



Standards for Facilities and the Care of Raptors held for Falconry and Raptor Propagation

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Introduction

Falconry in Ontario is part of an unbroken tradition that stretches back into antiquity. Over that long history many specialized techniques and norms have been developed to ensure that the birds used in falconry are maintained in a safe, healthy and stress-free way. Recently these techniques have been adapted for the captive propagation of raptors as well.

Raptors are not domestic animals and, in the case of hunting birds, are kept in very active condition. In addition, raptors have certain physical and psychological characteristics that make some of the norms applicable to domestic or zoo animals inappropriate or even dangerous for falconry birds.

This document is not a “how to” guide for aspiring falconers looking for help in the design of a mews or raptor facility. Many excellent resources are available in print and online for this purpose. Rather, the focus of this document is to set out minimum standards for facilities and the care of raptors held in Ontario under a provincial falconry licence. It is intended to be used by sponsors, conservation officers, inspectors and others to assist them in determining whether birds are being properly cared for. It is intended to complement the Standards of Care regulation made under the OSPCA Act (O.Reg 60/09)

It is our hope that all falconers will strive to comfortably exceed the minimum requirements where ever practical. Apprentice falconers are strongly encouraged to work closely with their sponsor to review their facilities plans.

Acknowledgements

Several existing facilities documents were consulted in the preparation of these standards including those developed by the North American Falconer’s Association and incorporated into many US state regulations, the Alberta Falconry Association and the International Association of Avian Trainers and Educators (IAATE).

Many people contributed to the preparation and review of this document, including the members of the Ontario Hawking Club who, in aggregate provided a wealth of experience and opinion. We wish, in particular, to acknowledge the assistance of Dr. Scott Craig DVM for his thoughtful review and suggestions as well as Mark Williams who reviewed early drafts and provided practical advice, and Elizabeth Dubas who provided many of the illustrations.

General Principles

These guidelines are based on generally accepted norms for the proper housing and care of raptors held under a falconry licence. They are intended to allow for some flexibility and innovation in materials and design. The primary consideration is the protection of the bird from harsh environmental conditions, predators, undue disturbance, and self-injury.

The health and well-being of the bird is every falconer's first responsibility. The fact that a bird is healthy at the moment is not justification for sub-standard equipment. Conversely, no matter how good the facilities appear, damaged feet, a scraped cere, or excessive feather damage are signs that something is wrong, and it is a falconer’s duty to find the problem and rectify it without delay.

Housing Standards

Mews and Breeding Chambers

The mews shall be large enough to allow easy access and to allow the bird to fully extend its wings. Minimum and recommended sizes for “free-lofted” (i.e. not tethered to a perch) *individual* birds are as listed below: Breeding chambers and facilities designed to hold multiple birds should be larger and must be large enough to allow each bird to fully extend its wings and move freely about within the enclosure.

	Minimum (WxLxH)	Recommended (WxLxH)
Kestrel or similar size bird	6' x 6' x 6'	6' x 8' x 8'
Peregrine Falcon or similar size bird	6' x 8' x 7'	8' x 8' x 8' or 6' x 12' x 8'
Red-tailed Hawk or similar size bird	8' x 8' x 7'	10' x 8' x 8'
Eagles and similar birds	10' x 10' x 8'	10' x 14' x 8'

Every mews, breeding chamber or indoor enclosure must have at least one window or a partially open roof to allow for natural light and ventilation. Where the mews is used for birds in hunting condition, the windows shall be protected on the inside by vertical bars, spaced narrower than the width of the bird's body. An appropriate fencing material may also be used on the sides of large breeding or flight chambers. Open roof sections should be barred or covered with appropriate fencing material. “Chicken wire” and similar wire netting is weak and potentially dangerous to the welfare of the bird and shall not be used as the primary enclosing material where raptors are free-lofted.

The main door should be secure and easily closed. A double-door system is recommended wherever practical. The floor of the mew shall permit easy cleaning and shall be well drained. Material such as straw, sawdust, and other organic substrates have been linked to respiratory disease and should not be used. Adequate perches designed to prevent foot damage and maintained in good condition, shall be provided.

Weathering Yard

Weathering yards are enclosed outdoor areas in which tethered falconry birds can safely experience natural lighting and weather conditions. Weathering yards must be completely enclosed on the sides and on top with fencing, netting or roofing to protect the birds from disturbance and attack by predators.

