

RFAWA POLICY STATEMENT



CODE OF ETHICS

Please note that all contents of this submission remain the intellectual property of the Raptor Fliers Association of Western Australia and may not be copied, shared or otherwise reproduced without authorisation. Questions regarding the use of this information should be sent to Renae Okley, RFAWA Secretary, PO Box 138. Serpentine, WA 6125



A brood of orphaned Peregrine Falcons close to fledging

Purpose

This Code of Ethics has been developed as part of a suite of policy documents that outline the ethics, standards and philosophy of RFAWA. It advises on best practice with regard to the ethical treatment of raptors in our care and in the wild, and is designed to be read as part of RFAWA's Code of Practice.

Introduction

RFAWA members shall endeavour to employ, uphold and promote the use of the highest standards and best practice relating to the handling, general management, use of suitable equipment and housing, and conduct the training, conditioning and free-flying of Birds of Prey with the utmost consideration for the bird's safety and well-being and eventual rehabilitation where possible.

They must always seek to positively influence the public's perception of the Association and of the use and practice of the free flying techniques that we employ. Anyone with a casual or passing interest in free flying raptors should be made fully aware of the level of all legal aspects, commitment, dedication, time and costs involved. Those with a genuine interest will demonstrate enthusiasm, commitment, determination and maturity. They must be willing to serve out the required apprenticeship, or otherwise satisfy the committee of their prior training and qualifications.

In the interests of transparency and accountability, all members are strongly encouraged to keep a personal diary or logbook detailing as much information about each individual raptor being free flown, including:

- daily records of flying weight;
- the raptor's development and progress;
- veterinary records and reports; and
- any other notable information that may be of value to the Association, its members or interested parties.

Members must conduct their raptor free exercise flying activities in compliance with current laws and regulations and in mutual co-operation and trust with officials from Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA, formerly DPaW) and other authorities.

Members must show respect towards landowners and private property (and always gain their prior permission to use their land), members of the general public, all wildlife and animal welfare. All members should be aware of the dangers of negative press and or TV coverage and refer media queries or requests for interviews to the Committee or the appointed Public Relations Officer.

Care, training and free-flying of raptors for rehabilitation

All raptors that are being free exercise flown should carry a small identification tag which clearly shows the contact details of the rehabilitator. In the case of any rehabilitated raptor being returned to the wild, this tag must be removed before final release unless it is an approved identity ring or marker under the appropriate licencing from DBCA.

Members must ensure that all housing and equipment is fit for purpose and consistent with any guidelines provided by RFAWA. At the very least, all housing and equipment should meet the minimum standards and requirements of the DBCA guidelines see 'Code of Practice for Wildlife Rehabilitation in Western Australia' or any future revision/replacement of this document.

Raptors that are not undergoing daily handling, training or free flying should be free lofted in a suitable enclosure whenever it is practicable or required in the circumstances. Raptors that require tethering for

the purposes of daily handling and management should be suitably 'manned' and display a calm disposition.

RFAWA will advise Apprentice grade members as to the type and species of raptor their level of experience warrants them working with unsupervised (although we have no power to enforce this). RFAWA will consider the Apprentice's individual circumstances, mentor assessments and recommendations.

Use of Radio Telemetry/GPS/Satellite Tracking Systems

In accordance with the required licensing in the case of raptors undergoing rehabilitation, and where otherwise appropriate, all raptors whilst being free exercise flown shall be fitted with a functional and activated GPS or radio-frequency transmitter that is fit for purpose and is securely attached in a suitable manner approved by the Association.

Every reasonable effort must be made to recover any errant raptor. Note: It is permissible, in exceptional circumstances only, and with the approval and direction of the Committee, to free-fly a raptor without the use of telemetry.

No raptor may be final-released to the wild environment whilst carrying any radio-telemetry and or GPS tracking device, or any other equipment other than under the appropriate licensing by DBCA. For further information, please see the RFAWA Policy Statement – *'The appropriate methods of fitting and use of radio telemetry and GPS tracking systems'*

The role of mentors

The RFAWA Secretary shall keep a record of all graded members and approved mentors. The role and responsibilities of RFAWA mentors cannot be underestimated. Mentorship requires a high level of dedication, involvement and personal sacrifice and should not be taken lightly. It is much more than signing a form.

A mentor is responsible to the apprentice, to the raptor in their care, and in a wider sense to the upholding of the Aims and Goals and future well-being of the Association. The mentor must be highly skilled, experienced and competent, uncompromisingly ethical, and continually available to the apprentice.

The mentor must be able to fully appreciate the apprentice's needs and be able to guide them to and through the appropriate learning material, have an awareness of the status of all equipment or housing in use, the apprentice's activities, and the condition and current status of any raptor in their care.

Selection criteria for raptors to be free exercise flown for the purposes of rehabilitation

Most raptors that are taken into care are not suitable as candidates for a training and free exercise flying program prior to release. This is usually because:

- they can be released within a few days in a reasonably fit condition; or
- injuries will prevent them from ever being fit enough to fend for themselves in the wild environment.

