

Job Progress Report

State: CaliforniaProject Number: W-54-R-12 Project Title: Nongame Wildlife InvestigationsJob Number: II-5 Job Title: Falconry Monitoring ProgramPeriod Covered: July 1, 1979 - June 30, 1980 Job Type: Survey & Inventory

SUMMARY

Falconry is an ancient, time-demanding, and sophisticated sport originating over 4,000 years ago. Because of the numbers of people involved with falconry today in California, the California Fish and Game Commission, as authorized by legislative mandate, established regulations to provide for the optimum care of the raptors involved. In general, there seems to be a downward trend in numbers of people involved in the falconry program. There were fewer licenses issued, a slight increase in the number of inactive falconers is noted, and fewer birds were held or acquired by falconers as compared to 1978. Data from 1978 rather than 1979 will be used to compare to the 1980 season because of the accessibility of records for that year.

BACKGROUND

Falconry regulations were established in 1957 when three licenses were first issued. Today, to qualify as a first-time licensee, the applicant must pass a written exam covering the rules and regulations pertaining to falconry and become familiar with the natural history and care of raptors. Adequate housing must be provided for the birds held under a falconry permit. When the above qualifications are met and upon receipt of a \$25.00 fee, the successful applicant will qualify for an apprentice falconry license.

Certain license classes have been established by the Fish and Game Commission and are as follows:

- 1) Apprentice: Beginning falconers are required to be 16 years or older. They are allowed to possess one bird, either an American Kestrel or a Red-tailed Hawk.
- 2) General: Applicant must have two years' experience at the previous level and may possess two birds.
- 3) Master: Five years of experience is required at the previous level, and this class permits the falconer to man three birds.

As with most other states, California Falconry Regulations have been periodically updated to keep pace with the need for a stricter control on the capture of selected raptor species. In 1968, Peregrine Falcons were placed on the list of protected species in California and as such, they could no longer be taken from the wild in the state. Gyrfalcon and Harris' Hawk were also placed on the protected list. A limited number of Prairie Falcons may be taken in a year in which there is normal reproduction of young.

The impact of falconry on wild raptor populations is also of concern and needs to be studied and it should be determined what impact human disturbance has on the reproductive success of wild raptors.

OBJECTIVE

The primary objective of the Falconry Monitoring Program is to assure that the sport of falconry does not jeopardize the populations of native birds of prey or further deplete those populations faced with extinction. In the event there is a threat to the raptor resource as a result from its use in falconry, the Department will propose regulation changes to the Commission to assure its protection.

PROCEDURES

Annually, falconers are required to submit a report on the species and number of raptors in their possession to California Department of Fish and Game. Report provides details on the number of species of raptors in possession at the beginning of the season, the number of birds acquired, the number lost, and the total number of raptors in possession at the end of the reporting period.

During the falconry reporting period, the report forms are mailed to all licensed falconers. Those falconers who do not return their reports are notified and if reports contain any discrepancies, letters are sent out for clarification.

Reported information is compiled on a master sheet. The data is recorded by name, license class, and species. Species information is further broken down as follows to:

- 1) Birds obtained from breeders or falconers
- 2) Birds caught in the wild as nestlings or adults
- 3) Birds obtained from a rehabilitation center or from Fish and Game
- 4) Birds lost due to escape, release, or death
- 5) Birds transferred to breeders or to another falconer

FINDINGS

For the 1980 falconry program, 528 licenses were issued. This appears to be following a downward trend in total numbers of licenses issued after a peak in 1977 (Figure 1). The number of inactive falconers was recorded with a slight increase to 6.2 percent from 5.2 percent in 1978.

There were 22 species of raptors used in the sport of falconry in 1980. Of these species, the most popular was the Harris' Hawk. It was followed in popularity by the Red-tailed Hawk, Prairie Falcon, Goshawk and Cooper's Hawk, accounting for 81 percent of the total number of species (Table 1). The Peregrine Falcon, Merlin, American Kestrel, the cross between the Peregrine and Prairie Falcon and the Great Horned Owl follow in popularity. The remaining 12 species used account for only 5.75 percent of the total number of raptors held under falconry licenses.

