



Thank You, Bill (1947–2006)

Tom J. Cade William A. Burnham, our President and leader for the past 23 years, has died at the age of 59 after a brief battle with cancer. What can one say about a person who dies before his time? In Bill's case quite a lot.

We all die; "therefore," as John Donne cautioned, "never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee." How long we live is not as important as how well we live—how much we contribute to the good of humanity and to the welfare of the earth, the sustainer of all life. Bill Burnham made outstanding contributions to the preservation of his beloved birds of prey and other wildlife, and to nurturing the habitats they require. Therefore, we should not mourn but celebrate his life and move forward, strengthened by our association with him and thankful for all he has done.

Bill became associated with The Peregrine Fund (TPF) in 1974, after receiving his MS degree at Brigham Young University under Prof. Clayton White. That summer, Jim Weaver met him on a field trip to western Greenland. Hiking and camping with Bill in the arctic wilderness, Jim became greatly impressed by his stamina in the field and by his eagerness to face up to hard challenges. Jim recommended that TPF hire Bill to head up a new program of captive breeding and reintroduction of Peregrines that we were just starting in collaboration with the Colorado Division of Wildlife to restore falcons in the Rocky Mountains.

On Christmas eve of 1974, Bill and his wife, Pat—soon to be joined by a son, Kurt—moved into some rooms on the second floor of an old game farm facility the Colorado Division of Wildlife made available for TPF use on the outskirts of Fort Collins. Kurt was born in May, 1975 at the same time the first baby Peregrines were hatching. Pat not only mothered her child, she also cared for many young falcons over the years and always remained the person Bill relied on most for running The Peregrine Fund. Bill quickly attracted several skilled and dedicated associates to help with the breeding and release of Peregrines. Two of them, Bill Heinrich and Cal Sandfort, are still with TPF 31 years later.

By the 1980s the Fort Collins team, under Bill's supervision, had produced hundreds of Peregrines and had released them in several Rocky Mountain states and in the Pacific Northwest. At the same time all this intensive work was underway, Bill somehow managed to earn a Ph.D. degree from Colorado State University without ever taking time off from his job. Bill's effectiveness in managing the western operations did not go unnoticed by the fledgling board of directors of TPF. In 1977 he was elected to the board of directors, and in 1982 he became the fifth "Founding Member" of the board, joining Bob Berry, Frank Bond, Tom Cade, and Jim Weaver.

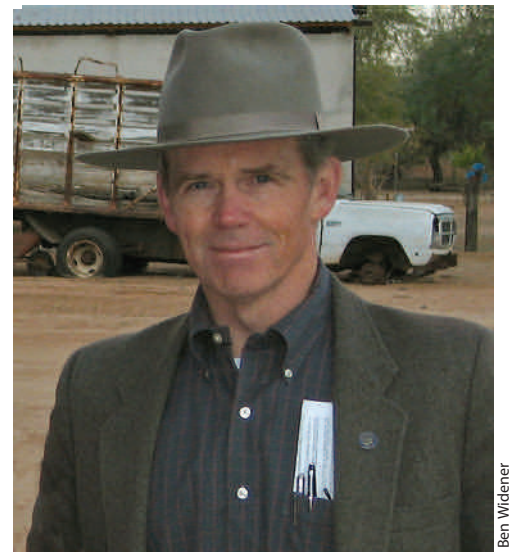
When TPF had an opportunity in 1983 to consolidate its eastern program at Cornell University and its western operations into one facility, Bill was put in charge of finding a location, constructing the new campus, and making the move. At the same time the directors decided to expand the mission of The Peregrine Fund to embrace work on birds of prey worldwide. Through Bill's leadership and ability to organize the volunteer efforts of many falconers and raptor enthusiasts, members of the business community, and government agencies into a unified and productive endeavor, the World Center for Birds of Prey came into existence on a hillside overlooking Boise, Idaho, in 1984. The site was dedicated in May, construction began soon after with much comradeship and enthusiasm, and the birds from Fort Collins were in their new quarters before the next breeding season in 1985. The Cornell birds followed a year later.

It quickly became clear to the small group of directors that TPF's expanded global mission would require a much bigger board of influential people and a strong and determined chief executive. Bill became President in 1986, and he began to build a more active and diverse board of directors, including people from the business world, scientists, and conservationists. Through Morley Nelson's introductions, he began to establish personal relationships with local business people in the Boise community, meeting weekly with some of them for breakfast and discussion. Several joined the board and brought some of their friends along. Our vice presidents, Jeff Cilek and Peter Jenny, whom Bill wisely chose to help him, made important additional contacts, as did Frank Bond and Bob Berry. Currently the board consists of more than 30 members, and it is considered to be one of the strongest boards of a non-profit, conservation organization in the country, thanks largely to Bill's ability to forge personal ties with influential and supportive people.