The very few raptors deemed to be suitable for training and free exercise flying prior to release are to be selected primarily for their suitability. Selection criteria include:

- the improved probability of successful release and longer-term survival in the wild, which can be directly attributable to the use of free-flying techniques, and when;
- other rehabilitation methods and release options may not be suitable for that particular individual, or have previously proven to be unsuccessful.

Typically, this would include young orphaned birds that cannot be hacked back, and are not human imprinted (see note below), or previously injured or incapacitated older birds (particularly those from the more dynamic hunter species) that have spent a protracted time period in captivity.

Note, Imprinting: Great care should be taken to ensure that no wild raptor becomes 'imprinted' onto a human foster parent. It is of questionable conservation benefit to release any imprinted raptor to the wild environment and is strictly against the ethos of RFAWA. Please see the RFAWA information sheet - *Understanding and measures to avoid the mal-imprinting of wild raptors undergoing rehabilitation.*

The more dynamic hunters, for example Peregrine Falcons, Goshawks, and Hobbies, depending on the individual circumstances, are more likely to require and benefit from extensive free exercise flight to build up the required levels of fitness which is consistent with, and essential for free living in these species.

The required levels of fitness varies from species to species. Ideally and as a general guide only, those of the 'Falco' genus should be able to perform one or all of the following:

- 30 to 50 passes to a swung lure,
- climb to 100 metres or more to a kite or drone suspended lure, and
- be capable of continuous single flights of several kilometres at a time.

Accipiters (the hawks) and other species should be able to:

- fly up to a kilometre at a time
- demonstrate an ability to twist and turn,
- grasp and hold firmly with both feet and
- in the case of the eagles and some of the searchers, the ability to seek out and use thermals

Raptors that are orphaned prior to fledging or reaching full hunting/foraging capability may require extensive free exercise flight or 'hacking' where practicable, up to the point that they can demonstrate that they have normal and healthy physical functions and hunting ability which are consistent with that species surviving in the wild environment.

Many non-imprinted raptors, which show an outwardly tame disposition during hands-on training and free exercise flying, very quickly revert to being afraid of the close approach of any human, including the previous handler, once back in the wild for a few days. However, prior to release they should also become accustomed to and demonstrate an awareness of the dangers of other natural predators in the wild environment.

Reporting

Notwithstanding the requirement to comply with any COP or standards required by DBCA, RFAWA members shall complete the Association *Raptor Report Form (1 and 2 as appropriate)* detailing the circumstances of all raptors selected to undergo training and free exercise flying for rehabilitation. All raptor report forms should be submitted to the Association in a timely manner as stated on the form.

Note: The *Raptor Report Form* is for our own purposes to build and record a history of our conservation efforts. RFAWA reserves the right to share the information with interested parties as appropriate, with the consent of the rehabilitator concerned (see form), or if ordered to by the relevant authority.

Rehabilitation and release

The laws of nature dictate that a wild free-living raptor must successfully and without assistance recognise, pursue, capture, kill and eat its natural quarry in the wild environment, and in the case of the searchers, be able to locate sufficient food. Without these abilities no raptor can be deemed fit for release either legally or morally. Our goal is to provide a platform for this natural and essential phenomenon through building fitness by means of conditioning and free exercise flying, and controlled exposure to all the variables of the wild environment.

RFAWA encourages rehabilitation and release methods which facilitate a raptor to reach and achieve:

- a high level of physical and mental fitness;
- demonstrable ability to fend for themselves in a manner which is consistent with normal survival of that species in the wild; or
- that monitors post-release survival in such a way that enables intervention and rescue in cases where it may be required.

It should be remembered at all times that whilst caring for any raptor, RFAWA members have a moral and legal obligation to ensure that its welfare is paramount. Inevitably this includes euthanasia when the bird has no realistic chance of a successful return to the wild, or when it cannot be reasonably assured that it can have a good quality of life whilst being retained for the purpose of educational display work or scientific study under the appropriate licencing.

Our endeavours with regard to rehabilitation should be in line with the guidelines outlined in the DBCA 'Code of Practice for Wildlife Rehabilitation in Western Australia' under which all members will be required to be licenced. It is our individual responsibility to ensure we are fully conversant with this document in its entirety, and particularly to Section 3.15 (Suitability for release) with regard to final release requirements.

Wild raptors undergoing free flight rehabilitation must only be held as long as they are progressing as expected towards successful release and they should be released in an appropriate location, in good feather and in perfect overall condition, once they are deemed fit to survive in the wild environment, or as soon as it is reasonably practicable thereafter.

Conclusion

Any breach of RFAWA *Code of Ethics*, Regulations/laws by a member may be deemed to be an action injurious to the interests of the Association, and may result in disciplinary action or expulsion. The *Code of Ethics* may be modified by the RFAWA Committee at any time, and as it sees fit.

