

FAQs

Contributed by Administrator
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What is Falconry?

Falconry is the hunting of natural prey in their natural environment with a trained bird of prey and has long been recognized as legitimate recreational use of wildlife. The training of and hunting with birds of prey has been practiced since 2000 BC and was originally used as a means of catching food for the table before the advent of gunpowder.

Falconry is considered high input, low impact recreational-use of wildlife. It has been officially provided for in Alberta under the Wildlife Act since 1981. The following questions and answers will provide general information concerning the practice of falconry in Alberta. What is the Alberta Falconry Association?

The Alberta Falconry Association is a private organization whose members are dedicated to the conservation of raptors and their prey and to falconry as a source of recreational enjoyment. Not all members actively fly birds, but many have extensive experience handling and training falconry birds. Some are actively involved in domestic breeding programs, some in field research and others in rehabilitation projects for injured wild raptors. The association maintains a strict code of ethics. Each member is ranked and regulated according to his or her falconry knowledge and expertise.

A Novice Falconer practices the sport for a minimum of one year under the supervision of a more experienced falconer; is expected to study and learn as much as possible about falconry and falconry birds; can have only one falconry bird of restricted species; cannot hold a Commercial Falconry Permit. The novice must pass a written exam before advancing.

Apprentice Falconer has had at least one year of supervised experience and has passed the written examination administered by the Alberta Falconry Association; cannot have more than two falconry birds; cannot breed them or hold a Commercial Falconry Permit.

Regular Falconer has had at least three years of experience; is not specifically restricted; can supervise novices.

Master Falconer has exceptional knowledge and skill, with at least seven years of broad-based experience; is expected to help and instruct those who are less proficient.

A Non- Falconer is a resident of Alberta and a member of AFA and is not classified as any of the previous categories. The purpose of this category is for those individuals who are interested in falconry or falconry birds but who do not have any falconry experience or who do not wish to actively participate in the sport. Why is falconry considered a valid recreational activity?

The challenge and skill associated with the training of and hunting with falconry birds provide satisfaction, enjoyment and outdoor recreation to falconers with no negative impact on the populations of wild raptors or their prey. Additional benefits are gained from developing domestic breeding techniques and increased public awareness of wildlife.

Trained raptors have higher survival rates than wild birds and are maintained in peak physical condition. They are assured of food and generally protected from disease and predators. Some falconry birds are accidentally lost while flying and some are intentionally released back into the wild, where they add to the free ranging populations.

Hunting by falconry birds is a natural method of feeding, the same one used for survival by all wild raptors. During the hunt, the role of the falconer is reduced to that of an observer of a real life drama. The falconer only attempts to choose the time and place in order to be present to witness the event. Who can become a falconer?

Alberta government regulations indicate that in order to obtain or hold a Falconry Permit, an individual must have Alberta resident status for a minimum of six months, be at least 14 years of age (an individual who is under 16 years of age must be authorized in writing by their parent or guardian to hold that license), will construct a housing facility that is approved by the Minister, must be a member of the Alberta Falconry Association and, must enter the apprenticeship scheme which restricts the species and number of raptorial birds one may possess.

However, falconry is not for everyone. There is no field sport and are very few hobbies that require more devotion of time and attention than falconry. This is often the most underestimated demand of the sport to newcomers. Furthermore, not everyone is, by their nature, capable of handling raptors. If your interest in the art of falconry is primarily to take game, then do not try falconry. If your attraction to falconry is that it is an interesting and unusual hobby and would be a neat way to attract attention, you may be right but it is not what falconry is about. If you love birds and would like a hawk as a pet, then do not attempt falconry for they do not make good pets! If you are actively involved with social activities or clubs, business commitments, or enjoy taking vacations numerous times a year then do not attempt to fit in a bit of falconry.

However, if you have an interest in the outdoors, the environment and a love of wildlife with enough depth and breadth to be more than sentimental; if you can see the highly developed and evolved qualities of predators such as courage, strength, coordination and physical perfection; if you have a fascination with the predatory process of search, locate, attack, subdue and consume and understand that these are essential in order for them to survive; if you are prepared to commit the time to ensuring their success; then falconry may be for you and with time and experience you may become a falconer.

What can I do under the authority of falconry permit?

In general, a falconry permit allows the holder to possess and traffic in falconry birds. There are two types of falconry permits.

The holder of a recreational permit may possess up to four falconry birds, depending on his or her category within the Alberta Falconry Association. Any offspring of these birds may be kept until they are six months old. The permit holder may buy, sell, trade or barter up to four falconry birds annually between April 1st and March 31st of the following year - as long as none of these birds were taken from the wild in Alberta.

The holder of a commercial falconry permit may possess and traffic in any number of falconry birds that were not taken from the wild in Alberta.

Under either type of permit, the holder may have custody of another falconer's birds for up to 90 days with written authorization of the bird's owner. All falconry birds must remain under the direct care of a member of the Alberta Falconry Association and all falconry birds must be registered with the Fisheries and Wildlife Management Division and permanently banded by a Conservation Officer. The falconry permit under which it is possessed must accompany any bird being transported.

