

At hotels and other businesses, predator birds have gotten popular

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Image 1. Falconer Roxanne Word and Floyd, a Harris's Hawk, patrol the grounds of the Montage Hotel to help keep seagulls away on August 2, 2019, in Laguna Beach, California. Photo by: Robert Gauthier/Los Angeles Times/TNS

LAGUNA BEACH, California — Floyd the hawk watched over his world. There was a pool below him, a hot tub to the left and a restaurant to his right. The roofs of the Montage Laguna Beach hotel were behind him.

The hawk kept an eye out. He watched for seagulls and other birds that make a mess on the roofs and steal food from guests by the pool. His job was to bother the other birds. He would let them know they were not wanted. The hawk spread its wings and flew down, returning to land on the hand of its trainer.

Adam Chavez is a falconer who has worked for more than six years for the Montage. He and the trained birds keep the hotel free of flying pests. "It's a predator-prey relationship that has been going on for centuries," he said. The prey fear the predator will eat them.

Predator Rules The Property

Falconers like Chavez say they do not use the hawks and falcons to harm other birds. The trained birds just need to fly around an area. That sends the message that a predator rules the property.

Falconry goes back thousands of years. Only in the last 10 years or so has it become more common to see birds of prey working in nuisance abatement. They scare away other birds.

In California, several falconers have turned the ancient hobby into businesses. They are used by hotels, airports, farms and office buildings.

In 2007, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service started approving permits that allow predatory birds to be used for business. Since then, it has approved 137 permits to use them for bird abatement. California has gotten 43 of those permits.



No Pooping, Nesting Or Stealing Food Allowed

Owners of businesses and hotels think about the environment. They use hawks and falcons instead of spikes or nets. They want to keep seagulls and other birds from pooping, nesting or stealing food.

Anne-Marie Houston runs Montage Laguna Beach. She said the hawk program is the best way to protect the environment and keep nuisance birds away.

Hawks and falcons have been popular for keeping seagulls away from seaside hotels. One is the Hotel Del Coronado near San Diego, California.

They have also been used to frighten off pigeons. The birds do that at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in California.

Falconers in the Los Angeles area say they charge about \$65 an hour. Costs can go up to \$1,000 a day. It depends on the number of birds and handlers needed.

Keeping seagulls and pigeons away saves on the cost of cleaning up bird poop and nests. Lynn Mohrfeld is president of the California Hotel and Lodging Association. He said the biggest problem is something else.

Guests want to be able to eat french fries by the pool. When a seagull takes them, that is a problem, Mohrfeld said.

Fruit farmers in California also use falconers. They use them to protect their grapes and berries.

Using predator birds has gotten popular. Vahe Alaverdian is the owner of Falcon Force, a California company. He said he has more job offers than he can handle. He has 26 workers and 60 falcons and hawks.

Bird abatement is the only choice, he said. Everything is about taking care of the environment, he said.

Not Everyone Is A Supporter

However, not everyone supports using the trained predators for business.

Sheldon Nicolle is president of the North American Falconers Association. The group has about 2,000 members. Most of them train predator birds for hunting. He said that only 200 to 300 of those members use their birds for abatement.

"There are a lot of traditional falconers out there who have concerns about it," he said. Falconry is not something you do to make money, he said.

Still, Nicolle said that the work helps to educate the public about them.

"I've always said abatement could be falconry's best friend or worst enemy," he said.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wants to be sure that falconers do not take birds from the wild for business. It gives permits only to falconers who use birds raised by people.

Roxanne Word is a falconer who works for Chavez. On a recent Friday morning, she worked with Floyd at the Montage hotel. Several guests watched the hawk in action.

Alain Hirtz was a visitor at the hotel. "The bird is beautiful," he said. It seems good for the environment, he said.

Chavez fell in love with predator birds when he was 12 years old. His father owned property in Nevada. Chavez found three young falcons there that appeared to have been left behind. He said he raised one of the birds. Later, he passed a test to be a falconer.

Chavez turned his interest into a business. It has 15 workers and 30 hawks and falcons.

Quiz

1 Read the section "No Pooping, Nesting Or Stealing Food Allowed."

Which selection from the section explains why companies benefit from using the hawk program?

- (A) Falconers in the Los Angeles area say they charge about \$65 an hour. Costs can go up to \$1,000 a day.
- (B) Keeping seagulls and pigeons away saves on the cost of cleaning up bird poop and nests.
- (C) Guests want to be able to eat french fries by the pool. When a seagull takes them, that is a problem, Mohrfeld said.
- (D) He said he has more job offers than he can handle. He has 26 workers and 60 falcons and hawks.

2 Read the paragraph below from the section "Not Everyone Is A Supporter."

"There are a lot of traditional falconers out there who have concerns about it," he said. Falconry is not something you do to make money, he said.

What conclusion can the reader make based on this paragraph?

- (A) Some groups teach falcons how to hunt for food.
- (B) Some people think it is wrong to put falcons to work.
- (C) Using predator birds has become a popular option.
- (D) Using predator birds can cost companies a lot of money.

3 The main idea of the article is that predatory birds are now being used in business.

Which key detail from the article supports the main idea?

- (A) Falconers like Chavez say they do not use the hawks and falcons to harm other birds.
- (B) Fruit farmers in California also use falconers. They use them to protect their grapes and berries.
- (C) Sheldon Nicolle is president of the North American Falconers Association. The group has about 2,000 members.
- (D) The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wants to be sure that falconers do not take birds from the wild for business.

4 How does the information in the introduction [paragraphs 1-3] support the main idea of the article?

- (A) It describes how Adam Chavez got involved with training hawks for a living.
- (B) It shows how much money hotels can save by hiring falconers and hawks.
- (C) It gives an example of what it is like for a hawk to work in nuisance abatement.
- (D) It explains why some people have a problem with hawks working in nuisance abatement.