

Demonstrations of Birds of Prey and Owls at Shows, Fetes or any public display, event or place

Guidance to Organisers and Static Display Teams

These notes have been prepared by the Countryside Alliance and the Hawk Board in consultation with other groups interested and experienced in falconry.

These notes are considered necessary for a number of reasons:

- There is a potential risk to the public if birds are not trained and displayed correctly. We suggest that all organisers check that the people bringing and handling birds of prey and owls have suitable experience, the right birds and public liability insurance
- There is a potential risk to the birds if they are not trained and displayed properly, with the advent of the Animal Welfare Act, organisers may be held partially responsible for welfare issues.
- In today's political climate for field sports. In drawing attention to the protected species used in falconry, there is a risk of stimulating a demand for participation that cannot be satisfied.
- The general public can be misled as to how birds should be kept by birds that are not displayed in a manner that is acceptable

It is hoped that this leaflet will be helpful to both Organisers and Display givers in setting out what is expected of those responsible for demonstrations. Displays must be well organised and well executed, the bird's welfare must come first.

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Note – the word 'Hawk' is a generic term used here to cover all birds of prey and owls in this instance

Falconry

Falconry is the sport of taking wild quarry in its natural state and habitat by means of trained hawks. Any publicity involving birds of prey has a potential for benefit and harm. Benefit comes from increasing appreciation of birds of prey and the art of falconry. Harm comes from stimulating a desire to possess hawks in those who lack the time and expertise to look after them or who may try to obtain them illegally: or by showing birds in a condition that is detrimental to the birds and possibly to the viewing public.

Displays of hawks on perches (static displays) are best undertaken in conjunction with demonstrations of birds in flight. Generally, static displays without a flying demonstration are misleading as no birds are seen untethered or flying free. Therefore those giving static displays must be prepared to explain that the hawks are hunted and or flown free on a regular basis.

Objectives

The object of any display of birds of prey should be to educate the watching public with strong emphasis on the need for bird conservation. This can be achieved by clearly stating the role which birds of prey play in the ecology of the countryside. This should be supported by suitable leaflets at all times, e.g. from Countryside Alliance, or suitable Government Agencies, etc.

The Law and Insurance

It is illegal to take from the wild in Britain or import from abroad any species of birds of prey unless approved by AHVLA or with the appropriate CITES certificate. Since 1997 all Annex A birds, captive bred, require an Article 10 certificate to be used for any commercial purpose, of which showing to the general public is one, organisers must therefore ensure that anyone giving a demonstration has the necessary licences or can account for the origin of the birds. Organisers need to take particular care that Display Givers are not collecting funds illegally or claiming charitable status fraudulently. Both the Organiser and the Demonstrator must check that Display Teams have adequate public liability insurance and are keeping within the law.

Requirements from the Event Organiser

- In Events for which the C.A. is responsible the Event Organiser must ensure that C.A. has approved the proposed Demonstrator, who in turn will have agreed to abide by these guide lines.
- Well prior to the day of the show the Event Organiser should issue clear information to the Demonstrator the location of the Event and the timing requirements, e.g. arrival time, parking, flying times, times of talks, etc.
- Each bird should be given enough room to keep it safe from its neighbours- six feet per falcon/hawk and ten feet per eagle is a recommended minimum. The demonstrator can notify the Event Organiser what length of shelter is needed depending on the birds he/she intends to bring or is required by the Event Organiser.
- Radio or cable microphones or similar aids should be available by arrangement, if any 'in ring' commentary is given.
- If the Event Organiser knows that there could be a problem with any anti-field sports group, the Demonstrator must be warned.
- The Event Organiser should check that the Demonstrator has adequate public liability insurance and are keeping within the law. It is advisable that press or television interviews on falconry or bird of prey keeping should be given by the principal demonstrator.
- Collections are not permitted at C.A. displays or stands, unless prior permission is given.
- If the Demonstrator has not got his or her own shelters for the birds and the event requires a static display of birds it is their responsibility to put up a suitable stand with requirements from the demonstrator, as indeed is done for cattle, sheep and so on.

Requirements from the DEMONSTRATOR/OWNER/KEEPER

- All birds should be accustomed to being on display and be tame and fit, with good plumage, without overgrown beaks and talons, and wearing smart, safe suitable equipment. As a general rule birds used for hunting do not make good display birds. The welfare of the birds must be kept under consideration at all times.
- All birds must have sufficient shelter from the weather, rain, heat etc., and be protected by stand-off barriers from children and dogs.
- A Static Display is intended to enable the public to view the hawks at close quarters. If the public have any questions, they must be answered by qualified falconers or keepers. The distance from the public to the tethered hawks should be outside stress or interference distance, but close enough to permit photographs.
- It is recommended that Owls, other than the large Eagle Owls, should not be displayed.