The holder of a falconry permit is required to submit annual records concerning all birds in his or her possession and also report within 5 days any bird that has died or was lost. Any changes of status regarding a falconry bird also must be reported to the Secretary of the Alberta Falconry Association within 5 days. What is a falconry bird?

In Alberta, 12 species of raptors are classified as falconry birds: American Kestrel, Cooper's Hawk, Ferruginous Hawk, Gyrfalcon, Harris' Hawk, Merlin, Northern Goshawk, Peregrine Falcon, Prairie Falcon, Red-tailed Hawk, Sharp-Shinned Hawk and Swainson's Hawk. Hybrids of these species are also permitted. Persons classified as Novice Falconers by the Alberta Falconry Association may keep one only, of either American Kestrel, Red-tailed Hawk or Swainson's Hawk. How do falconers get birds?

There are a number of sources and methods of obtaining falconry birds. An import permit may be issued so that a bird, which is legally obtained in another jurisdiction, can be brought into Alberta. A collection permit may be issued for species that are not rare or endangered. Any threatened or endangered species (e.g. Peregrine Falcon) used in falconry must have been bred and hatched domestically.

Only captive bred birds and those birds that have been legally imported into Alberta may be bought, sold or bartered. Traffic and export in birds collected from the wild in Alberta is not permitted, although such a bird may be transferred from one Alberta falconer to another.

The holder of a recreational falconry permit may apply to collect no more than two birds each year, while the holder of a commercial falconry permit may apply to collect any number of birds. For each bird collected, a fee is assessed when ownership of the bird is transferred from the Crown to the falconer. How are falconry birds collected from the wild?

Usually birds are taken from the nest as chicks. When this is done, at least one nestling is always left for the parent birds to raise, so as to prevent the nest site from being abandoned. Sometimes birds are captured as free flying juveniles. Sexually mature adults and rare or endangered species are never collected for falconry purposes. What species of wildlife may I hunt with a falconry bird?

If you hold a falconry permit and have purchased the proper bird hunting licenses, you may hunt migratory and upland game birds during open seasons. If you do not have a Wildlife Identification Number (or WIN card), you will also be required to take a hunter education course in order to obtain a hunting license. Like many other jurisdictions, Alberta provides an extended upland game bird hunting season for falconry. Bag limits and possession limits that apply to game bird hunters also apply to falconers, with one exception: since falconry birds cannot be controlled as to which sex of prey they pursue, falconers may keep hen pheasants taken by their birds during the pheasant hunting season.

You may also hunt non-license animals such as crows, magpies, grackles, house sparrows, pigeons, starlings, hares, rabbits, ground squirrels, mice and woodchucks at any time of the year. Would hunting with a falconry bird increase my chance for success?

No! Next to throwing stones, falconry is probably the least efficient of traditional hunting techniques. The trained falconry bird, unlike its counterpart in the wild, is greatly disadvantaged during the hunt by the fact that the falconer chooses the time, place and prey available. Falconers are motivated not by the kill but by the quality of the flight and the thrill of the chase. Prey is sometimes captured unharmed and can be released. Do many hunters use falconry birds?

NO! Falconry will never be a popular sport. Aside from the fact that the hunting success rate is so low, it is relatively expensive to obtain, house and care for a falconry bird. On top of this, the inordinate amount of time required every day to handle, train and exercise a falconry bird is usually more than the average person is willing to forgo. Falconers must, by the nature of their calling, be extremely dedicated to it. It has been described as more of a way of life than a hobby. Would a falconry bird make a satisfactory pet?

NO! Aside from the fact that one cannot keep raptors as pets under Alberta Wildlife Regulations, raptors are by nature solitary predators who avoid even their own kind except during the breeding season. Through training they learn to tolerate and use the falconer as a food source, but they are neither affectionate nor intelligent, nor capable of responding to kindness per se like a dog or cat. I think I would like to be a falconer. What should I do?

The first thing to do is use the library and read as much as you can about raptors and about falconry. If possible, discuss the pros and cons of the sport with a falconer and then with your family. Assess your personal situation, remembering that falconry is a major commitment. Then, if you are still interested, apply for membership in the Alberta Falconry Association, where you can learn from experienced falconers. Are there any other points of general interest? Falconry birds collected from the wild in Alberta and held under a falconry permit may not be exported, except temporarily for the purpose of hunting or attending a falconry meet. This restriction does not apply to imported birds or captive-bred birds. A non-resident falconer is not permitted to collect wild raptors or falconry birds in Alberta. Non-resident falconers may bring their falconry birds temporarily into Alberta for the purposes of hunting, attending meets, etc., as long as the birds are accompanied by the appropriate licenses and permits (e.g. falconry permits, export and import permits, health certificates, CITES permit, hunting licenses, etc.).