

# Dealing with Hawks and Falcons

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I haven't had Tipplers for 7 years, but for what it's worth, here are some ideas on dealing with hawks and falcons.

Before and after keeping Tipplers I have flown rollers and racing homers. I've flown in hawk havens with Coopers hitting birds on the deck and Falcons working them up high, and I've flown in better places (right now, no falcons and, knock on wood, Coopers leave me alone April - August. Before and after that, lock it up tight!). I've flown for months without losing a bird, I've lost 2 and 3 birds a day. I like the former better than the latter.

The two golden rules when dealing with raptors are:

- 1) Be Flexible.
- 2) Be Unpredictable.

Right there some guys are just going to stop reading. We all learned when we started flying competition pigeons that golden rule #1 for getting top performance is to be **predictable**, have a routine. I will say up front, the performance hit you take from being flexible, creative, and unpredictable is less than the hit your birds take when a Falcon works them. Injured and dead birds deliver poor performance.

The other thing is, this is not your father's Oldsmobile. Many of the competition flying breeds (Rollers, Tipplers, Racers) and the methods of training and contesting with them were developed in a different time and place (Western Europe, late 19th and early 20th centuries) under different conditions. North America in the 21st century, with most guys keeping pigeons in more rural, open areas, or in cities with *much* taller buildings (that falcons can live on top of), is a much different playing field. And the avian predator situation is drastically different everywhere than it was 100 years ago. We need to be flexible and we need to be creative, but it can be done. People flew pigeons for thousands of years in falcon territory and they weren't breeding thousands of birds to do it either.

That said, the first thing to do when you are under constant, daily attack is to break the cycle. Lock the birds down. One week. Maybe two or three weeks. A falcon can't afford to hang around in a spot day, after day if it is getting no food. It has to move on to better hunting grounds. But the falcon also likes predictable, easy hunting grounds, and he will remember, and keep checking back. My usual rule is to lock down for 1 week after I lose a bird. Since you've been losing birds for a while, the falcon is conditioned to your "bird feeder" and it is going to take longer to get him moving on.

Once you have the cycle broken, you don't want that falcon back. Or if he comes back, you want him to leave hungry. Depending on how many falcons you have, how close he nests etc. you will inevitably lose a bird or two. When you do. Lock it down for a week. Period. So the falcon doesn't get a bad habit of visiting you.

Things you can do to minimize exposure:



1) Fly smaller kits. When I flew in California, you could have two falcons hit a kit of rollers (20+ birds) in a 1 hour fly during the "good" (Spring and Summer) season. I could fly 6 birds for 1 hour in the "good" season with no attacks. If I flew one bird at a time, I could fly all year with no losses. The more birds you have and the longer they are up, the more likely you will get hit.

Of course with Tipplers, you want them up for a long time, so that cranks up your exposure right there. But if you keep it to 3 birds up and have just one kit in training, it's less of an attractive target than 12 birds up for 7 hours, or multiple kits up all day, every day. Keep the other birds in reserve so if the falcon does pay a visit, he doesn't ruin ALL your birds.

Another thing is, experiment with "spoiled" birds. Scared birds diving from a falcon will land anywhere. Maybe they are, indeed, "spoiled" for 17 hours, but they might still be good for something less tiring like 12 hours. Smart birds that can dive away from the falcon will live to fly another day. 12 hours isn't a record but you need to decide for yourself, would you rather get 12 hours on a comp day or set your sights on a record and have empty kit boxes?

2) Fly at random times. Even fast flying racers can get tagged by a falcon or other hawk. Particularly if the buffet opens at exactly the same time every day. Fly morning, mid-day, afternoon. Mix it up, jump around. Don't fly every day. I saw an ingenious article in an old racing pigeon magazine where a guy took a furnace damper motor and rigged it to his trap. Then he put the switch on a timer so he could program random times throughout the day (when he was at work) for the trap to open, the birds to go out, and then the feed trays to open. The more predictable you are, the more likely a hawk or falcon will find you.

3) Try flying shorter flies. The less time your birds are up, the less exposure they have. Having birds up for 8, 10 hours day after day is asking for more trouble than having birds up for 5 hours.

All of these things will likely reduce your performance, it is up to you to decide if keeping pigeons in the air is more important than holding firm to a particular line. Think of the falcon as a handicap. It's like carrying 150 lbs in a horse race rather than 100 lbs. All other things being equal, the horse carrying 100 lbs will win. See what you can do under 150 lbs. In many ways it is no different than other environmental handicaps (e.g. shorter, hotter days in Texas vs. Ireland) -- just more disheartening when you are on the short end of the stick.

Good luck and I hope something here is useful! I hate to see anyone contemplate packing it in with flying pigeons.



*If any members have more information to help those that are being decimated by either the falcon or the hawk we certainly would appreciate it. If you have some great stories where the pigeon actually wins the battle - even better. This has become a global problem and no fancier is immune to it. Send us some stuff!*