



# SO YOU REALLY WANT TO BECOME A FALCONER?

Falconry Induction Booklet

A South African Falconry Association initiative

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## **1. WELCOME TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN FALCONRY ASSOCIATION WEBSITE**

Welcome, on behalf of the Executive Committee and the Membership Clubs, to the South African Falconry Association (SAFA)'s introduction to Falconry. If you are new to falconry we encourage you to read through this introduction booklet on falconry. This is not a "How to Do Falconry" manual, but a very small window into the world of falconry, which we hope will assist the aspiring falconer.

## **2. WHY WAS THIS BOOKLET WRITTEN?**

Too many times newcomers to falconry don't understand what falconry entails and hopefully this booklet will serve as a small window into the world of falconry, both within the South African and international context. In some countries, South Africa included, falconry is very strictly regulated. Sadly, in other countries where this is not the case, an aspiring falconer can run into all sorts of problems and **after** purchasing their first hawk seeks help, and often because:

- Something unexpected has happened
- Something has gone wrong, or
- The individual has realized that they do not have the experience required

This invariably angers many practicing falconers, simply because, if the necessary research had been done in the first place, then such a situation would not have arisen.

## **3. WHY IS IT A FALCONER'S RESPONSIBILITY TO PRACTICE FALCONRY PROPERLY?**

"Because.....every time any one of us picks up a bird, we are not only responsible for what we do in relation to our own bird, but also to the entire history and the entire future of falconry. We are, each of us, electing to take responsibility for something which has been practiced long before we were born and which will continue long after we die. If we cannot be true to the obligation to secure it for the future, by virtue of the way we practice it in the present....then we have no right to call ourselves falconers and we are entirely disgraced by our ineptitude. Do it properly or don't do it at all." International Falconry Forum member.

Owning a hawk is nothing like owning a pet: far more preparation needs to be done and knowledge & experience gained before one can be "ready" to take those first steps.

Hopefully, dear reader, by the time you get to the end of this booklet you will have a better understanding of what falconry is. We also hope you will have a better understanding of the dedication, time and expense it takes to practice the Art of Falconry.

#### **4. WHAT IS FALCONRY?**

For many people their first experience of “falconry” is from a Bird of Prey Display, either at a Centre, Country Fair or an article they read in a Magazine – **THIS IS NOT FALCONRY!**

**FALCONRY IS THE ART OF HUNTING WILD QUARRY WITH A TRAINED HAWK.**

#### **5. BRIEF HISTORY**

The Art of Falconry is the oldest sport in the world, probably four thousand years old, developing on the plains of central Eurasia. The origins have been lost with time, however, it can be debated that the first man to practice falconry was a hunter or herder, who trapped a falcon after witnessing the hunting style of a free flying falcon killing birds he flushed, while herding his livestock or on a hunt. In many parts of the world still today wild falcons will follow hunters and herds to try and benefit from what is flushed. What started out as a way of putting food on the table, in time, evolved into a sport. We would view falcons and hawks as among the earliest animals to be domesticated by man, probably sharing a history with mankind as old as that of the horse.

The social history of many countries, until the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, is full of reference to falconry; the falcons used were looked on as symbols of power and influence, while hawks were used by “yeomen” to help fill the larder. They are to be found in crests and on coats of arms. Sometimes they were given in payment of ransom and as rents for grants of land. The middle ages represented the Great Age for Falconry.

However, by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century with the advent of the shotgun, and the “Enclosures Act” in Britain, falconry as the means of filling the larder lost popularity. The gun became the sportsman’s delight. Falconry entered the realm of being a recreational sport, usually associated with the aristocrats and was known as the “sport of kings”. The nobility were the only ones who had the luxury of leisure time and hunting land.

In today’s society with more and more people having leisure time available, there has been a dramatic revival in interest in falconry. The great expanses of wild habitat in countries such as the USA and South Africa lends these countries to falconry, which is, by definition, the pursuit of wild quarry in its natural surroundings, with trained hawks. Falconry has continued and has been improved upon since the early nineteen hundreds. Technological advances, such as telemetry, have been of great advantage to the sport of falconry, and coupled with the up-surge in interest, we are seeing a new Golden Age of the Art of Falconry.

The dramatic increase in World population seen in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, coupled with the revolution in agriculture, are two factors that have seriously affected the population of raptors.

First there has been a period of persecution of raptors and secondly, the increased use of agricultural pesticides, particularly the residual chlorinated hydrocarbon group (DDT etc.). The raptor, as the last link in the food chain was found to take up accumulated doses of these persistent poisons, causing the production of thin-shelled and infertile eggs. Strict legislation on the use of these pesticides in developed countries led to recoveries in the affected raptor populations. Changes in land use and alteration of the ecology have affected raptor populations both positively and negatively.

Not all development has been detrimental to raptors. Many that are popular species for use in falconry have benefited from changes in the environment. Peregrine and Lanner Falcons thrive on the increased dove populations that result from grain production, while high rise buildings and quarries have provided additional nesting sites. Many accipiters also benefit from the dove population and also find nesting places in exotic forests and suburban gardens.

It is interesting to note that much of the energy devoted to the sport is now also channelled to the passion for conservation. Leading conservationists and falconers in the USA established "The Peregrine Fund", which pioneered and streamlined the captive breeding of Peregrines for release into the wild. There are several areas in the Eastern U.S. where Peregrines became extinct in the early 1960's, through the influence of DDT, which now have these captive bred Peregrines breeding successfully in the wild. By 1999 the Peregrine had recovered, through these efforts, to the extent that it was de-listed off the threatened species list in the USA - a uniquely successful event in the history of wildlife conservation. Similar achievements by falconers include the rescuing of the Mauritius Kestrel population, the restoration of the Northern Goshawk in Britain, while attempts to restore the tree-breeding Peregrine population of northern Europe are ongoing.

## **6. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF WORLDWIDE FALCONRY**

The Art of Falconry is practiced in many countries throughout the world. For an overview of world falconry you are encouraged to visit the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey at [www.iaf.org](http://www.iaf.org) . The IAF membership currently stands at 70 associations from 48 countries representing a worldwide membership of 28,500 falconers.