Birds must be tethered to adequate perches (see below) while in the weathering area. The enclosed area shall be large enough to ensure the birds cannot strike the fence with their feet or wings when flying from their perch, and cannot reach any obstructions or other tethered birds. The substrate material should not be damaging to the bird's feet when it bates. Sand, pea gravel and grass are examples of suitable material. Protection from excessive sun, wind, and heavy storms shall be provided for each bird. Weathering areas should not be used during severe winter storms.

Note: The weathering of falconry birds is recommended, but not essential.

Hutch and Creance

This type of housing involves tethering the bird to a long cable or “creance” which is strung between an A-frame shelter and another perch approximately 2 to 5 meters away. The A-frame shelter allows the bird to escape the effects of inclement weather. At other times the bird can perch on top of the A-frame or on the perch located at the other end of the creance. This arrangement allows the bird a similar freedom of movement to a large mews but can only be used safely with more sedate species and individuals. The entire facility must be enclosed in a weathering yard if the birds are left unattended.

Equipment Standards

Perches

Perches and perching surfaces are critically important to the long-term well-being of raptors. The 3 main types of perches for tethered birds are block perches, normally used for falcons, bow perches, normally used for hawks, and shelf or wall perches which are useful in mews and other indoor situations. They must be designed to prevent snagging or tangling of the leash. Perch surfaces must be easy to keep clean and not too abrasive. They should have rounded edges and incorporate materials that will prevent foot damage.

Block and bow perches should be heavy enough that the raptor cannot drag them. The leash ring must be “captive” such that the raptor cannot escape if the spike comes out of the ground.

Tethered bird should always be able to reach the ground or other flat surface. Screen perches and the like (see Illustrations) from which a tethered bird could hang upside down, should not be used where the bird is left unattended.

Other Equipment

Proper swivels and leashes are important to prevent tangling and/or escape of tethered raptors. Only high-quality, free-turning swivels of an appropriate design should be used. *Note: Snaps or clips are notoriously unreliable and should not be used where their failure would allow a bird to escape or injure itself or another raptor.*

“Aylmeri” jesses consisting of a separate anklet and removable straps are strongly recommended in all situations and are essential for birds which are being flown free (see Illustrations). Jesses and anklets must be made from strong leather, such as kangaroo hide, or synthetic material and should be checked often for signs of wear or fatigue.

Leashes should be made from a strong weather-proof material that will not fray or break. They should be long enough to allow the bird to reach the ground, but not so long as place undue stress on the bird’s legs when it bates; roughly 2 to 4 times body length is typical.

Weight is a critically important factor in the training of birds of prey. Every falconer must have an accurate, reliable weigh scale in good working order.

Regular opportunities to bathe and drink are important for birds in hunting condition. Suitable bath pans 5 to 15cm deep should be available.

Standards of Care

Standards of practice in the care and keeping of falconry birds are every bit as important as the physical attributes of facilities and equipment. A great deal of literature exists on the subject, most of which is beyond the scope of this document. However, there are a few areas in which the keeping of raptors is somewhat unique relative to most other animals.

Water

Raptors are able to obtain most of their water needs directly from the food they eat. They often voluntarily go for long periods without drinking even when water is available. The need for water depends on the species and also varies with the weather, moisture in the food, and physical activity. Likewise the need and desire for bathing is highly variable.

Generally speaking, birds in flying condition should be given an opportunity to bath and drink as often as practical, as long as there is no risk of cold or freezing weather. On the other hand, the intrusions required to provide fresh water to raptors in breeding situations often make this very impractical and stressful for the birds. In these cases extra water can be provided by soaking or injecting water into the bird's daily food ration.

In summary, though raptors benefit from the regular availability of water the fact that they do not have daily or continuous access is not a sign of mistreatment. In very cold weather this may actually be harmful.

Tethering

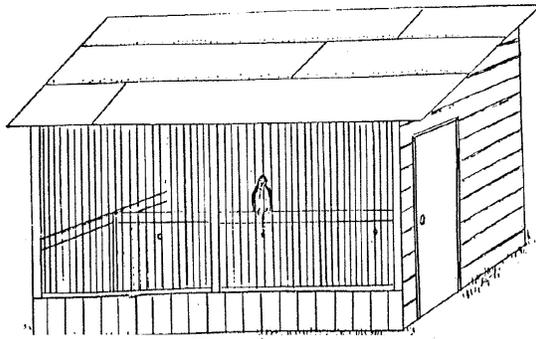
Tethering is an important tool for the management and training of birds of prey and has been used safely and successfully for thousands of years. It involves the use of soft leather anklets around the legs of the bird and leather or synthetic straps known as "jesses". To prevent entanglement, the jesses are connected to a swivel, which is then attached to a leash. Sometimes a "jess extender" is used between the jesses and the swivel to provide an extra measure of tangle prevention. The leash is attached to a heavy perch in a manner that allows the bird freedom of movement between the perch, bath pan, and the ground. The bird can comfortably eat, flap its wings, bathe, and preen, etc, but it cannot fly against or strike another object.