The combined fund-raising abilities of Burnham, Cilek, and Jenny, and their equal facility in dealing with government bureaucrats and legislators, were beautiful to observe in action. They allowed TPF to move beyond its original focus on the Peregrine and to take on many other projects around the world, although we had been involved previously in cooperating with Carl Jones on restoration of the Mauritius Kestrel.

The first major effort was the "Maya Project," which grew out of Pete's and Bill's interest in the Orange-

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breasted Falcon, a rare species of the Neotropics. Located in Tikal National Park, Guatemala, the fieldwork for the Maya Project was headed up by Dave Whitacre with several assistants, notably Russell Thorstrom, and included local Guatemalans. Carried out over several years, the project resulted in new scientific descriptions of the life histories of more than 20 species of tropical raptors and a detailed analysis of their community ecology, as well as studies on Neotropical migrants and the training of a number of Guatemalan biologists.

In 1990, a comparable project started up in Madagascar and continues to the present, under the supervision of Rick Watson, again with impressive fieldwork by Russell Thorstrom. It has focused on the ecology of the rare and endangered raptors found only on the island, notably on the Madagascar Fish Eagle.

The list of overseas projects quickly expanded under Rick's supervision as International Programs Director, including activities in Africa, New Guinea, Mongolia, Pakistan and India, and Latin America. In Hawaii Bill set up a program for the captive breeding and reintroduction of endangered bird species unique to the islands and oversaw the development of two breeding facilities. Under the management of Alan Lieberman and Cyndi Kuehler, this program was later transferred to the Zoological Society of San Diego. Bill also established a new branch of The Peregrine Fund located in Panama City—Fondo Peregrino-Panama, and supervised the construction of the Neotropical Raptor Center to carry out research and conservation involving raptors of Latin America and the Caribbean, again emphasizing rare, little-known, and endangered species, such as the Harpy Eagle, Orange-breasted Falcon, and Ridgway's Hawk.

One of the most important but least heralded accomplishments spearheaded by Bill was the discovery of the cause for the "Asian Vulture Crisis"—the virtual extinction of three species of griffon vultures on the Indian Subcontinent in just the past decade. In collaboration with a former associate of TPF, Lindsay Oaks, now a veterinarian specializing in avian virology at Washington State University, TPF biologists obtained conclusive proof that a veterinary drug called diclofenac was fatal to vultures that fed on carcasses contaminated with this chemical, which had become widely used on the Subcontinent as an analgesic and anti-inflammatory for domestic livestock. In 2006, as a direct result of this discovery, the governments of India, Nepal, and Pakistan banned the use of diclofenac for veterinary purposes. This achievement is in many ways equivalent in importance to the banning of DDT in the United States in 1972. Recovery of the vultures is now a possibility.

The study of Peregrines and Gyrfalcons in Greenland was Bill Burnham's favorite project. His first trip to Greenland was in 1972 when Bill Mattox started the Greenland Peregrine Survey, which on Mattox's retirement in 1998 he transferred to TPF. Burnham expanded the project to include Gyrfalcons and the prey species falcons eat, and with help from his son, Kurt, established the "High Arctic Institute" at Thule, using a decommissioned facility leased from the U.S. Air Force. Father and son worked together in Greenland each summer for the past 16 years, along with many other associates. Bill was able to fulfill his last wish by making two trips to Greenland in the summer of 2006, despite an incapacitating illness that would have kept anyone else in hospital.



Clockwise, Bill duck hawkling with his female Peregrine Falcon, Ebony, near Sheridan, Wyoming, in 2004; with his son Kurt conducting Peregrine Falcon surveys near Kangerlussuaq, Greenland, in the summer of 1992; and with his best friend Pete Widener antelope hunting near Buffalo, Wyoming, in the fall of 2005.

All gifts received in memory of Bill will be placed equally in the general endowment for The Peregrine Fund and the endowment for The Archives of Falconry.

Since the removal of the Peregrine from the list of endangered species in 1999, an accomplishment that involved Bill and other TPF staff in negotiations with the federal government for more than five years, our two main domestic projects have been the use of captive breeding and reintroduction to restore nesting populations of Aplomado Falcons in the Southwest and California Condors in northern Arizona. By negotiating use of the "safe harbor" policy for private landowners in Texas and the non-essential experimental population designation under section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act for condors in Arizona and falcons in New Mexico, Bill quietly but effectively maneuvered TPF through a tangle of political and societal issues that initially impeded the development of these projects.

Believing strongly that public education and academic training are the keys to successful conservation, Bill promoted projects such as the Velma Morrison Interpretive Center, which welcomes thousands of visitors each year, and the Gerald D. and Kathryn S. Herrick Collections Building. The latter houses a major ornithological library, egg and specimen collection, and the Archives of Falconry. Both facilities attest to Bill's commitment to education, as does TPF's support over the years of more than 20 Doctoral degrees, 53 Master's degrees, and numerous Bachelor degrees and high school diplomas earned by students around the world.