## **7. DO YOU REALLY WANT TO BECOME A FALCONER?**

So, you are an aspiring Falconer? We welcome your interest in falconry however, before you commit yourself to what, in real terms, will be a life time commitment, not only for you, your family and friends, but more importantly another living creature that will be completely reliant on you for its welfare and basic needs, we ask you to understand what being a falconer involves. Please be totally honest with yourself and consider some of the following facts before causing harm to or potentially killing an innocent hawk or realizing falconry in effect is not what you anticipated. It is not our intention to upset, belittle or degrade you as you obviously have a love for birds of prey and there are

other ways of loving and enjoying them without becoming a practicing falconer.

After reading this, if you decided falconry is not for you, hopefully we can show you how else to enjoy these majestic creatures and assist in their continued survival on this planet we share.

## 8. GENERAL

A genuine interest in raptors and their conservation is a prerequisite to being a falconer. Falconers support the principle of conservation in Nature through sustainable use of both raptors and prey species.

Very few people after watching a bird of prey display, a documentary on TV or reading an article on falconry realize the dedication, time and money that it has cost the falconer to get to this point. Unfortunately, this inaccurate portrayal of what falconry is, often leads to uninformed people wanting to enter the sport without having all of the facts on hand, which often leads to disappointment but more importantly, the poor aspiring falconer's bird is the victim of this lack of knowledge. Very few people are prepared to make the sacrifices of long term demands of time, effort and money that it takes to practice falconry properly.

Many falconers and falconry organizations often discourage beginners into the sport until the beginner proves their self and their commitment. Birds of Prey are an essential part of our planet's biodiversity and to practice falconry is considered by most falconers a privilege and as such practice sound conservation principles in pursuit of their sport. An aspiring falconer, without the facts at hand on the commitment levels needed could potentially, because of what might in effect be a passing fancy, in many ways do harm and discredit falconry by their misinformed actions.

Falconers believe in the principle of "**the hawk comes first**" and are therefore very wary of helping an aspiring falconer until such time as the aspiring falconer has proven his or her seriousness, interest and commitment to the sport. Anything less is seen by falconers as not worth bothering with and they can be quite cruel in their actions and expressing their views.

To be taken seriously by falconers, the aspiring falconer must prove their dedication before they will receive much help. This is normally demonstrated by reading as many books on falconry and birds of prey and making a persistent effort to learn the fundamentals of the sport, all before any attempt to obtain a bird. This is the route many falconers followed, and today's newcomer must expect a similar period of apprenticeship, leading to a reasonable expectation that a bird may be safely entrusted in your care, before help can be expected.

If you believe your interest in falconry is more than superficial and are willing to undertake the necessary study before you get a bird, you must then be prepared to fulfill certain additional minimum requirements.

## 9. COST AND TIME IMPLICATIONS

Falconry cannot be practiced on a shoestring, but by the same token you don't have to be a Rockefeller, though it helps. Unfortunately, many aspiring falconers do not realize the amount of time, effort, money and facilities the sport of falconry demands. Hopefully what follows will give you, the aspiring falconer, a better idea.

Some of the cost implications, of which some will be before getting your first hawk, would be:

- i. A safe secure mews (inside) and weathering (outside) suitable for keeping a bird in fair and foul weather. Captive hawks and falcons must be protected at all times from cats, dogs and other predators, including humans, as well as extremes of heat and cold, wind and dampness. They should be provided with a weathering place where they may be kept outdoors in good weather, winter and summer and an opportunity to bathe. They must have a sheltered perch at night and in bad weather, be dry and protected from the wind.
- ii. Perches, glove, scales, telemetry and a long list of other equipment that will be required **BEFORE** you get your first hawk (this list will be covered in greater detail later).
- iii. Funds for food.
- iv. Veterinary expenses, which invariably are needed after normal surgery hours.
- v. A hunting dog and their upkeep.
- vi. Petrol and car expenses to get to your hunting ground.
- vii. Books on falconry and dog training.
- viii. And the list goes on.

You must have sufficient time available. A trained falcon would require an absolute minimum of one hour of daylight per day, 365 days a year. To train a new hawk would require substantially more time. If you don't have this time available because of studies or an inflexible job it would be far better not to try and work falconry around this. Many falconers, to practice their art, work their employment around their falconry, by doing shift work, becoming self employed or whatever other means they can find to fund their falconry.

## 10. HOUSING

### ***Guidelines for Minimum Requirements***

The following Guidelines were developed by the Technical Advisory Committee of the North American Falconers' Association (NAFA) for the purpose of ensuring that facilities and equipment of prospective falconers meet minimum acceptable standards. Grateful acknowledgement is given to the NAFA for the use of material.

A trained hawk's housing requirements are simple. The primary need is shelter from direct sun, wind, rain and snow. Dryness, fresh air and an absence of draft are also required.

These are conditions that a wild hawk seeks and the closer the falconer comes to providing the maximum levels of such, the more his hawks will benefit in health and comfort. The quarters in which the hawk is to be kept, whether indoors (mews) and outdoors (weathering area), is an area which ideally is set aside exclusively for the bird(s).

### **10.1 Indoor Facilities (Mews)**

The mews may be a separate building or a room within a building. Ordinarily, sunlight and ventilation requirements make windows on the north or east exposures most desirable. The size of the mews varies with the species kept and the space available, but a room about eight feet high and square is appropriate for a raptor up to the size of a red-tailed hawk (Jackal Buzzard). Here the hawk may be kept loose or tethered to an appropriate perch. Tethering is very much a matter of individual preference. It is most definitely preferable where more than one bird is kept and is normally mandatory where the sex and species of raptors kept in the same room are different. Accipiters (African Goshawks or Black Sparrowhawks) must never be placed free among other birds (including their own kind) as they may kill all others. Even when tied, the wise falconer provides separate mews or partitions his facilities for Accipiters so that in the event of their escape possible disaster is avoided. When in training, raptors are generally tethered.

