

STEPS TO BECOME A FALCONER IN MINNESOTA

1. First Steps

Download the Department of Natural Resources Falconry Packet or contact the falconry coordinator for a printout if you do not have access to a computer.

- A. Review the state and federal falconry regulations.
- B. Study recommended reading materials listed on the MN DNR website.
- C. Print out the Apprentice Falconer Checklist sheet
- D. Cultivate relationships with other falconers by talking to them and going out in the field with them

2. Falconry Exam

Contact the Falconry Coordinator to arrange a time and place to take the falconry exam. New exams are generally scheduled between May 1st and November 30th. The falconry exam may be taken at the DNR central office in Saint Paul or at one of the field offices. You must get at least 80% of the questions right for a passing grade. If you fail the exam, you must wait at least two weeks before you may re-take it.

3. Sponsorship

Once you pass the exam, you will need to find an active Minnesota Falconer who will agree to become your sponsor. They must be a Master Falconer or a General Falconer with at least 2 seasons of experience as a General Falconer. If you are having difficulty finding a sponsor, contact a local falconry club or the DNR Falconry Permit Coordinator.

4. Falconers under 18 years old

Falconry applicants that are under 18 years of age should review the “Complete Minnesota Falconry Packet” with their parents.

5. Facilities and Equipment

- A. Before beginning any constructing on your facilities or making/buying any equipment, we strongly recommend that you discuss your facilities needs with your sponsor, tour several falconers’ facilities, and review the Facilities Handbook and Facilities Inspection Form.
- B. Additionally, we recommend that you consider your future bird possession goals when building your facilities. That means if you plan to possess more than one bird after you become a General, you may want to build your facilities in such a way that you are able to easily add on to your facilities, or you may want to build your facilities large enough to accommodate more than one bird right away. Such considerations may save you time and money later.

- C. Once you have determined the type and size facilities that you will need then, in coordination with your sponsor and in compliance with state and federal regulations, you may construct your facilities (both an outdoor weathering area and an indoor mews). Also in coordination with your sponsor, you must obtain the necessary equipment listed in the federal regulations. If you have any questions about the federal or state facilities or equipment regulations contact the Falconry Permit Coordinator.
- D. Finally, once your sponsor has inspected your equipment and your completely finished facilities, contact the Falconry Permit Coordinator to arrange a time for your official state facilities inspection. For people who are outside the metro area or who contact a local MN DNR Conservation Officer or Nongame Specialist directly, please tell the Falconry Permit Coordinator the Conservation Officer or Nongame Specialist's name and the date that they will be conducting the inspection to prevent delays in permitting. The Conservation Officers often need the correct forms to conduct the inspection and the Falconry Permit Coordinator can follow up if the forms have not been turned in after the inspection.

6. Apply for a Falconry Permit

- A. Once you submit your complete application, expect the permitting process to take **4-6 weeks**. **Please plan accordingly as we cannot expedite permits.**
- B. **Mail** your application with appropriate certifications signed. If your sponsor will be submitting their sponsorship letter separately, make sure that they submit it. If the exam and facilities were not conducted by the Falconry Permit Coordinator, ensure that all necessary paperwork was forwarded to the Falconry Permit Coordinator. Communication with the Falconry Permit Coordinator at this stage is very important. **Do not assume all paperwork was submitted on your behalf.** We do not start processing permit applications until all paperwork has been submitted.
- C. Once all paperwork has been submitted, you will receive an unsigned permit by email in **2-3 weeks**.
- D. Upon receipt of your permit, print, sign, and **mail** it to the Falconry Permit Coordinator.
- E. In **2-3 weeks**, you will receive a state-signed permit via email and a black falconry band via postal mail. If you do not get the black falconry band within 2 weeks of receipt of your emailed permit, contact the Falconry Permit Coordinator. Due to the bands thickness, the envelopes do not go through the postal rollers well and have been returned crumpled or destroyed in the past.

7. Trap Your Raptor

In coordination with your sponsor, you must:

- A. Acquire and/or make necessary falconry and trapping equipment to capture a red-tailed hawk.
- B. Stock your freezer with a variety of quality hawk food.

