



IAF Education Working Group: **-Youth Exchange Project-**

Youth Exchange Project Introductory Document:

The idea of the *Falconry Youth Exchange Project* is to unite falconers, and to give young falconers the opportunity to experience different styles of falconry in different countries.

Many young falconers have the motivation, the time, the energy and above all the passion to dedicate significant amounts of time to their art and they wish to learn different ways of practicing falconry.

Oftentimes, there are two obstacles to this. One obstacle is that they don't know as many people in other countries, and a further obstacle is the high cost of living in and travelling to other countries that are unknown to them.

Past falconry meets, festivals and the communities seeded by the online social networks have highlighted that the falconry community is like a global family. These seeds seek to grow, if only we nourish these initial experiences with the opportunities to expand.

In a world, which is often characterized by our differences and the strive that these differences provoke, falconry is in some regards a blissful exception.

Our differences are not so much differences, but rather diversity which is celebrated and encased in the different set of complex skills and knowledge that is passed down from mentor to apprentice, and from parents and grandparents to their children and grandchildren. While some falconry techniques are the same across much of a region or even throughout the world, individual countries or regions have honed unique practices and methods that should be celebrated, and word of which should be spread among the global falconry community to admire how the spark that is our passion has kindled different types of fires. These different traditions and customs are what define all our unique styles of falconry and they should be celebrated simply due to their intrinsic beauty and interesting manifestations as well as to promote best practice.

The purpose of the *Falconry Youth Exchange Project* is to take advantage of these links and of the curiosity that young falconers have to get to know different types of falconry.



IAF Education Working Group: **-Youth Exchange Project-**

To facilitate this, this project has created a website which links young falconers with places (be they individual falconers, breeders or falconry centres) that can teach different skills and convey interesting and enriching experiences to falconry youths.

The method for achieving this is the launching of a sub section on the IAF Falconry Education Program website to be called (*IAF Falconry Youth Links*). This project will be run completely by motivated volunteers and would not require any funds except for those needed to host the website, which the secretariat has approved as part of the general IAF website network management costs. The role that is envisioned for IAF is to facilitate the connection between youths and individuals and places of falconry excellence using its wide-ranging web of connections and to allow its name to be used in conjunction with this to encourage youths that have attended the festivals and the wider falconry community to participate, encouraged by IAFs endorsement of this idea. This project will also be linked and shared on the EWG Social media pages and will be promoted across the IAF website and social media networks.

This project, hereafter (*IYEP*) takes inspiration from the *IAF School Links Project* and bases its idea on the work and travel principle that has recently been so successful in New Zealand, where young people work as seasonal workers picking kiwis and live in those places for free as well as receiving food for their work. Details of how this could work in the *IYEP* framework could be agreed upon on a case by case basis.

The first step would be to find at least 8 falconers, falconry institutions or falconry centres that would be willing to participate in this project. The benefit that the hosting party would have would be to have an extra set of hands to help with things like cleaning mews, training their raptors and assisting in anything necessary for the maintenance of said raptors. In this regard it would be like the arrangements frequently made between apprentices and their mentors or falconry centres. Three key differences would distinguish the *IYEP* from this. The primary advantage would be that this allows the youths to experience new falconry skills and traditions and to perhaps fly raptors of a different species, at different quarry, or in a different style than they had previously experienced. Likewise, hosts may benefit from insights that the youth may be able to give about how things are done differently in other places. Another benefit is that youths and hosts could be encouraged to write a brief report of their time together for other falconers to learn of different falconry skills and cultures. Through this manner, unexpected knowledge transfers may be achieved. Lastly, this project will, if successfully executed create unity and connections that may last into the future for the youth, who are the next generation of our sport. In modern times, when falconry is beset from many sides and where extreme animal rights groups, overly keen legislators or pressure groups may seek to limit or even ban falconry in many places, this unity can only benefit our global falconry community.

In short, while there are further benefits and larger ramifications that could be distilled from this, the primary benefit for the youths would be to experience and learn about new falconry



IAF Education Working Group: **-Youth Exchange Project-**

techniques and cultures, while the benefit for the host would be to receive help with anything that needs to be done around their facilities.

The project seeks to be inclusive, so hosts may be anyone that has something different to teach and show relating to falconry. Hunting falconry would be encouraged in this regard, but falconry centres, raptor rehab stations, falconry hospitals, cultural or political institutions with a primary falconry focus would all be welcome to participate.

The coordination team would like to ask IAF national delegates to collaborate with us in recommending places and individuals that would be willing to participate. Initially projects would ideally be vouched for by someone known to one of the coordinators of the projects, a national delegate, someone who has participated in *IYEP* previously or a member of the IAF secretariat or a member organisation. This would be to ensure that youths are put in touch with hosts that are known for their excellence and their disposition to transmit their art to the next generation on an international scale.

All youths are encouraged to participate in this, but just like the hosts, it would be desirable for them to be recommended by two falconers known to IAF, its member organizations, national delegates, the coordinators or the IAF secretariat. This is to ensure that falconers that are connected through the *IYEP* can contribute to lessen their hosts workload and already know some basic falconry techniques. The ethos behind the *IYEP* is to enhance and add to youth's falconry knowledge, not to teach basics from the beginning. A brief rubric of basic skills that one needs to have has been created, as well as further skills desired by specific hosts (e.g. skills handling large eagles, basic veterinary knowledge, experience with longwings etc).

The idea of having both youths and hosts recommended by a minimum of two falconers each that are known either directly or indirectly by the *IYEP* is to ensure that youths contribute with skills that will allow them to be of help and that mentors have something of interest to teach the youth.

These experiences are intended to be anything between 1 week and 4 weeks depending on the disposition of the host and the youth. This time frame has been chosen as it may take at least a full week for the host to assess the youth's falconry skills and allow them to handle their raptors. After that, a minimum of one week would give the youth the necessary time to learn different skills and adjust to the new place. While less time would also allow for some knowledge to be imparted, the international nature of this would make it ideal if it were to be at least a full week in length. On a case by case basis, youths may be able to coordinate with their hosts to stay longer or shorter. The exact length is merely a guiding suggestion. The concept foresees this being used purely to facilitate these links on an international basis, as on a national basis the local falconry community, mentors and clubs could easily help young falconers in finding a place where they could volunteer or could offer to take someone on as an apprentice. At the end of a visit arranged through *IYEP*, both the youth and the host would



IAF Education Working Group: **-Youth Exchange Project-**

rate their counterpart on things such as the knowledge that was imparted, the helpfulness of the youth and similar aspects to be defined more closely in a matrix. This would allow the *IYEP* to see whether a host or youth has been outstanding or whether they were less cooperative and helpful. This would then affect whether they would be recommended for future projects but would be visible only to the *IYEP* coordination team. Hosts and Youths may post their experiences and pictures on their site (see below) in order to give other youths and hosts ideas and to allow youths to get a preview of what their time could be like. This way, both hosts and youths could also ask their counterparts what a host or youth is like and what they would highlight about their experience.

The website will have a member's area for which hosts and youths who have been recommended by at least two falconers as detailed above will receive personalized login details. With these login details they will be able to set up an account with pictures, interests, records of their experiences and other details.

Hosts and youths can either find each other through their profiles or they will be able to send a request to the *IYEP* coordinators who can then help them in finding a connection that fits their criterion.