



Falconry Apprenticeship Program 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 in many cultures worldwide. It offers unparalleled opportunities to experience the beauty, power and intensity that raptors embody, but it is not easy or simple. In fact, the sport requires a level of dedication and commitment that is unheard of to most people. Not surprisingly the number of falconers is relatively small.

The **Saskatchewan Falconry Association** is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting and protecting the art and 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 objective of the apprenticeship program is to produce high-quality falconers that are an asset to the sport and the wildlife on which it depends. The purpose of this document is to set reasonable expectations for both the apprentice and the sponsor. It is not a falconry manual. Rather, it highlights important areas that need to be addressed in the development of basic falconry skills and values, as well as key activities that should take place during the apprenticeship period. The Guide also outlines the preparation and equipment needed BEFORE a hawk is obtained.

The success of the apprenticeship program depends on the commitment of both sponsor and apprentice, and this commitment should not be taken for granted by either party. We believe that these guidelines will help to maximize the benefits of the apprenticeship program not only for the apprentice, but also for the falconry community as a whole.

Supporting and facilitating an effective apprenticeship program is an important function of the Saskatchewan Falconry Association as it promotes the care, welfare and responsible training of falconry birds.

The Ministry of Environment endorses this Apprentice program through its Falconry Policy and adherence to this program by the Apprentice and Supervisor/mentor is an absolute condition of being granted an Apprentice Falconry Licence. The Apprentice and Supervisor/mentor will sign a Falconry Apprentice Supervisor Agreement, Appendix D, once signed it will be forwarded to the Ministry along with the Falconry Supervisor/mentor Sponsorship letter, the Apprentices application for an Apprentice Falconry Licence and a SFA Apprentice Support Letter. Obtaining an Apprentice Falconry Licence through the Associations Apprenticeship scheme is extended by Sec 25 (2) (d) of The Wildlife Act.

Why Apprenticeship?

These guidelines are designed to help you make the most of your apprenticeship and truly master the art of falconry – **if you follow them!**

1.1 A Message for the Apprentice

Falconry can be an immensely rewarding pursuit, however, it requires commitment, perseverance, and above all else, a deep respect for the welfare of your hawk. The decision to commit to the care, training, and hunting of a raptor is not one to be made in haste. Careful consideration and investigation into the requirements of the sport is very important. A solid understanding of the time and resources that will be involved on an ongoing basis is vital. Before proceeding with your apprenticeship, you should answer the following questions:

Do I understand what is involved and what will be required of me?

Do I realistically have time to devote to falconry, considering my other commitments? (Family, work, school, etc...).

Can I commit myself to the specialized care that a raptor requires 365 days per year?

Do I have the resources needed to pursue the sport? (Funds 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/strata agreements).

Am I prepared to follow the Apprenticeship Program Guidelines? (Read this entire document carefully).

For what purpose do I want a raptor?

Your objective must 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. *Keeping raptors requires a special permit issued by The Ministry of Environment and all raptors used in falconry in Saskatchewan must be banded.***

Your Ultimate Goal:

To be a responsible, ethical, sportsmanlike, law abiding falconer that is an informed asset to the present and future of falconry in the Province of Saskatchewan.

1.2 A Message for the Sponsor:

Should you agree to be a sponsor, as an experienced falconer you have the privilege and responsibility to provide guidance and leadership to novice individuals who exhibit a genuine interest in pursuing the art of 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 is one to be made carefully and sincerely.

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 Saskatchewan Falconry Association and falconers in general are the main issues at stake with respect to your commitment as a sponsor.

This Guide has been supplied to you as a resource. It is designed to provide a framework within which you can impart your knowledge, experience, sportsmanship, and ethics unto a novice in a consistent manner. Please read it thoroughly. Passing on the values and skills that are part of quality falconry is the best way to ensure that falconry continues to be a legitimate and respected field sport in the Province of Saskatchewan.