- Any hawk showing signs of agitation or distress should be removed from the display. Hawks should not be set down on perches with their hoods on for any length of time.
- It is recommended that no more than eight birds should be brought to the shows. Unless a large van or trailer is used, more than one vehicle is generally required if more than eight birds are to travel in safety and comfort.
- Birds should not be put on static display unless a suitable shelter has been provided (see "Requirements from the Event above). Signs giving the species of the birds should be visible and easily legible.
- Small birds such as Merlins (or small owls) should not be tethered next to birds that would cause them stress such as Harris Hawks, or Peregrines or Eagles.
- At no time should the static display birds be left unattended.
- Perches, baths and equipment should be in good order. Full bathing facilities with fresh water should be available to all tethered birds of prey (including owls) throughout the day.
- Article 10's are required for all appropriate birds on display. No wild disabled birds should be put on display to the public.
- ALL birds must be flown with working telemetry which has been checked and have viable batteries checked before use.
- For a variety of safety reasons the participation of children in demonstrations is not wise, or to be encouraged. If members of the public are to touch or stroke a bird, you should only permit this having had regard to the safety and welfare of the public and of the bird. Repeated handling can seriously damage the waterproofing of the plumage. The Hawk Board suggests no stroking of birds as it can be very stressful for the bird.
- The Display Team should wear suitable country dress and behave properly at all times and avoid undue sensationalism in act or statement. Falconry should not be brought into disrepute.
- The demonstrators should be competent in answering questions on falconry or on relevant legislation and be up to speed with accurate facts on the birds that they have with them. Remember that often questions may be posed by those opposed to falconry or the keeping of birds of prey, whose aim is to cause mischief.
- Demonstrators should not enter into public arguments with people who are obviously opposed to field sports. It may be necessary to suggest that discussion be continued in private later on. All demonstrators should be capable of arguing their case in a cool and logical manner.
- Enquires about taking up the sport should be answered by giving the name of either the Countryside Alliance or any reputable club or course giver. There is now a Lantra Award for Falconry which the Hawk Board strongly advises anyone interested in keeping birds of prey should investigate and take prior to getting their own bird.

Commentary, Static Display or Parade and Programme Notes

If given, the commentary is a most important part of a Display and needs careful preparation. It is advisable to witness a competent display giver and to note the points made. A clear balanced narration suitable to the audience is required. On occasion an interview style is often easier for the inexperienced.

The skeleton commentary which follows is intended for general guidance.

What you are about to see is not true falconry as it is done in the field, it is a demonstration of the ability of the various birds of prey and some of the training techniques. It is similar to a sheep dog demonstration, or a gun dog demonstration, where the animals are showing you how they would be working.

Falconry is the sport of taking wild quarry in its natural state and habitat by means of trained hawks. What you see here is a demonstration of trained hawks being flown to the fist or various lures. The lure is a sort of imitation quarry used to exercise the hawk and call it back from a distance.

The words "hawk" and "falcon" are interchangeable in ordinary conversation, but in strict usage the birds flown by falconers fall into three types:

Falcons: (Genus Falco) Long -winged, dark -eyed birds of prey. Naturally mount up to high pitch above the ground and dive or "stoop" onto their prey. Peregrine is a typical example. Falcons are trained to the lure.

Hawks: (Genus Accipiter) Short-winged, yellow eyed birds of prey. Take their prey by surprise or by a swift level chase. Sparrow Hawk is an example. Short-winged hawks are trained to the fist.

Eagles & Buzzards(Genus Aquila, Buteo, etc.) Broad-winged birds which are in their element in air currents and soar at great heights in mountainous country. Eagles are usually trained to the fist and sometimes to the lure or a perch.

The Birds you will see today are: (Names, provenance, etc.)

A hawk may be wearing a hood, which is a leather cap fitted to the bird and worn on its head. This is so that it remains quiet and is not frightened by unusual sights. There are thin leather straps (jesses) on its legs for it to be held by, and light bells which can be heard from a distance and tell the falconer where the hawk is when it is out of sight. All the birds that you see flown today should be wearing radio transmitters while flying, it is vital that these should always be attached to facilitate recovery should the hawk be lost. The bird comes to the lure or fist because it has been trained to do so. In the early stages this is achieved by offers of food. The fully trained bird does so by habit and enjoyment, but this is achieved only by the skill of the falconer after long experience.

One is often asked "Are birds of prey dangerous?" There are stories of eagles carrying off babies and so on. Like all wild animals, birds of prey are frightened of man, and stories of attacks can usually be explained by the bird being cornered and frightened, protecting its young or even being a lost trained bird which approaches a human being for food. A big eagle can carry about its own body weight at the very most and then only in a snatch lift, most birds of prey catch things of less than half their body weight, with the exception of Sparrowhawks. It would be very careless parents who left a baby young enough to weigh that where eagles might be living.

A hawk that has been fully trained for falconry and been taking quarry regularly should be able to fend for itself, if it is lost, and return to a wild state. A hawk that has not been taking quarry regularly will probably not survive, if turned loose. It will need to be "hacked back", which requires access to open country where the hawk can be provided with food every day until it learns to kill for itself, which may take some days.

These points MUST be made in any commentary or programme notes.

The birds being demonstrated here today are generally captive bred birds or birds that have the correct paperwork to be here.

Without doubt some wild birds of prey will take wild birds and game. They also take crows, magpies, jays, etc. which cause more damage to game than the hawks themselves. Birds of prey tend in any case to select weak and distressed individuals. Birds of prey are not wicked, cruel killers, but natural pruners of weak stock. Cars and cats are responsible for the death of millions more wildlife than any bird of prey.

Hawks do not make satisfactory pets. In Britain all birds of prey are protected by law. They may not be shot or trapped, and they may only be taken from the wild or imported under licence, often with quarantine restrictions as well.

Training a hawk is a difficult and demanding activity. It takes a great deal of dedication. A trained hawk needs daily, time-consuming attention, as well as access to open country, special housing and much detailed knowledge. There is far more to taking wild quarry with a trained hawk than the demonstration you have seen today; but should you wish to know more, please contact either us, a reputable club, or the Countryside Alliance.

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