Figure 1

CALIFORNIA FALCONRY LICENSES, 1957-1980

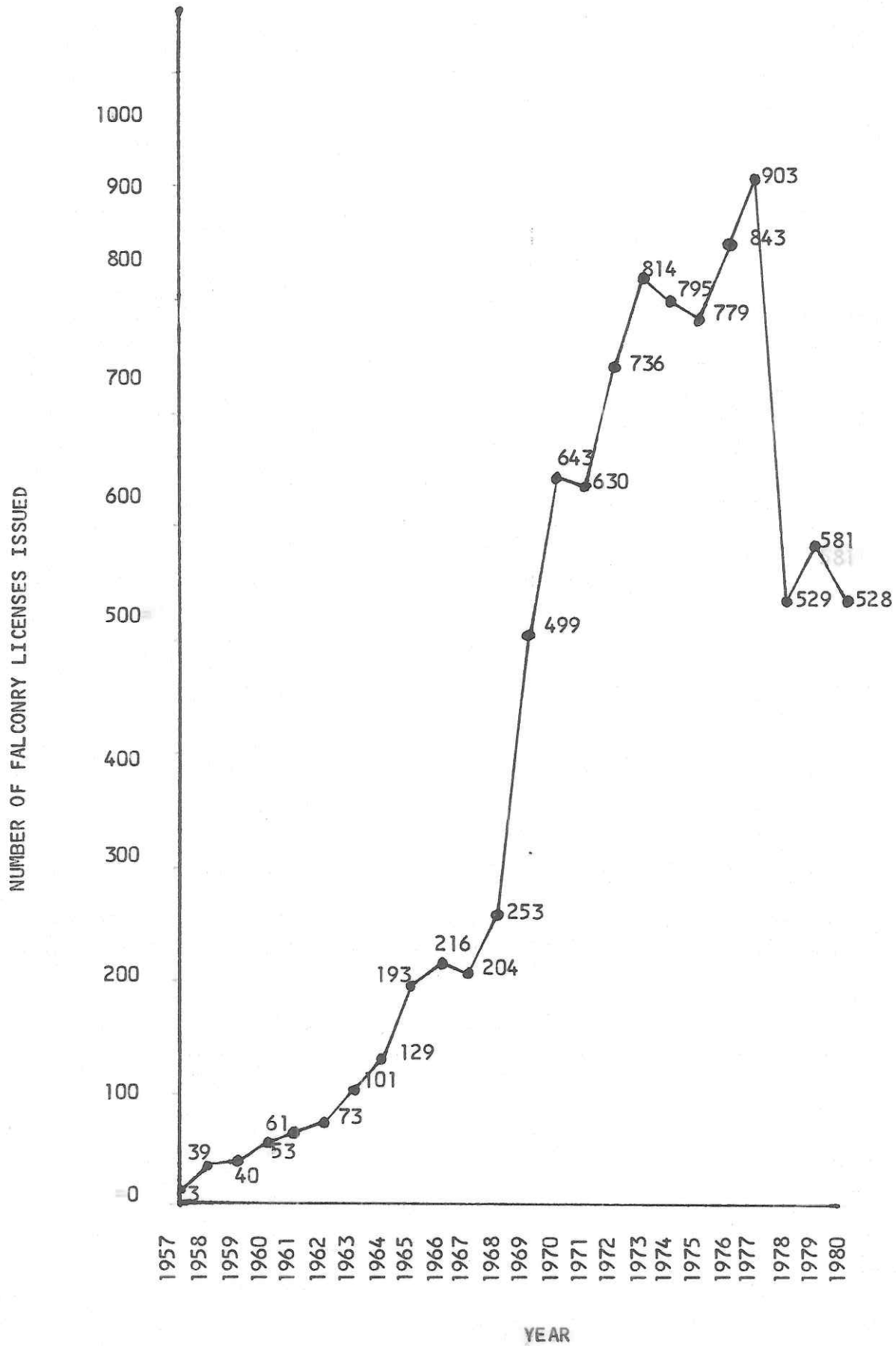


Table 1. Raptors Most Frequently Used for Falconry in 1980.