Raptors in hunting condition, particularly young birds, possess a great deal of energy. If not restrained, many would thrash about repeatedly in the mews. Tethering is often the only safe way to way to keep a bird in hunting condition from harming or stressing itself between flights. The Ontario Hawking Club fully supports the use of tethering in the training and management of birds of prey provided that the birds and their equipment are regularly monitored. We do not support the permanent tethering of birds as a substitute for a proper mews.

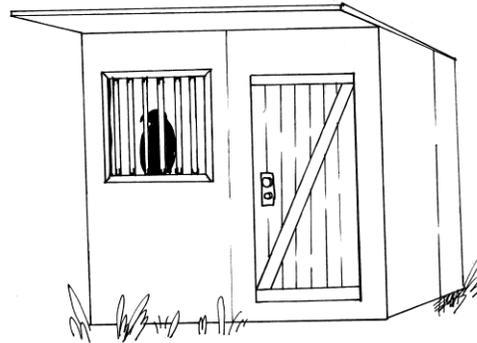
Veterinary Care

Every falconer must have and maintain an arrangement with a qualified veterinarian who is willing to provide professional care for the birds if necessary. It is very important that this arrangement be made before any birds are acquired. If possible the veterinarian should specialize in, or have suitable experience with avian medicine. The welfare of the bird is every falconer's first responsibility and professional veterinary care must not be withheld from a bird in need of medical attention.

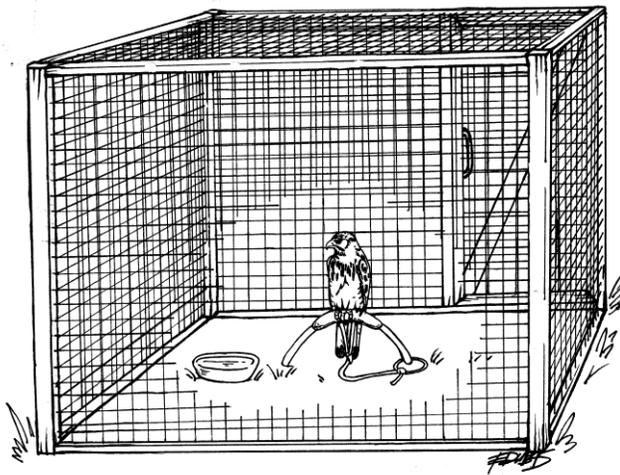
Illustrations



Open faced mew with barred window



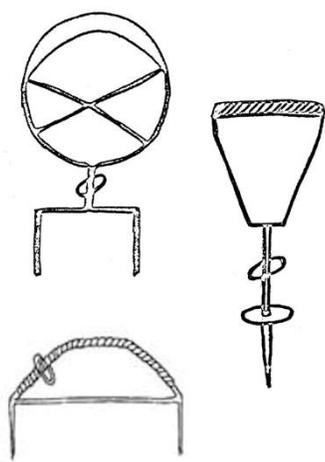
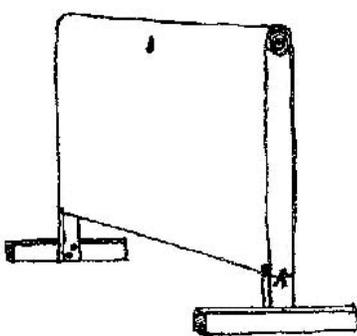
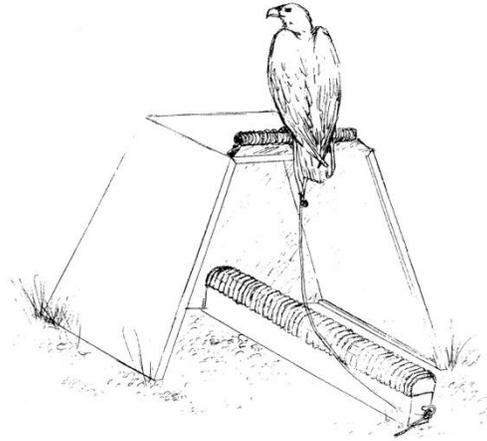
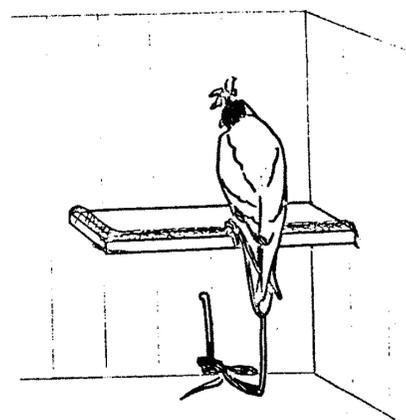
Shed-style mew with barred window