Your Ultimate Goal:

To produce a responsible, ethical, sportsmanlike, law abiding falconer that will be an informed asset to the present and future of falconry in the Province of Saskatchewan.

2. Objectives and Responsibilities

The objectives of the apprenticeship program are to ensure that:

A novice with little or no previous falconry experience will develop proficiency in the husbandry, training, flying and hunting (hawking) 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 art of falconry at a high level of competence, sportsmanship and ethics.

The art of falconry and the reputation of the Saskatchewan Falconry Association are not harmed by the acts of inexperienced or irresponsible individuals.

2.1 Responsibilities of Apprenticeship

Prior to obtaining a falconry bird, the apprentice shall:

1. Be prepared to put the welfare of any raptor in his or her possession first and foremost at all times.
2. Be at least 12 years of age and in possession of a valid Capture and/or Possession Permit issued by The Ministry of Environment.
3. Have read at least two modern texts on falconry or studied sufficiently to achieve a basic understanding of the sport (see recommended reading list in Appendix C).
4. Be familiar with all Provincial Regulations pertaining to falconry (see Appendix E & F).
5. Secure a relationship with a sponsor who agrees to this undertaking for the entirety of the apprenticeship period. The apprentice must agree to follow advice given by the sponsor.
6. Determine with your sponsor which species of raptor would be suitable as a first bird.

In order to successfully complete the apprenticeship requirements, a mastery of basic falconry techniques must be demonstrated to the satisfaction of your sponsor. This includes hunting with your bird in several unaided flush and chase situations at wild quarry. The Saskatchewan Falconry Constitution requires an apprenticeship period of (under revision) *at least two years*.

2.2 Responsibilities of Sponsorship

The role of the sponsor is to guide and oversee the apprentice, and to confirm their proficiency by the end of the program. It is of the utmost importance that you do not sign off on your apprentice until you feel confident they will practice falconry in the way you see fit. 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. Discuss with your apprentice various conservation strategies in regards to wildlife and the habitats they occupy.
4. Strive to develop 'game sense' in your apprentice. This will empower apprentices to find their own hunting grounds instead of using yours.
5. Except in extenuating circumstances, the Saskatchewan Falconry Association does not recommend that a sponsor oversee more than two apprentices at one time.
6. Novice falconers are not unlike young birds. Both need to build the confidence to achieve a task before they become good at achieving it. As much as being a sponsor entails rules and procedure, instilling confidence and the belief in their abilities is also vital to the development of an apprentice into a falconer

3 Apprentice Unit

Learning to practice the art of falconry requires a considerable investment of time and attention to detail. The steps outlined in this guide are designed to assist you in making the most of your learning experience. Taking shortcuts or cutting corners, on the other hand, will make success much more difficult to achieve and will be reflected in your falconry abilities down the road. It may even lead to the loss or injury of your bird, yourself or others. Please read and follow the steps in this guide carefully!

This section covers the following topics:

- Research.
- Preparation.
- Your First Bird.
- Manning.
- Early Training.
- Free Flight and Entering
- Hunting

3.1 Research

This is the time to learn as much as you can about falconry from as many different sources as possible. You are ready to find a sponsor and prove your genuine desire to hunt wild quarry with a trained bird of prey. By this stage you should have adequately answered the questions posed in section 1.1 of this Guide.

