

**ONTARIO
HAWKING
— CLUB —**



Falconry Apprenticeship Guidelines

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1 Introduction

Falconry is the sport of hunting wild game with a trained bird of prey. It is an ancient art that has captivated people for thousands of years and offers unparalleled opportunities to experience the power and intensity that raptors embody-- but it is not easy. In fact, the sport requires a level of dedication that is unheard of to most people.

The Ontario Hawking Club (OHC) is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting and protecting the practice of falconry and the raptors that it employs.

The requirement for novice falconers to successfully complete an apprenticeship period is nearly universal in North American falconry regulations. We support this requirement and believe that an effective apprenticeship program is essential to the long-term welfare of falconry.

The purpose of this document is to provide a summary of the process and to establish reasonable expectations for both the apprentice and the sponsor.

Information is provided here on the preparation and equipment needed *before* a hawk is obtained.

The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) recognizes the OHC's Apprenticeship Program Guidelines as meeting Provincial apprenticeship licensing requirements.

1.1 Message for the Apprentice

Falconry can be an immensely rewarding pursuit; however, it requires commitment, perseverance and a deep respect for the welfare of your hawk.

Before proceeding with your apprenticeship, you should answer the following questions:

- Do I understand what is involved and what will be required of me?
- Considering my other commitments, do I realistically have sufficient time to devote to falconry? (family, work, school, etc...)
- Can I commit myself to the specialized care that a raptor requires for 365 days / year?
- Do I have the financial resources needed to pursue the sport? (to pay for food & equipment, veterinary expenses, proper housing for the bird, reliable vehicle to travel to and from hunting grounds, etc...)
- Am I legally able to possess a raptor at my place of residence? (check city/town bylaws, rental agreements)
- Am I prepared to follow the OHC guidelines and practice falconry ethically and responsibly? (read this entire document carefully)
- For what purpose do I want a raptor?

Your objective should be to hunt wild game with your raptor. This is the definition of falconry and is the only reason the law allows individuals to keep native birds of prey.

Falconry is not pet keeping.

In fact, raptors make very poor pets and keeping a raptor as a pet is strictly illegal in the province of Ontario

1.2 Message for the Sponsor

Although there is no legal requirement for you to be a sponsor, as an experienced falconer you have the privilege and responsibility to provide guidance to individuals who exhibit a genuine interest in pursuing falconry.

This responsibility is a part of the tradition of falconry that stretches back through the ages. In order to continue this tradition and uphold the highest possible standard of falconry, the decision to take on an apprentice should be made carefully.

The welfare of raptors that come into the possession of a novice, the level of proficiency and ethics of falconry practiced, public perception of falconry, and the reputation of the OHC and falconers in general are at stake with respect to your commitment as a sponsor.

2 Objectives

The objectives of the apprenticeship program are to ensure that:

- A novice will develop proficiency in the husbandry, training, flying and hunting of a raptor under the guidance of an experienced falconer.
- Raptors are properly fed, housed, equipped, and are otherwise maintained under healthy, safe conditions.
- Raptors in the possession of a falconer are regularly flown at game when it is safe and legal to do so.
- The apprentice will strive to practice the sport of falconry at a high level of competence, sportsmanship and ethics.
- The sport of falconry and the reputation of the OHC are not harmed by the acts of inexperienced or irresponsible individuals.

2.1 Responsibilities of the Apprentice

Prior to obtaining a falconry bird, the apprentice shall:

1. Be at least 15 years of age and in possession of a valid Ontario Small Game Hunting Licence.
2. Have read at least two modern textbooks on falconry and have a basic understanding of the sport.
3. Be familiar with all federal and provincial regulations pertaining to falconry.
4. Secure a relationship with a sponsor who agrees to this undertaking for the entirety of the apprenticeship period.
5. Determine with your sponsor which species of raptor would be suitable as a first bird. The OHC strongly recommends either a passage red-tailed hawk or a Harris' hawk, as both of these birds are more easily trained than other species and are relatively hardy.

Any raptor used for the apprenticeship should be an untrained bird. Very little is learned by flying someone else's bird! **Imprinted and/or previously trained raptors are not suitable.**

In order to successfully complete the apprenticeship requirements, the apprentice must demonstrate the mastery of basic falconry to the satisfaction of the sponsor, including successfully hunting wild quarry with your bird.

Provincial falconry regulations require an apprenticeship period of *at least* 15 months including two October hunting seasons. However, a sponsor is not required to sign-off on the apprenticeship until he/she feels that the apprentice has adequately proved their falconry competence, whether or not the 15-month period has been reached.

