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DR. HEINZ K. MENG

1924 ~ 2016

Dr. Heinz K. Meng, one of America's leading ornithologists and an avid falconer for almost 75 years, passed away quietly and peacefully at the age of 92 on August 13, 2016.

Heinz was born in Germany in 1924 and immigrated to America with his family when he was five years old. His father, a banker in Germany, took a job as a chauffeur to a wealthy New York City family, the J. C. Penny's, who also owned a large farm upstate in Dutchess County. Heinz grew up both in the city and the countryside. The countryside spoke to the boy in many ways that the city did not. Heinz developed a deep fascination with the creatures he saw there that he could not find on the asphalt streets and in the concrete canyons of NYC.

While surf casting off a Long Island beach in 1941, Heinz captured his first peregrine falcon. The bird was feeding on a marsh hawk, unaware that a soon to be falconer was stealthily making in on her. A jacket was quickly thrown over the raptor and Heinz had his first bird. He then found a book on falconry and embarked on an adventure with birds of prey that occupied the rest of his life.

Heinz's interest in animals caused him to enroll at Cornell University, one of America's leading colleges, and one that offered very strong programs on agriculture, veterinary medicine, and ornithology. He was tutored there by Dr. Arthur A. Allen (1885-1964) who orchestrated the first college courses in the United States designed to confer a Doctorate in Ornithology. Through him Heinz met the illustrious falconer and lecturer Captain C. W. R. Knight (1884-1957) of Great Britain who toured the States in many years talking about falconry and the value of preserving birds of prey. Heinz's interest in falconry was further kindled by this meeting. Heinz's Ph.D thesis was a study of the Cooper's Hawk, still a most valuable document to this day.

Upon graduating in 1951, with a Ph.D in Ornithology, Heinz was immediately hired by the State University of New York at New Paltz as its biology professor. He retained this position for fifty years until his retirement in 2001. Through the years his classes were amongst the most popular offered by the college. His instruction was both enjoyable and educational. He greatly delighted in taking his students out of the classroom and

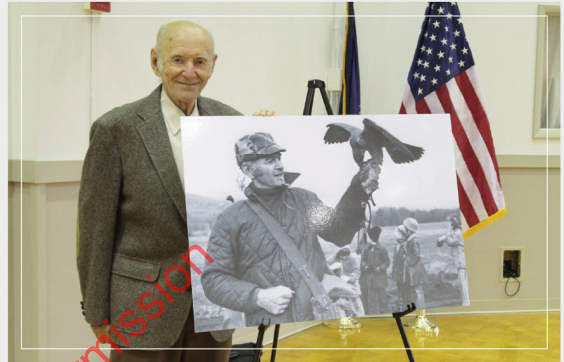
into the wild to watch birds, insects, and other wildlife in their home. Quite a few of his students went on to become biology teachers themselves. One of them – a falconer too – even took over teaching his course for several years after his retirement. Several of his students have become notable falconers and are still practicing the sport today.

Heinz lived at the base of the Shawangunk Mountains whose steep cliffs harbored cries of the Anatump Peregrine Falcon. Though his thesis had been on Cooper's Hawks, his heart was captured by these longwings. He often went to watch and photograph them in their natural habitat, and took some to train for falconry.

In the 1960's Heinz and other ornithologists and falconers grew alarmed at the disappearance of the peregrine from its traditional haunts. Chlorinated hydrocarbon pesticides were causing eggshells to thin and shatter when being brooded. Over the course of only a few years, it seemed, the peregrine was gone. In 1971 Heinz became the first scientist to breed peregrine falcons for release into the wild. Frank Beebe in Canada probably was the first in North America to breed peregrines in captivity but the progeny died. Heinz developed a successful – and reproducible – technique for consistently breeding the birds, and his successes were shortly followed by Jim Enderson on the west coast and Thomas Cade and companions at Cornell. Falconers all. For his contribution to the restoration of the peregrine in the United States and his advocacy for the environment Heinz was named one of the Hundred Champions of Conservation by the National Audubon Society in 1998. Amongst the other champions were fellow falconers Tom Cade and twin brothers John & Frank Craighead, and giants in the field of conservation such as Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, and Louis Agassiz Fuertes.

As a falconer Heinz was ever the teacher. He was the guru and go-to-guy for many novice falconers in the Hudson River Valley of New York. He never failed to take the time to get initiates off on the right foot, offer advice on how to improve mews and equipment, and was available even in the latest hours of the night when a panicking falconer called with a problem. Heinz was involved heavily in writing the New York State Falconry regulations and for this work was granted falconry license #001 in 1975. From 1967 through 1976 Heinz was the Eastern Director of





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the North American Falconers Association. He attended many NAFA Field Meets, New York Field Meets, and travelled west on several occasions to hunt with fellow longwingers such as Steve Chindgren.

An all-around country sportsman, Heinz enjoyed fly fishing very much and travelled quite widely around the Northeast, and out west to Montana, to participate in this sport. He tied his own flies (his books on entomology were not just used for schooling!) and was also an avid bowhunter. His quest for a good venison stew recipe is legendary.

Heinz was a proficient artist and many of his paintings grandly illustrate the 9th edition of Beebe & Webster's North American Falconry and Hunting Hawks. They have also appeared in NAFA Journals, the Conservationist Magazine, and other periodicals. He was the co-author of Falcons' Return published in 1975, and wrote many articles on biology and falconry over the years. His most infamous painting was a piece of "modern art", a blank canvas on which he let his Redtail and falcons defecate. A series of vertical black and white lines resulted. Turning the canvas 90 degrees another series of lines was created. This cross hatched painting won first prize at the local art show.

Heinz married Elizabeth "Sonny" Metz in 1953, herself an educator and artist. At the time they met, however, she was his student, only a few years his junior. She

thought him an interesting person to spend the rest of her life with. He thought the same about her. Over the years Sonny tolerated the innumerable drop-in students and falconers with great good humor as they came to "hang with Heinz". They had two children together, Robin and Peter-Paul.

Heinz was a life member of the American Ornithologists' Union, the Cooper and Wilson Ornithological Society, was an Honorary Life Member of NAFA, and a member of other organizations such as the Audubon Society and local bird clubs.

A Celebration the Life of Heinz Meng was held at The Terrace Building, SUNY New Paltz, on September 25, 2016 at 2:00PM. Over 135 members of his family, falconry family, students and friends were in attendance. Robert F. Kennedy Jr. gave the moving and delightful keynote speech, and testimonials were also offered by family and friends. Falconer Brian Bradley flew his falcon at the end of the ceremony over the grounds on which Heinz spent much of his life teaching the young. From its vantage point the falcon could see the cemetery in which Heinz now sleeps.

Contributions in his memory may be made to The Archives of Falconry in Boise, Idaho. A bronze plaque for Heinz will be placed on the Wall of Remembrance there at the 2017 Rendezvous.

