THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES

Testimony in Opposition to S.B. 827
AAC Concerning Falconry

Presented to the Committee on the Environment
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On behalf of The Humane Society of the United States, the nation's largest animal protection organization with more than 11 million supporters, including more than 188,000 in Connecticut, **I strongly urge the Committee on the Environment to oppose Senate Bill 827 and any other attempts to expand hunting or falconry on Sundays.**

In addition to allowing falconry on Sundays, this bill would allow wild birds of prey, which are federally protected, to be taken out of the wild and kept in captivity merely for the recreational enjoyment of just over a dozen people.

The DEC does not allow any other licensee to take healthy animals out of the wild in Connecticut for the purposes of personal possession. Such taking is not only ecologically irresponsible, but it is very traumatic for wild animals to have their instinct totally frustrated by being held captive and only allowed to fly free at certain times.

I understand that falconers are pushing for a Sunday hunting expansion under the guise of needing a means to feed their birds on Sundays. This is a fallacious claim; these birds can and should be fed while in captivity, just as wildlife rehabilitators, zoos and nature centers are required to do.

Many books and websites about falconry state that the supplemental feeding of falcons is "essential" and that the costs of food are a major expense for falconers. In their section about the expenses of falconry, the North American Falconers Association states, "*To keep [the falcon] healthy, you must feed your raptor only fresh raw meat, preferably the exact same whole birds or mammals they would catch on their own.*"

Birds used for falconry in Connecticut will not go hungry if the current laws are preserved and falconers feed their birds the way they're supposed to. If a falconer is relying on the birds being "flown" to catch food, then the bird is most likely being underfed and the DEP needs to intervene.

This legislation is completely unnecessary for other reasons. Falconers have access to enough hybrid, captive-bred and wild-caught raptors (from other states) to meet their demand already. We strongly oppose any further harvest of wild hawks for falconry due

to the frivolous nature of the activity, and the stress and cruelty to the bird inherent in its practice. There is no compelling reason to disrupt the status quo in order to appease a tiny minority.

There are only 13 falconers in Connecticut presently. Already, 44 Red-tailed hawks have been taken by these CT falconers from the wild between 2005-2010 for the purpose of falconry. The mortality rate of these birds was unacceptably high – 7 out of 44 died, and 31 escaped or were released -- which underscores the obvious cruelty inflicted on these wild birds who should be able to fly free, and obviously want to.

Such statistics also reflect the fact that opening the door to "wild take" will result in numerous hawks being taken from the wild to replace the high number who die or escape. **The DEC cannot police this activity sufficiently, that is why a complete ban on any wild take is the only enforceable option.**

This passage of SB 827 appears to be part of a larger effort pushed by the hunting community to allow all forms of hunting on Sundays in Connecticut. Taking the first step down this slippery slope would further the interests of a tiny fraction of the population – 1% -- at the expense of the vast majority of other citizens who wish to enjoy the outdoors in peace on a prime day of leisure.

On behalf of the HSUS, I urge the committee to reject any disingenuous attempt to remove the prohibition on Sunday hunting for falconry under the false pretense of "needing to feed the birds" – and to not establish a dangerous precedent by allowing falconers to take healthy birds out of the wild for personal possession.

Thank you for your time and consideration of the Humane Society of the United States' perspective on SB 827.