Bill also participated in many activities external from but related to TPF interests. For example, he helped establish a unique graduate program in raptor biology at Boise State University (BSU) and became an adjunct professor in the program, supervising a number of students who carried out research associated with TPF projects. Secretary of the Interior Emanuel Lujan appointed Bill to the National Public Lands Advisory Council; he also served as a trustee on the BSU Foundation; as a conflict mediator and then member of the Bureau of Land Management's Oversight Committee for the Snake River Birds of Prey Area; on the council for the multi-agency and university Raptor Research and Technical Assistance Center at BSU; on the board of the North American Raptor Breeders' Association; on the advisory board of the Walt Disney Company's Animal Kingdom; as an adviser to the Philippine government on science and conservation for the Philippine Eagle; as a board member of the Philippine Eagle Foundation, Inc; and in various other similar capacities.

He was elected to be a "Fellow" of the Arctic Institute of North America and of The Explorers Club. He was also presented



with The Explorers Club's Lowell Thomas Award in 2004. In 2006 he was chosen to receive the Conservation Medal of the Zoological Society of San Diego in recognition of his many contributions to the conservation of birds of prey.

I knew Bill for 32 years and watched in admiration how he developed as a person and crafted The Peregrine Fund into an outstanding organization. Bill was the quintessential workaholic, an early riser, often in his office before 6 a.m. and putting in many seven-day weeks. He was a natural-born leader, attracting many good and loyal people to work with him. He viewed his position as President to be one of making the big, strategic decisions, and he left his associates free to handle most of the tactical, day-to-day things. Consequently, he empowered a strong, well-organized group of people to carry on after him.

Bill worked hard, but he also played hard. He was not a large man, but he had great body strength and great endurance. His stamina in hiking and backpacking was legendary. On hikes in Greenland looking for falcon eyries, he was always ahead and would be set up in camp brewing coffee by the time the rest of us straggled in.

Danger excited and challenged him. He actually enjoyed rappelling on a rope hundreds of feet down cliffs to enter falcon eyries. You can read his account of one such climb on a karst cliff in Guatemala in search of the nest of the Orange-breasted Falcon (page 189 in his book *A Fascination with Falcons*, 1997). Once in a

campfire discussion, we both agreed that one of the things that makes true wilderness so exciting is the possibility of being eaten by a grizzly bear. Remove the bear—no more wilderness.

Bill was an avid falconer, especially in his earlier years. When he became President of TPF he selflessly reduced his practice of falconry, a time-consuming avocation, so that he could devote more attention to the needs of the organization. He did continue to hunt big game seasonally, often with his close friend, Pete Widener, and more recently, upland game birds with Kurt and other companions. I know it was one of his great joys to return to falconry in recent years.

Although Bill had the reputation of being a practical, rough-and-ready, can-do, let's-get-it-done-now, sort of guy, he also revealed a more philosophical and meditative—even poetic—side to his character from time to time. Some of his reflections on the need for conservation and the value of wild animals and wild places in his book, *A Fascination with Falcons*, reflect a deep devotion to nature. I especially like his short essay on "The Scent of a Peregrine" published in *Return of the Peregrine* (2003, p. 222), a book he conceived and helped edit: "There is nothing in the world that smells like a newly captured Peregrine. She smells like a mix of willow and birch of a green arctic tundra, the scent of pine as the rays of the sun pierce the forest to dry the needles of the morning dew, the freshness of the golden prairie grass on an autumn day, and the fragrance of the sea breeze through marsh flowers."

Bill loved to explore new places and to test his endurance against hardships. One of my strong memories of him is how he stood stalwart and confident at the controls of our "Safe Boat" with Kurt by his side, as we faced into a gale and icy rain, while traveling up the west coast of Greenland with icebergs passing to port and starboard. Jack Stephens and I crouched in the back of the open boat, huddled in our rain parkas trying to keep from freezing to death, while Bill and Kurt faced the brunt of the storm during hours of hard travel to reach a safe harbor.

When traveling under such conditions, I tend to enter a kind of sleepy lethargy, and all sorts of random thoughts and images drift through my groggy consciousness. Once I glanced up and saw Bill still at the wheel, and some words from history came to mind: "There stands Jackson like a stonewall." I then realized that our "Safe Boat," said to be unsinkable, was safe not so much because of its design as because of who was at the helm.

One of Bill's legacies is that he has left behind a strong and capable wife and son who have guided us with grace and dignity through these last days with Bill. He has also left behind a dedicated and active group of colleagues, which he molded into an internationally respected conservation organization—The Peregrine Fund—and which he wisely left with the capability to move forward without him, but ever in memory of him.





Even at age 14, Bill's rock climbing skills were evident and developed to the point where he could pull an eyess eagle



THE PEREGRINE FUND

WORKING TO CONSERVE BIRDS OF PREY IN NATURE

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