1. Listen to the experienced falconers, they are a wealth of information. Read as much as you can about falconry and raptor care, husbandry, and behavior. The more you learn the better equipped you will be to determine the directions best suited to your circumstances. Meeting both the physical and psychological needs of your bird is required on a daily basis, whether hunting or not.
2. Complete the Saskatchewan Falconry Association Membership Application.
3. See about obtaining a Provincial Hunting license. Eligibility for provincial/federal hunting licences is requisite to practice falconry in Saskatchewan. Persons born after January 1st, 1971 must graduate from a Firearm Safety/Hunter Education course in order to hold or apply for a Saskatchewan game or fur licence or provide proof of holding a hunting licence in another jurisdiction. Contact a local branch of the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation to determine when classes will be held.
4. Know all the laws pertaining to falconry and hunting game including migratory birds.
5. Scout for potential hunting areas. You will need regular access to hunting areas in order to train and fly your bird. Finding these areas can prove to be a time-consuming task.
6. Contact your local Conservation Officers to introduce yourself as an apprentice falconer and explain to them what your interest is.
7. Visit as many Saskatchewan Falconry Association falconers as you can. You will see the many differences of how raptors can be handled, cared for, maintained and hunted. **Don't expect another falconer to show you areas to hunt!** Even though you may accompany your sponsor in the field, part of undergoing the apprenticeship is to develop your own 'game-sense', or your ability to locate areas with suitable quarry. Put your knowledge to the test and find several areas different to the places you have already seen.

3.2 Preparation

1. Secure a sponsor and enter into a Falconry Apprentice Supervisor Agreement. You and your sponsor should discuss and agree on general expectations for supervision, facilities, equipment, and a general training plan.
2. Decide on the sex and species of raptor you would like to apprentice with, based on the space you have, where you live, the hunting grounds you have access to, the quarry that is available and discussions with your sponsor. A wrong choice here can be costly. Get into the habit of putting the bird's needs first! **The idea is to get a species of raptor that you will be able to regularly fly at game.**

**IF YOU FAIL IN THE BEGINNING, LOOKE FOR NO SUCCESFULL
ENDING, FALCONER EDMOND BERT - 1619**

3. Get the necessary equipment and build the mews. Your sponsor will discuss the details of both equipment and facilities requirements with you, as well as vehicle perches and carrier boxes. An equipment checklist and facilities guidelines are included in this Guide.
4. Final pre-bird check. Have your sponsor inspect your mews, equipment, food source, and go over any last-minute questions. You want to be as prepared for your bird as possible before it arrives. Review the basic training steps with your sponsor and determine a schedule of meetings to follow as soon as the bird arrives.

The Do's and Don'ts of Apprenticeship

You must first get a sponsor and **before** you get a bird have the approval of your sponsor, the Saskatchewan Falconry Association and authorization from ENV! Ask your sponsor for advice and follow it.

Falconry requires patience and attention to detail. Short cuts don't work!

3.3 Your First Bird

In consultation with your sponsor decide the best direction to take. If this includes the temporary handling of an already trained bird it must be understood that as an apprentice, you are allowed only one bird. In addition to move from the apprentice category you must successfully have trained a fresh raptor to successful hunting condition.

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 or is trapped.
3. Record all data in your logbook.

3.4 Manning

Manning starts from the moment you get the bird and is an ongoing process. Socialization is another term synonymous with manning, and is associated with the initial period of time where you get the bird comfortable with its new surroundings and with you. Discuss techniques in detail with your sponsor. This can sometimes be a difficult stage that will test your resolve, but don't give up or get discouraged! Listen to your sponsor's advice, that's what they are for. During this period, you may need to re-read sections of books that talk about manning techniques. If you plan to hunt with dogs this is also the time to introduce your bird to your dog(s).

Keep your bird "feather perfect"!

One of the hallmarks of a good falconer is the physical condition and the feather of their bird. Peak physical condition and good feather can only be achieved by vigilant attention to detail with respect to housing, equipment and good quality food.

