

Oregon falconers adhere to strict guidelines

By [Mark Freeman](#)

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Oregon's 94 licensed falconers are some of the most regulated sport-hunters in the state, falling under the wings of state wildlife biologists and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Every state but Hawaii has a program affiliated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, but most oversight comes through state natural-resource agencies, says Martin Nugent, who oversees the falconry program for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Falconers must first secure state and federal licenses to possess and transport raptors, Nugent says. Individual facilities also must meet minimum requirements and pass state inspections.

Falconers fall into three classifications — apprentice, general and master — with the classifications determining what type of bird falconers can fly.

To become an apprentice, one must be sponsored by a master or general falconer who will help teach training and caring for the bird. Apprentices must be at least 14 years old and they can possess only one raptor, such as an American kestrel or a red-shouldered hawk. Apprenticeships last at least two years.

General falconers must be 18 years old and pass a written test. They can have two birds, including Cooper's hawks, prairie falcons, Merlin and great-horned owls.

After five years as a general, one can become a master falconer. Masters can have up to three raptors — including peregrine falcons.

Other licenses allow general and master falconers to take individual birds from the wild under strict conditions.

Nugent works closely with the Oregon Falconers Association, which includes the vast majority of licensed falconers here.

— Mark Freeman