

INFORMATION ON RAPTOR HOUSING

A person applying for his or her first Louisiana falconry license is required to successfully pass a supervised examination, have his or her raptor housing facilities inspected, and obtain a sponsor before the Department will issue an apprentice license.

Proper housing is not only essential to successful falconry, but is required by the Department to assure that birds are adequately cared for. It is not our intent to establish specifications for hawk houses or mews. Such specifications are readily available in reliable falconry texts if a falconer wishes to construct such a facility. We recognize that raptors can be retained in captivity and properly cared for without recourse to construction of mews. Some falconers house their raptors in the home or garage and use the backyard to meet the weathering needs of their raptors. Consequently, we provide only a general description as to what constitutes adequate or inadequate facilities, leaving final judgment to those who conduct the inspection.

ADEQUATE FACILITIES: Mews constructed for loose raptors - If mews are constructed for untethered raptors, the following general specifications should apply:

1. Loft, house, pen, or enclosure size (width x length x height, in feet):

Peregrine Falcon or similar size falcon	-----	10' x 10-20' x 9-10'
Red-tailed Hawk, Harris's Hawk, Goshawk	-----	8-10' x 10-20' x 9-10'
American Kestrel	-----	6-8' x 6-10' x 6-10'
Merlin, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk	-----	8' x 8-10' x 8-10'
Eagle or similar size bird	-----	15' x 15-20' x 9-12'

2. Vertical slats, dowels, or bars on the inside of all windows or similar openings. **Chicken wire or hardware cloth is unacceptable for window openings in houses of solid-wall construction.**

3. Shelter from wind, rain, and mid-day sun.

4. Water for drinking and bathing.

5. Sanitary conditions.

6. Adequate ventilation.

7. Perches.

Tethered Birds: Tethered raptors should be provided with a perch covered with AstroTurf, or wrapped with rope, or a similar material designed to prevent bumblefoot. Raptors can be sheltered in reduced sized mews, a garage (if free of exhaust fumes), or even in the home. When placed out of doors they should be protected from cats, dogs, raccoons, coyotes, other raptors, excessive exposure to wind, rain, snow, or sun, and be provided with water for drinking and bathing.

INADEQUATE FACILITIES: Poor condition of the raptor will indicate improper housing and/or care. Excessive broken tail and wing feathers, damage to cere and head, dirty appearance, bumblefoot, and poor physical conditions are keys to the inability of the person to provide adequate care. Examples of inadequate housing are:

Bird cage of the pet store variety.

Glass window panes on the interior where the raptor is free-lofted.

Housing constructed of chicken wire or hardware cloth.

Housing with exposure to the elements.

Housing with sharp obstructions.

Unsanitary housing such as unclean chicken houses or pigeon lofts.

Tips on Building Raptor Facilities

Raptors have different housing needs depending on the species and origin (wild versus captive bred).

Mews for a passage Red-tailed Hawk or Harris's Hawk:

Many passage hawks need to be free-lofted in a mew (enclosed flight chamber). Adequate dimensions can range from 8–10' x 10–20' x 9–10'. However, if the raptor will sometimes be tethered in this same enclosure, the floor dimensions should be at least 10' x 10'.

The flooring and any substrate must drain well and not accumulate standing water. Avoid any substrate that might dull the hawk's talons. Raptors can develop life-threatening respiratory infections (e.g., aspergillosis) if exposed to mold spores. For this reason, hay, which can harbor mold spores, should not be used for a floor covering. If the floor is the ground, bury wire or use some other barrier to prevent predators such as dogs and coyotes from digging into the mew.

Install at least two windows in the upper halves of two walls. Place one window on the front wall and one on a side wall. Having a solid rear wall gives the hawk a place to retreat to and feel safe when you enter the mew. Cover the insides of windows with vertical bars. The bars are slick so that there is nothing for the hawk to hang on or break feathers against. Bars can be made of ¾" to 1" electrical conduit and spaced 1.5" to 2" apart, depending on the species and sex of the bird.

A mew should have at least two perches that span the width of the mew. The perches are 2" x 4" wooden planks where the hawk perches on the flat surface (4") and this surface is covered with AstroTurf. Provide a high perch in the back of the mew where the hawk can retreat from you and feel comfortable. Allow at least 2' clearance for the high perch.

Install a feeding shoot with a feeding platform for the food to drop onto. The feeding shoot can be made of PVC piping or a door mail slot. Double doors prevent escapes. Some falconers build a small chamber outside the mew that becomes both the second door and the weighing shed. A second door can even be made out of netting or a tarp.

If lighting is installed, the hawk must be protected from contact with a glass bulb, and also with electrical wiring. The wiring can be run through electrical conduit.

Flight chamber for a captive bred Harris's Hawk:

Captive bred Harris's Hawks do well when exposed to a lot of stimulation. One way to provide stimulation is to house the hawk in a flight chamber made of chain-link fencing. Recommendations for chamber dimensions are the same as for a mew. Shelter from rain and ice can be provided by wiring a sheet or sheets of corrugated metal or fiberglass to the roof as needed. Shade cloth can also be tied to the top and/or sides of the chamber as needed.