3.5 Early Training

Once your bird is comfortable with you and you are starting to understand weight control, it is time to prepare for free flight. The early training is the interim step between manning and free flight where you take your bird outside and fly her on a creance. It is a good idea to have your sponsor oversee this exercise several times. They will provide crucial feedback about your handling techniques as well as interpreting the bird's response to you. Often to a novice it seems the bird is responding well and therefore must be "keen", but the sponsor, having had many years of experience, is able to recognize that the bird may not be as keen as it appears. This is not much of an issue when flying the bird on creance, but it can make the difference between keeping and losing your bird when the time for free flight arrives. During this time period:

1. Review your logbook entries and discuss them with your sponsor.
2. Closely monitor the overall health and condition of your bird.
3. Have your sponsor oversee your bird perform on the creance, and follow any recommendations offered.
4. Understand the difference between 'keenness' and 'weight'.
5. Discuss preparation for free flight and use of telemetry. With regards to transmitters; **two is one, one is none**. Transmitters fail it is just a matter of when.

3.6 Free Flight and Entering

Now that you have become familiar with your bird's response on a creance it is time to remove the swivel and set her free to fly. There are various exercises you can do with your bird at this stage that will help her get into hunting condition. This is the time where you introduce the lure, kite, and any other techniques that aid the bird's physical condition and reinforce your relationship as her hunting companion. Review your logbook entries and discuss them with your sponsor.

1. Observe the bird's flight and discuss physical conditioning. Introduce exercises that build the bird's strength and endurance, and relationship to you.
2. Review safety issues when free flying the bird (roadways, hydro wires, other raptors or predators, etc.).
3. Have a strategy in place in the event your bird becomes lost or injured. Your sponsor will help you with this. Although it is not nice to think about, you need to know what to do if this does happen.
4. Introduce the bird to live game in a timely manner. Your sponsor will again be able to guide you through this process. Your bird will need some early successes in order to build confidence in his ability to catch wild quarry.

3.7 Hunting

Hunting with your bird in the field will make use of all the knowledge and skills you have acquired up to this point. The hours of research, preparation, manning and early training will begin to pay off as you accompany your bird in flush and chase situations.

1. Be sure to make daily entries in your journal
2. Observe the field response of your bird to you, its surroundings, and to flushed quarry. Make adjustments to weight and training methods as needed.
3. Maintain regular contact with your sponsor. They will need to see you in action with your bird and give instruction in the field. This is a requirement of your apprenticeship.
4. Continually provide your bird with as many opportunities as possible to take wild game. Consistency is the golden rule of falconry and your bird will perform better with each success.

The end of the hunting season does not mean your bird is left to sit alone for several months. Continue the manning process and be aware of the health of your bird. By August or September of the second season once your bird has finished his moult, you will need to start the re-training process. Go through the same steps as in the early training section. This may not take as long as it did in the first year, as your bird will remember its successes of the previous season. Consult with your sponsor throughout this stage.

4 Sponsor Unit

The sponsor unit is designed to act as a companion to the Apprentice Unit. If you are a new sponsor or have an apprentice who is following the SFA's Apprenticeship Program Guidelines, you will be better prepared to help your apprentice by reading this section. Being a source of knowledge and support for your apprentice throughout their learning process will benefit the apprentice, their bird, and the sport of falconry.

The Sponsor Unit covers the following topics:

- Research and Preparation.
- The Bird.
- Manning.
- Early Training.
- Free Flight.
- Entering and Hunting

4.1 Research and Preparation

It is the responsibility of the apprentice to have read at least two modern texts on falconry or studied sufficiently to achieve a basic understanding of the art. You may have several books in mind to recommend and this is the time to do it. Be available for the apprentice to answer any questions during this period. Take on an apprentice who exhibits a genuine desire to hunt wild game with a trained bird of prey.

1. Enter into a Falconry Apprentice Supervisor Agreement. Make your expectations of the apprentice clear.
2. Recommend books for the apprentice to read. Enter into varied discussions about the Art of Falconry. Be available to answer any questions the apprentice might have. Lead by example.