The Interior of the mews should be severely plain with no beams or ledges to tempt the hawk to fly to a higher perching place. It is a characteristic of the birds of prey to seek higher perches from which to survey their surroundings. Anything that appears to offer a foothold above the hawk's rightful perch holds a hawk's attention. In a well-ordered mews, a hawk sits at ease when tethered because there is no other inviting perching place available. Windows should be protected on the inside by vertical bars or doweling spaced smaller than the bird's width, whether or not birds are kept tethered in the mews. If screen or chicken-wire is desired for additional protection or safety, such should be placed outside the vertical barring at sufficient distance to prevent a hawk free in the mews (intentionally or otherwise), from grasping the mesh and damaging its plumage. This, incidentally, is the reason that bars/dowels are placed vertically rather than horizontally. The mews should be capable of being darkened without interfering with overall ventilation, if fresh wild-caught birds are to be placed in it.

Mews Doors should be secured (by lock if necessary) and should, additionally have some sort of hook or spring so that the falconer can keep the door safely closed while inside. Doors of any mews which open directly out-of-doors should be closed by an additional protective covering, inside or out, to prevent escape of a bird free in the mews (intentionally or otherwise) as the door is opened. Such protective covering can be achieved by a hanging cloth or plastic sheet. If the curtain is placed at an angle inside the mews, it provides the falconer with a small enclosed alcove into which he may step and loosen

the outer door behind him before pushing aside the cover to enter the mews itself.

The Floor of the mews should be constructed so as to facilitate cleaning. A layer of gravel or sand is excellent as these materials absorb moisture. The items must be washed occasionally for cleanliness. A covering of straw, hay, sawdust, or similar material is not normally acceptable as these materials retain moisture and provide a medium favorable for the growth of pathogenic fungi and bacteria dangerous to the bird's health.

Although numerous variations in a captive raptor's housing may be appropriate under given circumstances, bird cages of the "pet-store-variety" or other such enclosures are totally unacceptable, as are any facilities which do not afford the bird proper space and /or protection.

## **10.2 Outdoor "Weathering" Facilities**

Most falconers prefer to place their charges out-of-doors for sunning, etc. (called "weathering"), weather permitting. The birds are placed on appropriate perches (see below) on some soft, resilient surface. A thick heavy lawn can be excellent. This surface should be cleanable, or in the case of a lawn, the perch moved frequently enough to prevent soiling the area beneath it. Soft sand, although appearing ideal, should be avoided; it is inclined to get between the bird's legs and the jesses (see below) and cause abrasion of the skin. Perches must be located so that birds are not exposed to direct midsummer or mid-day sun without shade also being available. Any site where birds are to be weathered must be protected to prevent the raptors from attack by dogs or cats and from undue disturbance by strangers or children. For this reason a weathering site normally should be protectively fenced. Without such fencing, NO bird should be weathered unless under the immediate and continuous supervision of the falconer.

The size of the weathering site is dependent upon the length of the restraining leash. Each bird normally requires an area approximately eight-by-eight to ten-by-ten feet to prevent its body or wings from touching the enclosing fence or other birds.

In many areas attacks by wild predators (mammals or birds) on falconers' birds are not as uncommon as might be supposed, even in relatively built-up suburban areas. This is especially true of attacks by wild owls on birds left out overnight. In areas where wild predators may constitute a problem, a totally enclosed weathering site, i.e., a site such as described above plus overhead protection in the form of wire or netting becomes extremely desirable if not mandatory. This overhead wire or netting must be high enough (6-7 feet) so that the bird may not touch it when at the end of its leash and so that the falconer can comfortably work inside the enclosure. As in any weathering site, the bird should not be able to touch the peripheral fencing or any other raptor in the same enclosure.

**NOTE:** A bird is NOT placed free in such an enclosed weathering site, but rather is tethered by leashes on normal outdoor perches. (See below).

The mews and weathering area must provide adequate protection to the hawks from:

- \* Excessive heat/direct sunlight.
- \* High winds and winter storms.
- \* Ground and airborne predators.
- \* Disturbances from humans.

## 11. EQUIPMENT

Mandatory prior to acquisition of a Raptor:

- a. **Glove:** Some type of pliable leather glove is a necessity (one hand usually the left if right handed).
- b. **Leash:** Varies in size and type depending on the species of raptors to be used.
- c. **Swivel:** Several types are used. The classic "Figure 8" swivel may be purchased from hawking equipment supplies or a heavy-duty fishing swivel may be used. The swivel is used to attach the leash to the jesses and to prevent twisting of either or both. The commercial "snap" or "dog leash" spring swivels should never be used in tethering a bird to an outside perch.
- d. **Jesses:** These are soft strips of tough, thin leather, one fastened to each leg of the captive raptor. Jesses are fitted and placed immediately upon receipt of any raptor. "Aylmeri" jesses consists of a "cuff" and jess for each leg. The leather cuff is placed around the leg and its ends held together by a grommet. The jess is passed through the grommet and its slit end is then attached to the swivel as are traditional jesses. The use of "Aylmeri" jesses definitely is to be encouraged. Not only are they more efficient, but an escaped bird readily loses (or removes) the jesses, leaving it far less encumbered than with traditional jesses.
- e. **Bells:** These are especially made for falconry and are small, light in weight with a loud tone. They must be purchased from those manufacturing hawking equipment. Bells are affixed with a small piece of leather called a "Bewit". Bells provide a useful "signal" when something causes even an untrained raptor to move about unduly. In the field, they assist the falconer in locating his bird when it is out of sight.
- f. **Bath Pan:** A large, shallow pan or tub 3-6 inches deep with a diameter several inches longer than the length or the bird (at a minimum). This provides both drinking and bathing water and should be cleaned and the water changed frequently.

g. **Scales:** Beam or balance (as opposed to spring) scales are preferred. Scales should register in grams.

h. **Outdoor Perches:** (1) *Bow Perch:* This perch is used with birds which normally perch on tree limbs, i.e., the Accipiters and Buteos. (2) *Block Perch:* This type is used for the falcons as they normally perch on flat surfaces.

