**YVCipedia RAPTOR**

Falcon Care Sheet

## **Species Overview**

Falcons are fast, agile birds of prey belonging to the genus *Falco*, known for their incredible speed, sharp vision, and predatory precision. Common falcons in falconry and captive settings include the **Peregrine Falcon**, **Saker Falcon**, **Lanner Falcon**, and **Gyrfalcon**, each with its own temperament and environmental preferences.

Unlike parrots and companion birds, falcons are typically kept by trained falconers under strict legal and welfare standards. They are **not suitable as casual pets**—their care demands expertise, time, and legal permits. At YVC, we only recommend falcon husbandry for licensed and actively practicing falconers with a deep understanding of raptor behavior, health, and training.

## **Housing & Environment**

Falcons require **large, secure enclosures** (mews) and a separate, weathering area for outdoor access and sun exposure. Enclosures must allow for natural behaviors like wing stretching, sunning, and bathing.

At YVC, we emphasize **perch variety and safe flooring**—abrasive or wire surfaces can cause foot injuries like bumblefoot. Enclosures should be protected from predators, escape-proof, and well-ventilated but draft-free.

Environmental enrichment and training flights (under falconry protocols) are crucial. Falcons that are not regularly exercised risk obesity, boredom, and psychological distress.

Key considerations:

* Clean, quiet environment with minimal stressors
* Multiple perches of safe materials (wood, rubber-covered metal)
* Adequate space for full wing extension
* Visual barriers between aggressive or nervous birds
* Daily cleaning of perches, feeding stations, and flooring

## **Diet & Nutrition**

Falcons are obligate carnivores, and their diet must reflect that. At YVC, we recommend a **whole-prey diet** wherever possible, including **quail, rats, mice, chicks, or pigeons**. Prey should be species-appropriate, fresh or frozen/thawed with proper storage, and balanced for calcium-phosphorus ratios.

Falcons should **not** be fed muscle meat alone (like chicken breast), as this can cause severe nutritional deficiencies.

General guidelines:

* Whole-prey items provide essential nutrients, bones, and roughage
* Supplements are rarely needed if prey is appropriately varied
* Fast days may be appropriate depending on falconry practice, but must be carefully managed
* Water should be available at all times, though many falcons drink infrequently

Monitoring weight and condition is vital. Falcons often maintain optimal health within tight weight ranges specific to each individual bird.

## **Behavior & Handling**

Falcons are not companion animals and should be handled **only by trained falconers or veterinary professionals**. Even tame birds may show aggression, especially during molt, breeding season, or after poor handling.

At YVC, we stress:

* Respecting flight response and stress signals
* Using proper gloves, jesses, and anklets during handling
* Avoiding unnecessary restraint—use falconry hoods or towels as appropriate
* Maintaining consistency in training and routines

Captive falcons often respond best to daily routines, predictable handling, and calm environments. New handlers should work under experienced supervision.

## **Enrichment**

Mental and physical stimulation is non-negotiable for falcons. A bored falcon is not just unhappy—it’s at risk for illness, feather damage, and self-harm.

Enrichment approaches include:

* **Hunting or lure training** (under falconry guidelines)
* **Interactive time outdoors** in weathering yards
* Regular variation in perching environments
* Visual enrichment like moving objects or mirrors (carefully introduced)

Bathing opportunities and sunlight are also important for feather health.

## **Health & Veterinary Care**

Preventative care is essential, as falcons often **hide signs of illness until advanced stages**. At YVC, we recommend **annual wellness exams and fecal parasite testing**, and **bloodwork as needed**, especially for working or breeding birds.

### **Common Health Concerns:**

* **Aspergillosis** – A serious fungal respiratory disease, often triggered by stress or poor ventilation
* **Bumblefoot** – Pressure sores on feet from improper perching or inactivity
* **Obesity** – Particularly in birds not flown regularly
* **Parasitism** – Internal and external parasites from wild-caught prey
* **Feather damage** – From nutritional issues or environmental stress
* **Lead or rodenticide poisoning** – From eating contaminated prey

Behavioral changes such as reduced vocalization, fluffed feathers, lethargy, or decreased prey interest should prompt immediate veterinary attention.

## **Facts & FAQs**

* The **Peregrine Falcon** is the fastest bird on Earth, reaching speeds over 200 mph during dives
* Falcons rely on **visual cues**, not olfactory, and have extraordinary long-distance vision
* Most falcons used in falconry are **imprinted or trained** from a young age
* U.S. law requires a **falconry license** to keep falcons; penalties for unauthorized possession are steep
* Breeding in captivity is possible but complex, requiring specialized facilities and knowledge

## **Supplies Checklist**

* Secure mews and weathering area
* Variety of natural perches and artificial turf
* Access to sunlight or UVB lighting (if indoors)
* Clean water supply and bathing dish
* Quality whole-prey items (properly stored)
* Glove, jesses, hood, and other falconry handling tools
* Scale for regular weight checks
* Emergency kit with nail clippers, antiseptic, and vet contact info
* Transport crate for veterinary visits
* Permits and documentation (if applicable)

*Yarmouth Veterinary Center*