



**DONORS:**

Dee Bianco, Natalie Nicholson, Pat Burnham, Frank and Linda Ely and the California Hawking Club



*Brian was an avid and generous supporter of the Archives of Falconry. He donated his collection of prized Moran hoods.*

**BRIAN JAMES WALTON**

**Lifetime Honorary Member California Hawking Club**

by Glenn R. Stewart

*Glenn Stewart recorded about an interview with Brian Walton on December 12, 2006. Questions focused on his early days as a falconer, some memories of his gyrfalcon, Beulah, and his view of the role of falconers in the peregrine falcon recovery.*

*Thanks to Brian, many have enjoyed extraordinary experiences like a trip to one of the last places in California where peregrines were found in the 1970's—experiences that will forever.*

HERE IS A PORTION RECORD OF GLENN'S INTERVIEW WITH BRIAN (the complete interview is on file with The Archives of Falconry):

**First Great Falconry Bird**

Brian received a gyrfalcon as a hand-me down bird from a fellow who didn't have time for her. He called her "Beulah". Falconers from that era say that one had to get by reading the ancient European books that were largely stories about hawking that could not be replicated in the USA. He read *The Taming of Ghengis* and wrote to Ronald Stevens who had moved to Ireland, and asked his advice. Stevens was a gentleman; his reply was like one of his books.

Beulah was only the second gyrfalcon he had ever seen. She was absolutely loyal. As soon as she understood that he had food, she was not going anywhere, unless he failed to produce quarry. Then she would go find her own. But he paid attention to what Ronald Stevens had said. Maybe the tenth day he went out to a field covered with gulls. When he released her she took off after the gulls and almost caught one! She was still on the creance. He remembers the dowel bouncing over the ground as she pitched up after a climbing gull and almost caught it. She was powerful! He decided that it was time to stop using the creance. The next day she flew straight over and killed a gull.

He found that she would mount high in the wind. If it wasn't windy, she didn't go up. At that time, there were a lot of people in California falconry who did not know how to train birds very well. He was one of them. He learned that she would just give him a couple of minutes to flush or she would go off and find something to kill. She caught about twenty-five kites, about a dozen harriers, and many gulls. It was just no challenge for her to catch things. There were places in the Los Osos Valley where American widgeon would feed in the middle of these large grassy fields. The wind would be blowing so hard it would almost blow her off the fist. He would put her up about a mile away and let her mount while he drove to the duck flocks. Beulah took only two days to be wedded to his English setter, Grimes, so she became a real ally and enabled him to be a falconer. The gyr would climb to the heavens and the dog would run like crazy while he drove to the ducks and then see a spectacular flight. Of course she flew away one day. He looked everywhere, flew in airplanes, but could not get a beep. About ten days later, he heard about an Audubon rare bird sighting of a large falcon eating a gull down on the beach at the mouth of the Pajaro River. He likes to think that it was "Beulah" feeding up before she flew back to the Arctic.

**Visit with Ronald Stevens**

Brian and his wife attended an ornithological congress meeting in Moscow. The Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology asked him to look at some collections in Finland and Ireland so he wrote to Ronald Stevens and received an invitation to visit.

Stevens provided a dinner for the ages. He showed them his kestrel breeding pens. He would let a kestrel fly around wild all year and then it would fly back into the pen in the spring to breed. He was a magical guy. They corresponded several times before Stevens passed away. Brian valued his friendship. They were 'kindred spirits.'

I ran an errand for Brian Walton many years ago. Soon after we had our first successes breeding Harris' hawks at the Predatory Bird Research Group, Russell Tucker and I delivered one to Steve Baptiste so that he and his son could fly it. Steve worked for the Nevada Gaming Commission as an undercover investigator so he worked nights and was able to focus on breeding birds and hunting during the day. He used a dune buggy to travel into Nevada's high desert to observe the habits of sage grouse.

Steve treated us to a wonderful afternoon trip into the desert over almost impassable roads to teach us about grouse and a flight with his gyrkin. It was an ordinary, daily activity for Steve that became an extraordinary memory for a couple of young falconers who had never seen a sage grouse. As he fed his gyr out there in the silence of the desert after the flight, he remarked, "You know, I like Brian Walton—he never says anything foolish."

It was a simple statement, but I never forgot it. I think it goes to the core of Brian's success over the years as a member of the Club who showed up at many board meetings to offer advice; as a counselor to Department of Fish and Game officials; as a member of The Peregrine Fund board of directors, and, as a member of the peregrine falcon and bald eagle recovery teams. Jamey Eddy used to accuse him of having a "silver tongue" and to some extent I think Jamey was right. But what is important, and the reason we honored him as an honorary lifetime member of our Club, was that he offered truthful advice when it was needed and took action on things that he believed in.

...He offered truthful advice when it was needed and took action on things that he believed in.



L-R: Danny Verrier, John Moran, Brian Walton, James Eddy and Steve Duffy in 1991.



Brian at a Peregrine Fund board meeting in 1992 with Lloyd Kiff and dad, James Walton.