	<u>Numbers Held at End of Season</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Harris' Hawk	86	21.5
Red-tailed Hawk	76	19.0
Prairie Falcon	64	16.0
Goshawk	59	14.75
Cooper's Hawk	32	8.0
Peregrine Falcon	19	4.75
Merlin	12	3.0
American Kestrel	12	3.0
Peregrine and Prairie Falcon	9	2.25
Great Horned Owl	8	2.0
Other	<u>23</u>	<u>5.75</u>
TOTAL	400	100.00

It is interesting to note that the Harris' Hawk reportedly was trapped at Salton Sea and Imperial County, California. No recent sightings or evidence of Harris' Hawks have been reported for California which makes these data suspect. Total number of birds held under falconry permits was also lower by 12.5 percent from 1978, with 391 in 1980 compared to 447 in 1978 (Table 2). Bird loss is about 37 percent, which is not a significant decrease from 38 percent in 1978. There was a general decline in the number of raptors possessed of the 5 most frequently used species.

The captive raptor breeding program authorized by the Fish and Game Commission may be responsible for the increased number of falconers using captive-reared birds (Table 3). Of the five most popular species of raptors used, 1.6 percent were obtained from breeders in 1978 compared to 11.3 in 1980; birds taken from the wild in 1978 accounted for 59 percent of the total compared to 60 percent in 1980, a slight increase.

The demand for captive-reared birds continues to be high and the breeding program removes pressure on the wild population of raptors.

Geographically, it appears that the majority of falconers reside in Region 5 which includes the southern deserts and the major metropolitan areas of Los Angeles and San Diego (Table 4). Falconers from the various geographical areas all hold fewer birds than the number of licenses issued.

ANALYSIS

Based on the above data, it appears there is a downward trend in the number of licensed falconers. This may be due to a variety of reasons including an increase in falconers' license fees to \$25.00 and implementation of the new Federal written exam. In addition, the number of birds held and the number of species used in falconry has decreased from previous years. This may be due to an increased difficulty in obtaining a license.

Table 2. Summary of Numbers and Kinds of Raptors Held
Under Falconry Licenses in 1978 and 1980.

	Possession	Acquired	Lost	Released	Escape	Killed	Died	Transfer	Other	% loss
Goshawk	1980	59	44	33	4	16	1	6	4	32
	1978	54	61	43	4	21	3	5	9	37
Cooper's Hawk	1980	32	47	43	14	22	1	4	1	54
	1978	44	46	34	15	14	1	3	1	38
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1980	5	9	9	1	7	0	0	0	64
	1978	2	6	7	2	5	0	0	0	87
Marsh Hawk	1980	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1978	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ferruginous Hawk	1980	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1978	3	5	3	0	2	0	0	0	38
Red-tailed Hawk	1980	76	87	69	26	21	2	7	9	42
	1978	102	135	112	40	40	9	10	3	47
Red-shouldered Hawk	1980	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	33
	1978	0	3	3	1	2	0	0	0	100
Harris' Hawk	1980	86	39	14	0	2	3	0	2	11
	1978	103	71	38	9	7	3	3	0	22
Gyrfalcon	1980	2	3	5	1	1	0	1	0	100
	1978	4	4	4	1	0	0	1	1	50
Prairie Falcon	1980	64	56	44	2	15	1	6	13	36
	1978	58	59	54	2	23	1	4	20	46
Peregrine Falcon	1980	19	15	16	0	3	1	1	8	47
	1978	19	13	9	1	2	0	2	4	28
Merlin	1980	12	23	22	4	10	0	3	5	63
	1978	14	23	17	2	11	0	1	2	46

Table 2. (Cont.)