3. See about obtaining a Provincial Hunting license. Eligibility for provincial/federal hunting licences is requisite to practice falconry in Saskatchewan. Persons born after January 1st, 1971 must graduate from a Firearm Safety/Hunter Education course in order to hold or apply for a Saskatchewan game or fur licence or provide proof of holding a hunting licence in another jurisdiction. Contact a local branch of the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation to determine when classes will be held.
4. Stress the need for the apprentice to scout for hunting grounds. Go over qualities of areas that are likely to hold game versus areas that are unlikely to hold game. Teaching the apprentice how to find their own fields is the best way to keep them out of yours.
5. Invite the apprentice into the field when hawking your bird. Demonstrate with your bird the proper handling techniques (positioning on fist, safe carriage, bate recovery, etc.).
6. Discuss in detail the facilities and equipment requirements with your apprentice (see attached documents).
7. Final pre-bird check. Inspect the completed mews, weathering yard, equipment including scales, food source, and address any last minute details before the apprentice obtains a bird.

4.2 The Bird

Review potential bird choices with your apprentice. Decide on the sex and species of raptor your apprentice should start with, based on the space they have, where they live, the hunting grounds they have access to and the discussions you have had with your apprentice. Take into consideration the type and availability of game in the available area.

1. The general health, feather condition, and weight of the raptor as soon as the apprentice obtains it.
2. Attachment of equipment.
3. Basic bird handling techniques.
4. The apprentice's journal.
5. Weight control and the bird's metabolism.

Insist the apprentice contact you immediately if the bird becomes injured or appears ill.

4.3 Manning

Review the manning process with the apprentice. Give them direction on how to proceed from this point. Be as supportive as possible since your encouragement of the apprentice

will be the best thing for the bird's sake. Stress the importance of patience and consistency with your apprentice. Be readily available for your apprentice.

4.4 Early Training

1. Review journal entries with your apprentice.
2. Inspect the overall health of the bird and observe the relationship between the apprentice and their bird.
3. Oversee the bird's performance on the creance.
4. Explain the difference between 'keenness' and weight.
5. Discuss preparations for your apprentice to fly their bird free for the first time.

4.5 Free Flight and Entering

1. Review the logbook entries of your apprentice.
2. Check the overall health and condition of the bird.
3. Observe the bird's flight and response to the apprentice.
4. Review safety issues with the apprentice.
5. Discuss a plan for the apprentice to follow in the event his or her bird becomes lost or injured.
6. Guide the apprentice through introducing the bird to live game.

4.6 Hunting

This stage of the apprenticeship will show how much knowledge your apprentice has retained and give you an opportunity to view their skills in action. It is important to get out with your apprentice regularly so you can make suggestions and correct mistakes you see in progress.

1. Regularly check the apprentice's journal.
2. Observe the bird's response in the field to flushed quarry and to the apprentice. Make recommendations on training and weight control as necessary.
3. Maintain regular contact with your apprentice. Stress the importance for the apprentice to continually provide their bird with opportunities to take wild game. Discuss hunting strategies that will help them achieve this.

Other issues to cover during the course of the apprenticeship are: Prevention and treatment of raptor-specific ailments and injuries, avian veterinarians, coping and imping, use of dogs in the field, safety, etiquette and sportsmanship in the field.

Appendix A: Falconry Equipment Checklist

- Food Supply - a varied diet of whole food (e.g. quail, rodents, poults, etc)
 - vitamin supplements
- Bath Pan - suitable size and material
- Aylmeri Anklets and Jesses
 - equipment required (2 piece grommets, pliers)
 - appropriate leather types (*Kangaroo leather is recommended*)
 - non-toxic jess ointments to keep leather supple and strong
- Swivels
 - falconry swivels or ball bearing "sampo" of the appropriate size
 - (closed welded rings)
 - should have at least two swivels
- Leashes - have at least two suitable leashes of appropriate strength and length
- Falconry Bells - have at least two pairs of bells. This is optional.
- Glove - should incorporate a safety snap to secure raptor
- Perch
 - for hawks use a simple bow design incorporating a strong, lightweight,
 - closed ring for securing leash
 - for falcons use a block perch with appropriate closed leash ring.
 - suitable perching surface materials.
 - indoor perch designs and considerations
- Weigh Scales - triple beam, counter balance type or digital,
 - (*spring types are not recommended, but acceptable*)
 - properly mounted perch
- Lures
 - optional for hawks, required for falcons. -
 - have a spare lure
- Hoods
 - properly fitting hoods and a smooth hooding technique are important.
 - have a spare hood
- Giant Hood - designs, travel perches if bird hooded, other travel considerations
- Whistle - plastic/no pea - for cold weather conditions
- Creance - suitable materials - strength, weight, and length considerations
- Bag or Vest - considerations/field items required
- I.D. Tags - assist in the location of lost birds/suppliers
- Telemetry
 - not a necessity if flying a Harris' or Redtail, but a worthwhile topic
 - for discussion
- Tail Protector - important for accipiters

