a mouse. The real thrill of falconry is watching a magnificent hunter in action.

If you are under 18, 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 raptor care and maintenance and possible injury or damage that may result when hunting with 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 (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 entire 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? Raptors need food, water, and daily weigh-ins all year long. They have specialized diets, so their food must be purchased, caught, or raised and then cleaned, cut, and frozen for storage. They also need their facilities cleaned and regular vet check-ups. During the hunting season, the raptors should be flown regularly (at a minimum, this would require an additional hour per day). For every hour spent in the field, there may be 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**—The mews is usually an insulated shed, portion of your garage, or room in your house. The mews must have a door that is accessible by humans, window(s) with vertical bars, perches, and water dish. The mews must be large enough for the 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**—A weathering area is similar to an outdoor kennel, but with vertical bars, roof, perches, floor, and water dish.
3. **Purchase the required equipment or materials**—The mandatory equipment required for the sport are jesses or the material and equipment to make them, leash and swivel, bath container, and appropriate scales or balances for weighing your raptors. Radio telemetry equipment is often used to track and recover raptors, and are mandatory for raptors that are not native to Minnesota or are hybrids.
4. **Purchase a Giant hood or similar container**—A giant hood is basically a dog carrier or some other type box 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 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. Many potential sponsors are hesitant to take on a prospective falconer unless they demonstrate a very serious interest in falconry. The best place to find a sponsor is through local falconry clubs or contacting the DNR falconry permit coordinator. You should take the time to travel to several falconry 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 a raptor on your second or third trip out either.
4. **Training and Maintenance**—Once you trap your bird, it will probably actively dislike 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!