The top diameter must be sufficiently broad to prevent the two jesses from "straddling" the perch (slipping over both sides simultaneously). The block perch should not be too wide otherwise, if the falcon chooses to stand in the middle of the block perch, damage may occur to the tail feathers.

i. **Indoor Perches:** (1) *Screen Perch:* Caution should be exercised in the use of this type perch. It should not be used for recently trapped or sick (weak) raptors and no raptor should be left unattended on a screen perch until the falconer has ascertained that the bird is capable of regaining the perch after attempting to fly from it. (2) *Round Perch:* This perch is also suitable for all raptors. It is shaped very much like a large garbage can. (3) *Shelf Perch:* The shelf perch is most appropriate for use with the falcons and normally consists of a shelf approximately 1x2 ft. with a padded edge.

j. **Lure:** This is a padded leather device, ordinarily covered with the wings or fur of the intended quarry (a fresh individual of such quarry will also frequently suffice as a lure). The lure is used to call the bird back to the falconer after an unsuccessful flight or for exercise. It is garnished with meat attached by short strings (unless the actual quarry is used). A four to six-foot line fastened to the lure allows the falconer to swing it in a large arc or circle, making it more visible and attractive. A raptor may or may not be trained to come to the lure. Such training, however, has much to recommend it since, in essence, it constitutes a safety measure. A raptor will often come to a lure when, for one reason or another, it is reluctant to come to the fist.

k. **Hood:** The hood is used to blindfold the raptor to keep it calm during handling and transit. Hoods come in a variety of shapes and designs but the most important factor in any hood's suitability is its proper fit. The edges of the beak-opening should not rub or chafe the soft parts around the bird's beak, nostrils or mouth. The interior of the hood must not touch the raptor's eyes (as revealed by moisture inside the hood when removed) and the portion of the hood passing under the raptor's "chin" must not be so tight as to be constrictive.

l. **Telemetry:** Radio telemetry is used by many falconers to track their birds in the event that they wander out of sight. Telemetry should be used on any bird large enough to carry a transmitter – In some countries it's a legal requirement. Many countries require exotic (non-native and hybrid) hawks to be flown with two (2) transmitters. The beginner is advised to

practice the finer details of telemetry use before the need arises trying to find a lost hawk – practice and practice some more in different environments will be time well spent when one day trying to find a lost hawk. The system consists of a small battery-powered transmitter and antenna which is attached to the bird's tarsus, back, around the neck or mounted onto the tail. When activated, the transmitter sends a signal to a receiver, which is held by the falconer. The receiver is moved back and forth, and the position of the falcon may be triangulated by listening for the volume of the beeps emanating from the receiver. Telemetry allows a raptor to be located even if it has flown several miles away.

## **12. FOOD**

An adequate and reliable supply of proper food is as important to the falconer as are considerations of shelter and equipment. Although the proper type and amount of food varies considerable with the species of raptor, the time of year and stage of the bird's training, there are certain basic principles that apply in all cases. The best food for any raptor is natural food, which should make up the principal proportion of the diet. It is unlikely that the falconer can shoot unprotected birds or animals in sufficient numbers to provide a continuous and reliable supply, even for one hawk. (**Caution:** Ingestion of lead shot in birds or animals killed with a shotgun may cause lead poisoning in raptors.) Day-old cockerel chicks raised to 4-6 weeks old or quail may be raised by the falconer and make useful replacements for wild varieties of natural foods. Such replacements should also be considered where unprotected wild birds/animals may contain dangerous levels of chemical sterilants, pesticides and/or other poisons. A supplemental food supply such as butcher's meat/chicken parts should be available though such should be used only as a temporary expedient for the food items previously enumerated. Vitamin and mineral supplements (such as VitaHawk) are an important part of a captive raptor's diet, especially if fed more than occasionally un-natural foods. Use of such supplements should be undertaken only after determining proper types and dosages from an experienced veterinarian.

## **13. VETERINARIAN EXPENSES**

Keeping any animal can be expensive. Besides the housing, equipment required and a reliable healthy food source, an often overlooked expense is the veterinary expenses needed to keep the bird healthy. It is your moral and legal responsibility to ensure your hawk receives the best veterinarian treatment when necessary: invariably this treatment will be required after normal surgery hours.

The beginner is advised to take a basic first aid course on Veterinary procedures as this could mean the difference between a live Hawk as opposed to a dead one. A basic first aid kit should be readily available – consult with your avian Veterinarian on a suggested course and to help put together a first aid kit.

Due to the potential Veterinary expense of keeping raptors the beginner should consider taking out insurance which will cover veterinary fees, loss and theft. Liability insurance should also be considered. Contact your insurance broker.

#### **14. DOGS**

Often for successful falconry, the falconer has to employ the services of hunting dogs to find, point and flush quarry. Again the beginner must be aware of the time and expense involved in housing, equipping, feeding, training and vetting these members of his/her hunting team.

#### **15. OTHER QUESTIONS YOU MUST START ASKING YOURSELF ARE:**

If still convinced that your interest is more than casual, you should also be prepared to honestly ask yourself -

- a) Besides asking yourself "What hawk do I want to begin with?", the aspiring falconers should take note for some of the legal pitfalls they might encounter.
- b) What quarry do you want to hunt?
- c) Do you have legal access to hunting land with the correct quarry available?
- d) Is this prey base sustainable?
- e) Do you have the means (financial and time) to hunt a few times a week during the legal hunting season?

#### **16. LEGISLATION**

Depending on where the aspiring falconer finds themselves in the world, there are various pieces of legislation applicable to practicing the art of falconry. The onus is on the aspiring falconer to be aware and take note of whatever legislation must be complied with before acquiring their first hawk. The provincial policies regarding Falconry take this legislation into account and should be understood by all Falconers (see under provincial Clubs in the "Clubs" section. It is also in one's interest to have an understanding of international regulations such as CITES Regulations.

#### **17. ETHICS OF CARE / WELFARE**

Falconers are morally and legally bound to take note of "Animal Welfare" issues. The welfare and good husbandry of falconers' birds is paramount to the practice of our art.