Check your equipment regularly!

Appendix B: Sources of Falconry Equipment

Northwoods Falconry Equipment www.northwoodsfalconry.com

Mikes Falconry Equipment www.mikesfalconry.com

Western Sporting www.westernsporting.com

Appendix C: Selected Falconry Bibliography

- **"Apprentice Manual"** California Hawking Club
Western Sporting www.westernsporting.com
- **"Understanding the Bird of Prey"** Dr. Nick Fox, 1995
Western Sporting www.westernsporting.com
- **"Apprentice Study Guide"** California Hawking Club
F.W. Holderman editor
Western Sporting www.westernsporting.com
- **"The Falconer's Apprentice - A Guide to Training the Passage Red-Tailed Hawk"**
Oakes, William C. 1994,
Eagle Wing Publishing Post
Office Box 434
Roy, Utah 84067-0434
Telephone # (801) 731-7416
- **"Falconry Equipment"**, Kimsey and Hodge 1992,
Kimsey Hodge Publications
7815 Encinita
Houston, Texas 77083
- **"Medical Management of Birds of Prey"**, P. Redig 1993 The Raptor
Centre University of Minnesota 1920 Fitch Ave.
St. Paul, MN, 55108
- **"North American Falconry and Hunting Hawks"**
Beebe & Webster
Western Sporting www.westernsporting.com
- **"The Compleat Falconer"** F.L. Beebe 1992
Hancock House Publishers 19313 Zero Ave.
Surrey, British Columbia V3S 5J9

- **"Gamehawking...At Its Very Best"** Webster 1988

C/O Windsong Press

P.O. Box 1484

Denver, Colorado 80201

- **"The Hunting Falcon"** Haak, 1992 also

from Hancock House

- **"Veterinary Aspects of Captive Birds of Prey"** Cooper, J. E. 1985

Standfast Press, The Old Rectory Charington, Tetbury,

Gloucestershire

Appendix D: Falconry Apprentice Supervisor Agreement



Falconry Apprentice Supervisor Agreement

Objectives:

To guide and supervise/mentor the apprentice Falconer, over a minimum period of two years, in developing proficiency in the husbandry, training, and flying at quarry of a raptor.

The apprenticeship stage concludes when the supervisor/mentor is satisfied the apprentice has sufficient knowledge, and experience that he/she can competently manage a raptor in mews and field without supervision.

In the event that either the supervisor/mentor or apprentice wishes to sever the process, a letter of notification is required to the Ministry of Environment indicating the termination of the agreement.

Falconry Apprentice/Supervisor Agreement

Supervisor's Obligations

- 1) To instruct the apprentice in the proper care, handling, training and hunting of raptors.
- 2) To teach the apprentice that legal, humane and ethical treatment of raptors and their quarry is always expected.
- 3) To teach the apprentice the principles of good sportsmanship and responsible hunting, and to instill in him/her the importance of maintaining good relations with landowners, wildlife officers and the public in general, in order to prevent the sport of falconry coming into disrepute.
- 4) **The supervisor/mentor must notify the Executive Director when the apprentice has completed their apprenticeship.**