Predator-proof, totally enclosed weathering yard



Block Perch and Ring Perch with baths

	
<p>Outdoor Perches Ring Perch, Block Perch and Bow Perch</p>	<p>Aylmeri jesses</p>
	
<p>Screen Perch</p>	<p>Hutch and Creance</p>
	
<p>Shelf Perch</p>	

Glossary

Bate	The attempted flight of a tethered raptor
Mews	A building or structure used to house a falconry bird
Jess, Jesses	The straps of leather or synthetic material that connect the anklets around a raptor's leg to the swivel or jess extender. In "traditional" jesses the strap and anklet are formed from one piece of leather. In modern falconry "Aylmeri" jesses in with removable straps are threaded through a separate anklet have replaced the traditional system.
Creance	A long line or cable to which the leash or swivel can be attached. Often used in the training of young raptors
Leash	A rope or braided cord used to tether a raptor to a block or bow perch. The leash is usually constructed from nylon or similar material. Length is typically about 3 times the length of the raptor.
Block Perch	A round perch with a flat top usually used for falcons.
Bow Perch	An arched or "bowed" perch, often wrapped in rope and usually used for hawks
Screen Perch	A long, high perch. Carpet or other screening material fills the gap between the perch and the ground and prevents birds from bating off and wrapping the leash around the perch.
Long-wing	Common falconry term for a species of the genus <i>Falco</i> .
Short-wing	Classically refers to hawks of the genus <i>Accipiter</i> , but often used in reference to other types of hawk as well.
Free-loft	Housing a bird untethered in a mews.

Appendix I: **Facilities and Equipment Inspection Checklist**

Mews and Breeding Chambers

	Yes	No
1. Is the mews or breeding chamber of an appropriate size for the bird?	[]	[]
2. Is access controlled by secure door. (Double door system recommended)	[]	[]
3. Is at least one window or partially open roof present?	[]	[]
4. If present, is window protected on the inside with vertical bars spaced narrower than the bird's body?	[]	[]
5. Is adequate light and ventilation provided for each bird?	[]	[]
6. Is the floor material dry, well-drained and easily cleaned?	[]	[]
7. Are at least 2 safe perches provided for each free-lofted raptor?	[]	[]
8. Do breeding chambers have provisions for removal of excess food?	[]	[]
9. Are mews and chambers in a reasonable state of repair	[]	[]

Weathering Yard

	Yes	No
1. Is space provided to allow tethered bird(s) to bate (leave perch) without touching their wings on the side or top of the facility?	[]	[]
2. Are the sides of the facility sufficient to exclude predators	[]	[]
3. Is the top of the facility covered with wire, netting or roofed to exclude predators	[]	[]
Do birds have adequate protection from:		
4. Excessive heat or sun?	[]	[]
5. High winds, heavy rains and winter storms?	[]	[]
6. Avian or ground predators?	[]	[]
7. Disturbances likely to cause injury?	[]	[]
8. Structures that could cause entanglement?	[]	[]

Equipment

	Yes	No
1. Are suitable, properly maintained, perches available for tethered raptors?	[]	[]
2. Are perch designs “tangle free” and “escape-proof”?	[]	[]
3. Are suitable high quality swivels available and/or in use?	[]	[]
1. Are suitable Aylmeri jesses available and/or in use?	[]	[]
4. Are leashes of appropriate material and length available and/or in use?	[]	[]
5. One or more suitable bath pans are available?	[]	[]
6. Is a reliable weight scale, graduated in increments of not more than ¼ ounce or 5 grams available?	[]	[]

Approval

- [] Approved – Facilities meets the standards and requirements for commercial falconry and raptor propagation.
- [] Approved – Facilities meets the standards and requirements for recreational falconry.
- [] Conditional Approval – Facilities fails to meet standards. Licensee agrees to correct all noted deficiencies within 30 days.
- [] Not Approved – Facilities fail to meet standards and requirements.

Deficiencies _____