The floor can be grass or dirt. Bury wire to prevent predators from digging into the chamber. The chamber should have at least two perches, one at each end, that span its width. The perches are 2" x 4" wooden planks (exterior) where the hawk perches on the flat surface (4") and this surface is covered with AstroTurf. As with the mew design, a double door, feeding shoot and feeding tray are recommended.

Weathering area for a Red-tailed Hawk or Harris's Hawk:

A weathering area for tethering a large hawk should be at least a 10' x 10' x 7' enclosure. It must be large enough that a tethered bird can bate without striking its wings on the top or sides. A larger weathering area is preferred so that the hawk can be moved to fresh grass regularly. The sides of the weathering area should be fenced with suitable material to keep predators out (e.g., chain-link fencing). The top of the weathering area should be covered with game bird netting or fencing to protect the raptor from aerial predators and prevent accidental escape. The ideal ground cover for keeping the talons sharp is a lush, grassy lawn. Shade cloth can be stretched across the top of the weathering area as needed. If the hawk is to be housed overnight in the weathering yard, burying wire or providing some other barrier to digging predators is recommended.

The perch used for tethering the hawk should be low to the ground to prevent entanglement, injury or death. A low, somewhat narrow perch requires a relatively short leash. A hawk is more likely to break its leg or become tangled if the leash is long. The bow perch can be made of welded stainless steel or another sturdy metal. Recommended dimensions are: 9–10" above the ground and 11–12" wide. The anchoring spikes should extend 8–9" below the crossbar that is flush with the ground. A longer spike length (up to 12") should be used for larger individuals or for anchoring perches in loose, sandy soils. A metal, solid ring accommodates the leash. The perch ring has inside diameter of 3.0–4.0". Cover the perching surface with AstroTurf.

Additional comments:

The bath pan for any of these facilities should be at least 4.5" deep and no smaller than 18" long by 16" wide. Large cat litter pans, bus boxes, or a UV resistant plastic mixing tub for concrete can be suitable.

Harris's Hawks have been known to suffer from frostbite. A Harris's Hawk that is at hunting weight is especially susceptible and should probably not be exposed to temperatures below freezing.

Facilities can be designed to have the mew sharing a common wall with the weathering area. In this case, the weathering area serves as a double door for the mews.

One way to save space when housing a captive bred Harris's Hawk is to free-loft the hawk in the flight chamber over the summer and then convert this chamber into a weathering area during the hunting season by removing all the perches. The hawk can then be tethered inside the chamber for easy access during the hunting season.

Some passage hawks do well when free-lofted in a mew over the molt and then tethered in the mew during the hunting season. The mew will probably need some or all of the following modifications before the hawk is happy being tethered there: 1) remove the mew perches, 2) cover windows or portions of windows, 3) cover the floor with a thick rubber mat to protect the hawk's feet, talons and feathers when it bates. Some passage hawks bate too much and would injure themselves if tethered. These individuals need to be free-lofted in a mew year-round.

Before placing a raptor in any facility, check the entire facility for anything sharp. Run a magnet to pick up any nails and other small pieces of metal.

Falconry and Raptor Husbandry Books:

Beebe, Frank and Harold Webster. 2013. North American Falconry and Hunting Hawks, 9th ed. Western Sporting, Sheridan, WY.

- Coulson, Jennifer and Tom Coulson. 2012. *The Harris's Hawk Revolution*. Parabuteo Publishing, Pearl River, LA.
- Fox, Nick. 1995. *Understanding the bird of prey*. Hancock House Publishers, Blaine, WA.
- Kimsey, Bryan and Jim Hodge. 2002. *Falconry Equipment: A Guide to Making and Using Falconry Gear*, 3rd ed.
- McDermott, Michael. 2009. *The Imprint Accipiter II*, 2nd ed. Western Sporting, WY.
- McElroy, Harry. 2008. *Desert Hawking IV: Quail*. Privately published, Willcox, AZ.
- McGranaghan, Liam J. 2007. *The Red-Tailed Hawk: A Complete Guide to Training and Hunting North America's Most Versatile Game Hawk*, 4th ed.
- Mullenix, Matthew. 2007. *American Kestrels in Modern Falconry*, 3rd ed. Western Sporting Publications, Ranchester, WY.

Falconry Book and Equipment Suppliers:

- <http://www.westernsporting.com/>
- <https://www.northwoodsfalconry.com/>
- <http://www.mikesfalconry.com/>
- <http://www.harrishawkrevolution.com/>
- <http://www.deserthawking.com/>

Falconry Resources

- North American Falconers Association <http://www.n-a-f-a.com/>
- American Falconry* magazine <http://www.americanfalconry.com/>
- North American Falconers Exchange <http://www.nafex.net/>
- The Modern Apprentice <http://www.themodernapprentice.com/>