Falconers adhere to the wellbeing of the birds in their care, as the animals are reliant on the falconer for all their basic needs. The international animal welfare "principle of five freedoms" should be strictly enforced in the falconer's husbandry:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst – ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour.
2. Freedom from discomfort – providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.
3. Freedom from pain, injury or disease – by prevention, rapid diagnosis and treatment.
4. Freedom to express normal behaviour – hunting.
5. Freedom from fear and distress – ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

Hawks must be properly housed, fed, trained, exercised, medically treated and used for hunting according to recognized rules for falconry.

## **18. ETHICAL HUNTING**

An aspiring falconer must always obtain the permission of the landowner before hunting or flying their hawk on private land.

All falconers will follow the principles of ethical hunting. These principles will include the principle of fair chase. They will ensure that all hunting is on wild quarry and follows the principles of sustainable use.

It is recognized that it is impossible to control the actions of the falconer's bird absolutely, but every effort must be made to avoid the catching of non-target species. Quarry should only be hunted in the legal hunting season and every effort should be made to avoid hunting quarry that is actively breeding or which have dependant offspring. When non-target or off-season quarry is taken depending on the countries laws the hawk should be fed up in the field and the carcass left in the field.

The falconer has an obligation to dispatch quarry in a humane manner, ensuring that the quarry does not suffer a slow, painful death.

## **19. CONSERVATION**

In countries where the capture of passage hawks or the taking of eyasses is allowed the falconer must be aware of the fact that the breeding stock necessary for the survival of any raptor species is the wild population, so the capture of passage hawks and the taking of eyasses, must be strictly controlled to ensure that the wild population remains in a healthy and viable state.

It is a known fact that birds of prey throughout the world have a very high natural mortality rate, especially in their first year of life. There are various scientific papers that have been written on this subject and it is not our intention in this booklet to cover all the existing scientific data, we will leave it as just that – a scientific fact. (Peregrine Falcon Populations: Their Management and Recovery – Tom Cade, James Enderson, Carl Thelander and Clayton White; Understanding the Bird of Prey – Dr. Nick Fox).

The figures quoted vary quite substantially between species, ranging from 60% to 85% dying before they are a year old. It can be said with certainty that in most species well over half the young fledged will die during the first year of life (Birds of Prey – An Illustrated Encyclopaedic Survey by International Experts 1990).

From a falconer's perspective, where the harvesting of certain species from the wild is legal, it is seen as borrowing from the wild as many birds are released after serving as Falconer's birds. Such a harvest may be seen as "saving" youngsters from a near certain death, as well as probably increasing the survival rate of the remaining immature birds by reducing the competition and stress placed on them by the environment.

Exotic hawks (non-native and hybrid species) should not be released back into nature or hacked back in any country where they do not occur naturally. And every effort and expense should be made by the falconer on losing an exotic hawk to recover the exotic hawk. Falconers may not fly and hunt an exotic hawk without the use of radio telemetry, even if the replacement price of the exotic hawk is less than the purchase price of telemetry. The potential ramification of a lost non recovered exotic to a country's biodiversity and the continued right of falconers to fly exotics far outweigh the price a falconer pays for telemetry.

## **20. IS FALCONRY FOR ME?**

After taking note of some of the expenses, time commitments and level of dedication that is required to be a falconer, and realizing that falconry is not about the following items, you should be asking yourself "Is falconry for me?"

### ***Falconry is not:***

1. **Catching Lots of Game** – Falconry is not a very successful method of capturing game. Even the best trained hawks miss more game than they catch. On many hunting trips they catch nothing at all. Anyone interested in filling the game bag should go instead to the shooting range and practice there. A gun hunter will take far more game than a falconer for each hour of hunting time.
2. **Having an Exotic Pet** – All falconers form a close relationship with their birds, and this is an important, even essential element of the sport. But true falconry transcends the "I love my bird" theme. Falconry hawks are not pets.
3. **Impressing Others** – Falconry is not a method of impressing others with a regal or rare pet paraded around on one's fist. Pet keeping or exotic animal displays have no place in falconry.
4. **Possessing a Hawk For Profit or Educational Presentations** – No falconer will make a substantial profit out of using birds of prey for educational displays, breeding or pest control, but see it more as a means of trying to work their job around their falconry, and a commitment made in trying to help conserve raptors and their role in

the environment by exposing the general public to the wonders of these birds.

If any of the above is your motivation for wanting to practice falconry, forget it now. This is not falconry. **FALCONRY IS THE ART OF HUNTING WILD QUARRY WITH A TRAINED HAWK.**

So why become a falconer?

1. To train a wild hawk to hunt in the presence of a human – this is falconry. Nothing in nature matches the flight of a hawk or falcon as it chases a potential meal. Success means life to the hawk. To the prey animal being chased, escape means life. This age-old predator-prey relationship is a pivotal point in falconry. A well-trained hawk will exert a stunning effort attempting to capture a fleeing animal, which likewise pours everything into its escape. More often than not the animal escapes — but the viewing of this primal interplay, with each animal exerting its utmost, is unmatched in nature.

The hawk or falcon accelerates and twists itself through the air, deftly attempting to capture its fleeing target. The intended victim uses its natural gifts of escape to elude the hawk. The hawk's flight often lasts only a few seconds but is one of nature's most thrilling spectacles, one that has motivated falconers for thousands of years. Falconry is the pursuit of wild game by a hawk in the presence of its falconer. The actual kill is relatively unimportant (and by no means the motivation for the sport). It is the exemplary quality of the hawk's flight that has motivated falconers in all ages.

2. To hunt with a wild predator – Falconry requires a very deep commitment of time and energy, and that involves getting into the field with the bird and actually hunting with it. Falconry is a hunting sport, and because the birds it uses are natural predators, they must be given ample hunting opportunities. It is therefore important that the prospective falconer has the time to take his or her hawk hunting numerous times (typically more than once a week) during the legal hunting season. The falconer must also be capable of obtaining hunting permission for multiple locales in reasonable proximity to where they live.

If still convinced that your interest is more than casual, you must also be prepared to fulfil the additional requirements of becoming a falconer.