- C. Trap a red-tailed hawk. If you are not trapping on your own property, ensure you have any necessary permissions required to trap on that land. Not many people outside of falconers are aware that falconry is allowed in Minnesota and what the sport entails; therefore, when trapping in visible locations, we highly recommend that you do some outreach to neighbors through direct communication or post some signage to prevent tampering with traps and unnecessary calls to Conservation Officers or other law enforcement.
- D. Once an immature red-tailed hawk is captured, immediately place the black falconry band on the raptor's leg.
- E. Within 10 days of obtaining a raptor, complete and submit the required raptor reporting forms to the MN DNR.
- F. **Please note:** For a complete "season of experience" (a consideration for upgrading, see numbers 11&12 below), you would need to have a raptor in your possession by at least November 1st then hunt with and maintain the bird until April 30th (6 full months).

8. Raptor Maintenance

Your raptor must be maintained in a safe and humane manner, and your facilities must be maintained in accordance with state and federal regulations while you are a permitted falconer. If you make any major changes to your facilities or their location, you must contact the Falconry Coordinator in case an inspection is necessary.

9. As an Apprentice Falconer

- A. Maintain close contact with your Sponsor;
- B. **Contact the Falconry Permit Coordinator within 10 days if you lose or change sponsorship.**
- C. Discuss general maintenance issues, training, etc. with your sponsor and other falconers.
- D. Consistent hunting with your hawk is important.
- E. We highly recommend that you attend the Mid-Winter Anemia educational seminar presented by Minnesota Falconers' Association/The Raptor Center. Raptors generally need more food in the winter to maintain the same weight and stay healthy.
- F. Some species require an additional heat source during the winter months. Contact your sponsor to ensure proper maintenance of your raptor during winter weather.
- G. You should attend falconry events and meets to develop knowledge, maintain contacts, and further your falconry education.
- H. Consider attending The Raptor Center's Basic Raptor Rehabilitation Workshop (registration is through the University of Minnesota). It is for raptor rehabilitation, but feather, feet, and weight issues are discussed along with a lot of other useful information.

10. Falconry Permit Renewals

Renewal applications must be submitted **30 days prior to permit expiration**. Annually, an email is sent at the end of July/beginning of August reminding falconers to submit their annual report and renew their falconry permits if necessary. Requesting the renewal and completing the email via reply email is allowed in lieu of a standard renewal application form. Your facilities must also be inspected when renewing. Contact the Falconry Coordinator or your local Conservation Officer at least **30 days prior to permit expiration** to schedule the inspection.

Because many falconers renew at the same time, scheduled inspections sometimes cut very close to the expiration date. Accommodations can usually be made to keep the permit valid if there is a known issue; however, requesting renewal or the inspection near or on the expiration date, often results in a permit that is temporarily expired. You cannot possess a raptor with an expired permit; therefore, if you allow your permit to expire, any raptors in your possession must be released or transferred to another permitted falconer until your permit can be renewed.

11. Upgrading to an Apprentice Permit for Junior Apprentices

Upgrade is automatic on your 16th birthday. Contact the Falconry Permit Coordinator for the upgraded permit.

12. Upgrading to a General Falconry Permit

Upgrades are not automatic. The requirements for upgrades follow state and federal requirements. For the integrity of the program no exceptions to the requirements are made. Requirements to become a General Falconry Permittee are:

- A. You must have been a Junior Apprentice or Apprentice Falconer (or a combination of the two) for at least 24 complete months (2 years).
- B. You must have two (2) seasons of experience to be considered for upgrade.
 - i. A "season of experience" is defined as the experience gained by a falconer who has one or more raptors in the falconer's possession for a minimum of six calendar months within a season.
 - ii. A "season" in falconry is from May 1 to April 30 of the next year.
 - iii. Half months are counted from the first day of the month to the 15th day of the month or from the 16th day of the month to the last day of the month.
 - iv. Periods less than half months are not included in the total.
- C. You must meet federal requirements: At least 4 of the 6 months in **each season** must be during the hunting season, September 1st to February 28/29th.
- D. A written recommendation by your sponsor is required (they may email the recommendation).
- E. Once you have 2 seasons of experience and your sponsor's recommendation letter (emails are sufficient), you may apply to the Falconry Coordinator for a permit upgrade.