	Possession	Acquired	Lost	Released	Escape	Killed	Died	Transfer	Other	% loss
American Kestrel	1980 1978	24 28	18 32	7 9	11 13	0 1	0 9	0 0	0 0	50 84
Great Horned Owl	1980 1978	4 11	2 4	1 4	1 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	17 15
Crested Eagle	1980 1978	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0
Lanner Falcon	1980 1978	0 5	1 3	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	1 3	100 33
Lagger Falcon	1980 1978	1 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0
Peregrine x Prairie Falcon	1980 1978	5 4	1 0	0 0	1 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	3 0	40 0
Peals x Prairie Falcon	1980 1978	1 2	1 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	1 0	0 0	0 0	100 0
Gyr x Peregrine Falcon	1980 1978	1 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0
Harris x Red- tailed Hawk	1980 1978	3 0	2 0	0 0	0 0	1 0	0 0	0 0	1 0	66 0
Rough-Legged Hawk	1980 1978	0 1	1 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	1 0	0 0	100 0
Total	1980 1978	393 442	282 263	60 90	110 140	10 18	29 38	51 55	25 22	

Table 3. Comparison of Numbers and Methods of Taking
Most Popular Raptors Between 1978 and 1980.

<u>Species</u>	<u>Numbers of Birds Acquired</u>							
	<u>Total</u>		<u>From Breeder</u>		<u>From Wild</u>		<u>Other</u>	
	<u>1978</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1978</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1978</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1978</u>	<u>1980</u>
Harris' Hawk	71	39	2	9	29	12	40	18
Red-tailed Hawk	135	87	0	0	81	63	54	24
Prairie Falcon	59	56	3	22	20	12	36	22
Goshawk	61	44	1	0	47	38	13	6
Coopers' Hawk	46	47	0	0	43	41	3	6
Total:	372	273	6	31	220	166	146	76

Table 4. Comparison of Numbers of Falconers
by Department of Fish and Game Region, 1980.

<u>Region</u>	<u>Numbers of Licenses</u>		<u>Numbers of Birds Reported</u>	
		(%)		(%)
1	13	3.12	8	2.05
2	41	9.83	36	9.21
3	120	28.78	118	30.18
4	13	3.12	12	3.07
5	230	55.15	217	55.49
Total	417	100%	391	100%

Though there is no direct evidence that falconry is responsible for depleting the number of wild raptors, there is some reason to believe that it is a possible cause for the decreasing numbers in specific locales (Mallette and Schlorff 1978). In 1973, Wiley (1975) conducted a study of 116 Red-shouldered and Red-tailed Hawk nests. He concluded that harvesting was the major cause for nest failure. He also found that the majority of falconers who took nestlings were unlicensed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Continue to monitor and enforce the falconry regulations. Investigate those reports of Harris' Hawks being acquired in California.
2. Continue to work on projects which will be of benefit to wild raptor populations.
3. Work toward phasing out the take of selected species of raptors from the wild for falconry and meet the recreational demand for these birds through the captive raptor breeding program.

LITERATURE CITED

Mallette, Robert D. and R. Schlorff. 1978. A plan for California raptors. Calif. Dep. Fish and Game.

Wiley, J. W. 1975. The nesting and reproductive success of Red-tailed Hawks and Red-shouldered Hawks in Orange County, California, 1973. Condor 77:133-139.

Prepared by:

Ronald W. Schlorff
for Lyann Comrack
Seasonal Aide

Approved by:

Robert D. Mallette
Robert D. Mallette
Nongame Wildlife Coordinator

Approved by:

Eldridge G. Hunt
Eldridge G. Hunt, Chief
Wildlife Management Branch

Date:

April 28, 1981