## **21. PROCEDURE FOR THE BEGINNER**

Before obtaining a hawk the beginner should spend some time with a competent/experienced falconer to get the flavour of the sport. The beginner will soon establish that falconry is more correctly a life style! This will also allow the necessary contact to establish an apprenticeship should the beginner get the “bug”.

For successful training of any hawk, regardless of the level of experience of the falconer, the first month is most crucial. In fact the first two weeks of training set the behavioural patterns that will most likely endure for the remainder of the partnership. To capitalize and succeed under these circumstances, preparation is essential. It must be taken care of before the hawk is collected.

Some of the points that the apprentice must consider in advance include:

- a. An appreciation of the constraints of falconry – time for flying and hunting, places to hunt over.
- b. Familiarization with standard falconry training procedure, included in standard references such as Falconry and Hawking by P. Glasier, North American Falconry and Hunting Hawks by F. Beebe and H. Webster, A Hawk for the Bush by Jack Mavrogordato. However, there is no substitute for actual exposure, and more can be learned from an experienced and competent falconer than any or all of these texts.
- c. Study the laws and regulations pertaining to falconry in their country.
- d. If possible, pick up and handle a hawk under the guidance of a falconer. Get the feel of the hawk, balancing her on the gauntlet correctly, tying her and untying her from the perch to glove, using the standard falconry knot. You cannot afford to make any mistakes in this regard, as a hawk that escapes with her leash attached is certainly dead if not recovered. The beginner is advised to become familiar with and use the “safety position” from the outset.
- e. Make the appropriate perch, mews and safe weathering area.
- f. Buy or make the necessary equipment – see list about under equipments as well as leather working equipment.
- g. Organize a safe reliable food source and have some food available – natural food is essential in this regard, so is a deep freezer.
- h. Depending on the age of the bird have a brooder – necessary in the rearing of the young eyass, especially when the hawk is less than three weeks old.
- i. Establish the feeding and handling procedure for the hawk.

Success is not only guarded by the hawk’s ability when trained in the field, but on her overall behaviour in captivity.

## 22. SUGGESTED STEPS TO FOLLOW FOR AN ASPIRING FALCONER

1. Ask and answer yourself honestly, why you want to become a falconer.
2. Be aware of the time, expenses and dedication required to be a falconer.
3. Get at least one good falconry book and study it.
4. Try and experience some falconry first hand in the field.
5. Join a falconry club or association – In South Africa this is a legal requirement.
6. Find a sponsor or mentor.
7. Build mews and weathering area.
8. Buy or make your equipment.
9. Find and get landowners permission for your hunting ground.
10. If your chosen form of falconry requires the use of a dog, buy and train it before getting your hawk. Remember, if not a necessity to start with, your falconry might evolve at a later stage where you require the use of dog.
11. Learn as much as you can from your mentor/sponsor and only if they feel you are committed and ready for your first hawk should you get your first hawk.
12. After years and years of practical falconry when there's no turning back ask yourself why you did not just take up golf.

After training your first hawk and making your first kill you can now call yourself a falconer! Understand the learning will never stop and just as you think you are on top of it the devil will come along and fart in your face.

### ***Some words of advice:***

There is no such thing as a stupid question - no matter how many times you ask it.

Follow your sponsor's advice, direction and counsel.

## 23. A FEW RECOMMENDED BOOKS

There is a large array of falconry books available, however the beginner is advised to first get an understanding of the basic principles of falconry before trying to understand some of the finer points and new thinking that is currently on the market.

One of the best books available to the beginner (and experienced falconer) would be:

Falconry and Hawking; Phillip Glasier

Some other books that should be studied would be:

North American Falconry and Hunting Hawks; Beebe and Webster

The Complete Rabbit and Hare Hawk; Martin Hollinshead

Training Birds of Prey; Jemima Parry-Jones

Understanding the Bird of Prey; Nick Fox

Having access to suitable hunting areas and knowing how to hunt such areas sustainably is as important as obtaining the hawk. A vital part of the exercise involves an understanding of the breeding behaviour of quarry species and their breeding seasons. The beginner is advised to read books on the quarry species they intend to hunt as well as books on the training of gun dogs and ferrets.

It is essential for newcomers to realize that the art and practice of hawking may not be learned overnight, nor in a single lesson, but only after hard work and essentially devoting one's life to the subject.

## **24. SPECIES USED**

The principal birds flown are:

1. **Shortwings** – Goshawks and Sparrowhawks – flown off the fist or out of trees in a pursuit style after fleeing prey consisting of either small mammals or birds.
2. **Broadwings** – Buzzards, Harris Hawks and Eagles – again off the fist, out of trees and soaring.
3. **Longwings** – Falcons – “Flying out of the hood” flown off the fist in pursuit of birds. “Game Hawking” the falcon is released before the game birds are flushed and only once the falcon is waiting on at the right height and position are the game birds flushed.

What bird the beginner starts with might be governed by the laws of the country in which they find themselves. Often the broadwings are better suited as beginners' hawks as they are hardy and make very efficient hunting partners. Beginners are advised not to start with the smaller species of hawks as their weight control at the best of times can be very difficult to manage and can often lead to the beginner killing the bird through starvation and fits. A good reference on weight control or conditioning can be found in Falconry and Hawking by Phillip Glasier.

**NOTE: Under no circumstance should a beginner contemplate flying and hunting with Eagles – it cannot be stressed enough they are not beginners birds.**

You must have permission to enter adequate and convenient locations in which to fly a hawk. The short-winged hawks are best flown in woodlands, hedgerows and briar patches that make up their natural habitat. The falcons, or long-wings, require wide open expanses of land where they may be flown high over the falconer. Areas that are gun-hunted may render an otherwise suitable location unusable because of the potential threat to the hawk.

Whatever hawk the falconer has the simple adage “**The Hawk Comes First**” must be adhered to at all times.

## **25. WHAT AND WHO IS A MENTOR/SPONSOR?**

One of the most important things to have in place before you collect your first bird is a good Mentor. He/she will be your guide, your teacher and a lifeline for your bird in times of trouble.