2.2 The Role of the Sponsor

The role of the sponsor is to guide and oversee the apprentice, and to confirm his or her proficiency by the end of the program. It is of the utmost importance that the sponsor does not sign off on an apprentice until the sponsor is confident that falconry will be practiced in the appropriate way. Remember that once an individual has held their general falconry licence in Ontario for five years, they are able to be a sponsor for someone else.

A few points to remember:

1. Know the laws governing hunting with and possession of raptors so you can accurately answer any questions the apprentice may have.
2. Lead by example: Model the principles of good sportsmanship and responsible, respectful hunting. Show the importance of maintaining positive relationships with Conservation officers, landowners, fellow falconers, and members of the general public. Demonstrate by your own actions a respect for all wildlife, especially for raptors and their prey species.
3. Strive to develop 'game sense' in your apprentice. This will empower apprentices to find their own hunting grounds instead of using yours.
4. Except in extenuating circumstances, the OHC does not recommend that a sponsor oversee more than two apprentices at one time.
5. Novice falconers are like young birds- both need to build confidence to achieve a task before they become proficient at it. As much as being a sponsor entails rules and procedure, instilling confidence and a belief in their abilities is also vital to the development of an apprentice falconer.

3 Getting Started

Falconry requires a considerable investment of time and attention to detail.

1. Research. Take time to learn as much as you can about falconry from as many different sources as possible. Read as much as you can about falconry and raptor care, husbandry and behavior. Know all the laws pertaining to falconry and hunting small game, including migratory birds
2. Get your small game license. If you have never held a Small Game Hunting Licence in Ontario, you will need to take the Ontario Hunter Education Program and pass the exam. Contact the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry for a list of course locations throughout the province.
3. Take the Falconry Orientation Workshop offered by the OHC. It's a great way to meet falconers and learn about the many facets involved in the sport.
4. Join the Ontario Hawking Club and participate in Club events. Get out in the field with club members and view their facilities. It's a great way to see different species of raptor in action and a great place to find a sponsor.
5. Scout for potential hunting areas. You will need regular access to hunting areas in order to train and fly your bird and finding these areas can be a time-consuming task. **Don't expect another falconer to show you where to hunt!** Even though you may accompany your sponsor in the field, you need to develop your own 'game-sense', or an ability to locate areas with suitable quarry. Find your own areas to hunt so that once you have a bird, you'll know where to go.

3.1 Preparation and Paperwork

1. Secure a sponsor and complete a sponsor/apprentice agreement. You and your sponsor should discuss and agree on general expectations for supervision, facilities, equipment, and a general training plan.
2. Once you have a sponsor, contact the MNR for an **Application for an Apprentice Falconry Licence** (form 1003) and both you and your sponsor must complete the **Falconry Sponsor Information and Certification** (form 3001). Both forms are available from your MNR district office. **Make sure to get both forms, as you will need to submit both in order to have your apprenticeship period valid.** There is a \$20.00 cost for the apprentice licence.
3. Together with your sponsor, discuss the species and gender of raptor you would like to use for your apprenticeship. The decision will be based on your available space, where you live and the quarry you have access to. The availability of game in your area is a major consideration. **The idea is to get a species of raptor that you will be able to regularly fly at game.** *Note: The Ontario Hawking Club recommends the use of red tailed hawk or Harris' hawk for the apprenticeship period.*
4. Get the necessary equipment and build the mews. Your sponsor will discuss the details of both equipment and facilities requirements with you. An equipment checklist and facilities guidelines are listed on this website.

5. Final check- be as prepared as possible before your bird arrives. Ask your sponsor inspect your mews, equipment, food source, and go over any last-minute questions. Review the initial training steps with your sponsor and determine a schedule of meetings to follow the arrival of your bird.

The Do's and Don'ts of Apprenticeship

- Don't start with a bird that is previously trained – you won't learn anything!
- Don't start with an injured bird that can't fly or hunt properly – leave that to experienced falconers.
- Don't start with an older bird. These birds are set in their ways and it is much more difficult to enter them on wild game.
- First get a sponsor, then build your facilities and get them approved, and then get a bird!
- Ask your sponsor for advice and then follow it.
- Falconry requires patience and attention to detail. Short cuts don't work!

3.2 Your First Bird

In consultation with your sponsor, get a healthy, first year, non-imprinted, untrained bird. The reason for these recommendations is to ensure that very little is learned by working with a bird that is a human imprint or a bird that has been trained by someone else.

Working with an older bird will be frustrating, as their window of learning has mostly closed. Having little or no success with your first bird may discourage you from the sport altogether.

1. Welcome your new bird home. Check the general condition of your bird including weight, feathers, disposition and overall health. By this time you should be familiar with signs of stress or sickness in raptors.
2. Have your sponsor inspect the bird as soon as possible after it arrives.
3. Record all data in your logbook.