A good Mentor will have had many years of experience preferably with many different species of birds. Their Hawks or Falcons will be in pristine condition, they will be fit and fly well, their birds will hunt successfully and be obedient and well manned. Their equipment and housing will have been fine tuned over many years. He/she will have a good reputation amongst local falconers. However, mentoring is time consuming and not all experienced falconers have the will, the time, patience or the skill to teach a newcomer to the sport.

As a beginner mistakes will be made and mistakes in falconry are costly and often lead to a lost, or a dead bird. A Mentor will be able to steer you out of potentially dangerous situations with a glance or an experienced hand. For example, to a beginner, the signs of high and low weight in a hawk can look very similar. Without an experienced guide to tell you the problem and the solution, a feeding mistake at this stage could be life threatening to your bird.

A Mentor should live reasonably close to you, as although a phone call may help when a problem arises, it cannot compare to a Mentor watching you, seeing how the bird responds, and how it feels. A good Mentor will not mind a worried late night phone call; it will show him/her that your bird and its welfare is a priority to you.

A Mentors experience and time should be given freely, but bear in mind it will come with conditions. You will be expected to follow the advice given to you to the letter and it will be expected that your birds 'needs' **WILL** always come first.

Your Provincial Falconry Club will assist you to find a suitable Mentor.

A good mentor should be treasured. Good luck.

## **26. WHY SHOULD I BELONG TO A FALCONRY CLUB?**

**This is a legal requirement in South Africa.**

"In fact, the main objective of the clubs is to ensure that the art of falconry is accessible and transparent, in order to be practiced without interference from the uneducated bystander." Dylan – Eagle-Eyrie International Falconry Forum.

In some countries the falconer has no choice but to belong to a recognized falconry club as it's a legal requirement when practicing falconry, this is the case in South Africa. Unfortunately, in other countries where it is not a legal

requirement, there is a certain group of falconers that are loath to be members of a falconry club and one hears mutterings of elitisms and a few other words to justify why they don't belong to a club or association.

In today's society, with more and more people becoming detached from the realities of Nature and a very active animal welfare/rightist slant on things, if nothing else, club dues enable pro hunting groups the freedom to address animal rightist concerns, as a united group.

## **27. LIST OF FALCONRY CLUBS AND ASSOCIATIONS**

This website will give you the contact details for your Provincial Falconry Club.

Please find links to some international falconry clubs and associations:

**Argentina - Association Argentina de Cetreria**

[www.cetreria.com.ar/principal](http://www.cetreria.com.ar/principal)

**Austria - Osterreichischer Falknerbund**

[www.falknerbund.com](http://www.falknerbund.com)

**Belgium - Belgian Falconers Association 'Club Marie de Bourgogne'**

<http://users.belgacom.net/Mariae-Burgundiae>

**Brazil - Asociaçao Brasileira de Falcoeiros e Preservaçao de Aves de Rapina**

[www.abfpar.org](http://www.abfpar.org)

**Czech Republic - Klub Sokolniku**

[www.sokolnictvi.net](http://www.sokolnictvi.net)

**France - Association Nationale des Fauconniers et Autoursiers Francais**

[www.anfa.net](http://www.anfa.net)

**Germany - Deutscher Falkenorden**

[www.falkenorden.de](http://www.falkenorden.de)

**Ireland - Irish Hawking Club**

[www.irishhawkingclub.ie](http://www.irishhawkingclub.ie)

**Italy - The Italian Federation of Falconers (FIF)**

[www.federazionefalconieri.com](http://www.federazionefalconieri.com)

**Japan - The Japanese Falconers Association**

<http://www.jfa.gr.jp/en/falconers/>

**Netherlands - Nederlands Valkeniersverbond Adriaan Mollen**

[www.adriaanmollen.com](http://www.adriaanmollen.com)

**Poland - Gniazdo Sokolnikow**

[www.gniazdosokolnikow.pl](http://www.gniazdosokolnikow.pl)

**Portugal - Associacao Portuguesa de Falcoaria**

[www.apfalcoaria.com](http://www.apfalcoaria.com)

**South Africa - South African Falconry Association**

[www.safa.za.net](http://www.safa.za.net)

**Spain - AECCA**

[www.aecca.org](http://www.aecca.org)

**United Arab Emirates - Emirates Falconers' Club**

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Emirates-Falconers-Club/85065327412>

**United Kingdom - British Falconers Club**

[www.britishfalconersclub.co.uk](http://www.britishfalconersclub.co.uk)

**USA - North American Falconers Association**

[www.n-a-f-a.org](http://www.n-a-f-a.org)

**International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey**

[www.iaf.org](http://www.iaf.org)

## **28. HOW YOU CAN ASSIST FALCONRY IF YOU ARE HONEST WITH YOURSELF AND REALIZE IT'S NOT FOR YOU?**

In the state of California in the USA in 1994 of the over 300 people that aspired to becoming falconers, less than 40 stayed the course. Are you the one in eight who will go all the way?

Whether or not you eventually become a falconer, we hope that you will retain a friendly interest in raptors and falconry and in the conservation of our birds of prey. They need your help in eliminating needless persecution at the hands of those who know no better. Most bird of prey centres are owned, run and managed by falconers using falconry methods to train and care for their charges – visit Bird of Prey Centres and enjoy the birds and what the Centres have to offer; remember your entrance fee does help in the conservation efforts of these Centres – for a list of Centres in the UK see [www.visitfalconry.co.uk](http://www.visitfalconry.co.uk).

Some Centres would be unable to continue with the work they do if it were not for volunteers. So if you have spare time and would like to make a regular contribution in a practical way, consider approaching a Centre local to you. Be prepared to visit the Centre to meet with the owner, who will undoubtedly want to ask you a variety of questions; he/she will want to be sure that they are taking on a trustworthy volunteer. And don't expect that you will be there just to help fly the birds – there is much cleaning, maintenance and food preparation to be done at all Centres.

## 29. HOW TO SURVIVE SOME FALCONERS AND FALCONRY CLUBS

As stated previously “Falconers believe in the principle of **“the hawk comes first”** and are therefore very wary of helping an aspiring falconer, until such time as the aspiring falconer has proven his or her seriousness, interest and commitment to the sport. Anything less is seen by falconers as not worth bothering with and they can be quite cruel in their actions and expressing their views”.

Unfortunately, many beginners in their enthusiasm to correspond with real live falconers trip themselves up, which unfortunately can lead to some unpleasantness. In life no one owes you a living and the same applies to falconry: no one is morally, legally or duty bound to teach the aspiring falconer how to do falconry.

There are literally thousands if not hundreds of thousands of years of experience and knowledge on the internet. No other generation of falconers has had access to the knowledge base that we have at the click of a mouse. However, this medium is not the correct medium to learn falconry.

Aspiring falconers are again encouraged to join a club and find a sponsor/mentor to help them from a hand on perspective. To be taken seriously by practicing falconers the aspiring falconer should prove their dedication by reading as many books on falconry, birds of prey and making a persistent effort to learn the fundamentals of the art, all before any attempt to obtain a bird.

Falconry has never been easy, and it never will be; fortunately the internet and forums like the International Falconry Forum can help make it less painful. The aspiring falconer will find patience is a very valuable tool as they go through their falconry journey; not everything will be learnt overnight with or without the internet or forums.

We are all very fortunate to have access to the wealth of knowledge that the internet can offer us, however we don't have the right to abuse this privilege. It must be understood that for anyone to pass on a bit of advice costs time and money and in the case of the internet is given freely. When you enter the net you're inviting people into your office/living room and conversely you are entering their home or office; please don't abuse that privilege.

It should also be borne in mind that there is very rarely only one correct answer to a question and you will find that some information you receive will conflict with others' opinions. Hence, the second definition of Falconry:

**Falconry, the Art of disagreeing with everyone about anything to do with Birds of Prey.**

### 30. GLOSSARY OF TERMS USE

The following is a partial glossary of some of the common terms used in falconry. The term "hawk" is used here to refer to falconry birds in general.

**AERIE** - a hawk nest. Also spelt **Eyrie**.

**AUSTRINGER** - a falconer that trains a Shortwing or Broadwing hawk.

**BATE** - when a hawk jumps off the falconer's glove or a perch.

**BEWIT** - small leather straps used to attach bells or transmitters to a hawk's leg.

**BROADWING** - a raptor of the genus *buteo* or *Parabuteo*.

**CARRY** - when a hawk tries to fly away from the falconer with its food.

**CAST** – four meanings: 1) to wrap or restrain a hawk for medical or maintenance purposes, 2) when a hawk regurgitates a pellet, 3) several hawks flown together and 4) to release a hawk off the fist for a flight.

**COPE** - filing-down a hawk's overgrown beak and/or talons to sharpness.

**CREANCE** - a spool of light line used to train a hawk.

**ENTER** - starting a hawk out on a certain type of prey.

**EYASS** - two meanings: 1) a young raptor on the nest and 2) a raptor acquired from a nest.

**FOOT (verb)** - when a hawk repeatedly grabs and squeezes prey (or the falconer's glove) with its talons.

**GAUNTLET** - the heavy leather glove worn by the falconer.

**GIANT HOOD** - a ventilated box used to transported hawks.

**HACK** - two meanings: 1) the process of preparing a hawk for release to the wild and 2) the process of releasing and re-trapping a hawk to allow it to gain wild hunting skills.

**HAGGARD** - a wild hawk in its second year or more of plumage (adult).

**HARD-PENNED** - when all of a hawk's feathers have grown in and no blood remains in the feathers - after the moult for an adult and after the downy stage for eyass.

**HOOD** - the leather covering placed over a hawk's head to help keep it calm and reduce stress.

**IMP** - repairing a broken feather with another feather from the same or a different hawk.

**IMPRINT** - a hawk raised by people that ceases to identify with hawks of its own species. Generally cannot be released to the wild.

**INTERMEWED** - a hawk that has aged to maturity and kept through a complete moult.

**JESSES** - the leg straps used to hold a hawk.

**LONGWING** - a raptor of the *Falco* genus.

**MAKE-IN TO** - the act of approaching a hawk that has caught prey.

**MANNING** - the process of taming a hawk.

**MANTLE** - when a hawk fluffs-up its feathers and attempts to cover a kill with its wings.

**MEW** - the facility or building for keeping a hawk.

**MOULT** - the process of shedding old and growing new feathers.

**MUTE** - hawk droppings.

**PASSAGE** or **PASSAGER** - A wild caught hawk on migration in immature plumage.

**PITCH** - the altitude a falcon "waits on".

**PUT OVER** - when a hawk moves food from its crop to its stomach.

**ROUSE** - when a hawk fluffs and shakes its feathers.

**SHORTWING** - A true hawk of the accipiter genus.

**SLICE** - when a hawk propels its droppings out away from the nest or perch.

**STOOP** - a high speed dive made by a falcon toward its prey from high altitude.

**TALON** - a raptor claw or toe nail.

**TIERCEL** - a male raptor usually reserved for a Male Peregrine Falcon.

**WAIT-ON** - when a falcon circles above a falconer waiting for game to be flushed.

**YARAK** - when a hawk or falcon is hungry and ready to hunt

### **31. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Thank you to all members of the International Falconry Forum and particularly Rene "Kennelre", Jan "JanH", David "David Rampling", Simon "Harris" and Charlie "HallBeck" for their help, comments and assistance in putting this booklet together – Thank you!

A big thank you to the following clubs and associations whose material was used to compile this booklet:

California Hawking Club - <http://www.calhawkingclub.org>

Colorado Division of Wildlife - <http://wildlife.state.co.us>

International Falconry Forum - <http://www.falconryforum.co.uk/>

**Limpopo Falconers Club** - <http://www.safa.za.net.html>

North American Falconers Association – <http://www.n-a-f-a.org>

Ohio Falconry Association - <http://www.ohiofalconry.org/index.html>

**South African Falconry Association** - <http://www.safa.za.net>

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