



## Donors

### Donors (in progress)

#### Falconer – Free Spirit – Naturalist – Man of Iron — by Bill Heinrich and colleagues

Jim got involved in falconry in 1955. He began working with The Peregrine Fund in 1980. He took his life with raptors in a new direction. Jim started at the most difficult Peregrine hack site, named Death Canyon, in Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming. Jim showed up fresh from New Mexico in street shoes. After a two-hour hike straight up the mountain, Jim's shoes were literally falling off of his feet. The crew planned to set up another camp and Jim volunteered to do that as well, even though he was by now half barefooted. Everyone learned a lot about Jim at that moment. He did a tremendous job and became part of the Peregrine Fund family.

In 1984, Jim was asked to help construct The Peregrine Fund's new breeding facility in Boise, Idaho. Jim put his construction talent to work and performed flawlessly. Jim worked as a peregrine release assistant for 11 years until their recovery.

During the off-season Jim pursued the sport of falconry. Jim's close friend Anthony Crosswell from England wrote a few words about the time they spent together hawking:

"We bought a house together in Albuquerque in 1990. We hawked all over the Midwest out of a trailer. We trapped my Prairie, flew it along with our Peregrines and Jim's hybrid, Gremlin. His first kill was a drake mallard (on its 9<sup>th</sup> day!) at the Rio Puerco where Jim unhesitatingly waded the stream up to his chest at minus ten degrees! This soft Englishman looked for a less challenging crossing. It was a great time!

Jim Willmarth was a falconer, the most accomplished and creative that I ever knew - he had an instinctive understanding of his hawks. Without fanfare he made practical the quintessential falconer conservationist whose life made a difference to us all. As passion waxed and waned in its intensity, his commitment never faltered fanning the flames of his fire and purpose enabling and inspiring those around him. How fortunate I have been to have this man as my friend."



In 1993, The Peregrine Fund asked Jim to go to Hawaii to build an outdoor aviary to house the endangered Alala, better known as the Hawaiian crow. Peter Harrity wrote: "When we built the 'alala aviary, Jim worked tirelessly. He always knew the correct way to tackle a construction problem. There was no better person for that role. His efforts set the foundation that allowed The Peregrine Fund to play an important role in establishing the restoration programs in Hawaii. I have very fond memories of experiencing Hawaii with Jim."

In 2000, Jim helped construct a new California condor holding pen above the Vermilion Cliffs, Arizona. Jim and Bill Heinrich slept under the stars and discussed their experiences together late into the night. The release pen is still in use. Later that year, Jim helped work on the Cape Verde Red kite project where our biologists needed help trapping kites for genetic analysis.

Colleague Simon Thomsett wrote: "Jim spent months in the remote and wind swept archipelago of Cape Verde, off the West African coast. His mission, to catch the rare Red Kite, required careful observations and enduring patience. Walking long before dawn to wait days fruitlessly staring at a distant and hidden bow net, to be thwarted in the end by a faulty transmitter. In the shade of a thorn tree he spent hours relating the virtues of the passage Prairie Falcon over all others, and spoke of his ancient gyrfalcon hybrid, Gremlin. He caught kites by tying nooses on locusts and setting them on the tips of branches, a genius idea born of innovation spent during a lifetime living with his birds."

Between 2001 and 2003, Jim lived in Portland, Oregon. He purchased an old run down house. Jim rebuilt it from scratch and turned it into a beautiful home. While there, he attended a film director university program. Jim had a passion for cameras. Bill Heinrich saw his totally remodeled house. Jim



had put it on the market and was ready to move on. That was great news for The Peregrine Fund. Bill asked him if he would be interested in working with the California condor release project. Jim agreed, but first there was the Asian vulture crisis. A pharmaceutical drug, diclofenac, was responsible for killing thousands of vultures. There was an urgent need to build holding facilities in Pakistan.

Veterinarian Dr. Martin Gilbert wrote: "I was fortunate to spend time with Jim during a critical juncture in the story of vultures in Pakistan. Jim arrived in Pakistan at a turbulent time, as we tried in desperation to rescue a founder population of vultures. Politics and time conspired against us, but throughout it all Jim was a rock of reliability, turning a dry wasteland into holding aviaries fit to house 100 vultures within a matter of weeks. Jim combined the good humor and flexibility that made daunting tasks possible. He was a huge support at a very difficult time."

After Jim returned from Pakistan in 2004, he went to Arizona where he spent the next four years, working with Chris Parish and the field crew releasing endangered California Condors at the Vermilion Cliffs.

Chris Parish wrote: "It wasn't long after Jim arrived that I saw that we had something special. Despite the fact that Jim had been working in the field longer than many of our crew had been eating solid foods, he melted into the fabric of the red-rock desert land of the condor. It wasn't so much that he fit in, but we all fell in around him, his stories of old, and the easy way about him that left nothing too big, too hard, or impossible in the future that lay before us. Nothing stopped him. Because as long as ol' Jim was there we could handle anything. As with most experiences and relationships, one never seems to know when you are amidst some of the best times of your life, but Jim always seemed to exude an understanding that every day was one of those days."

During Jim's time in Arizona, Dr. Bill Burnham asked Jim to go to Greenland. Bill Heinrich, Cal Sandfort, and Kurt Burnham had the good fortune of spending September and October of 2004 and

2005 with Jim. Over 100 gyrfalcons were trapped. The close-knit group's only company were migrating falcons, arctic fox and hare, ptarmigan, sled dogs and the elusive polar bears. We rediscovered how strong Jim was mentally and physically. There was always a tremendous amount of physical labor involved from carrying water, moving 55 gallon barrels of fuel, and jumping off boats in the frigid arctic water to load and unload equipment. Jim always took care of his comrades first, without a thought to his own safety, and did more than his share of work. Life was always good when Jim was close by.

In 2007, The Peregrine Fund's current president Peter Jenny asked him to manage the education birds at the World Center for Birds of Prey. Utilizing his knowledge of falconry, he put together flight demonstrations for the public. He worked with kestrels, falcons, and his favorite Harpy Eagle.

Trish Nixon wrote: "During the 4 years that we worked together, he became my friend, my teacher, my confidant. When I first talked with Jim, I felt that I'd known him all my life. I'd been working with our education birds for a decade when Jim joined the team. I gained an immeasurable knowledge in all aspects of falconry, husbandry and understanding raptors. Jim brightened my days, made me laugh, and listened in a way that made me feel comfortable discussing anything with him. Jim was dedicated to taking care of our birds and to demonstrating that raptors are beautiful, well-designed, vital birds that everyone should care about. I will always remember Jim as the sweet person who prompted a 5-year-old boy to write a note thanking Jim for teaching him to not be afraid of birds of prey. That little boy, upon learning of Jim's illness, wrote, 'I am so sorry you are sick. It makes me cry.' We all feel that way. A kind, gentle man and steadfast friend has left us."

Material items meant nothing to Jim, aside from a camera that could capture images from nature that he could share with others. His determination, work ethic, and dignity in dealing with pancreatic cancer were unmatched. He set a standard that inspires. When it came to building things, both large and small, Jim was gifted with a special genius. Jim was a hero to everyone who knew him, and he lived his full life as a free spirit.







Michael and Jim Willmarth, May 1962



Jim and the Bantams



Jim, Laura, Susan, Lynne, Ann



Gremlin



Pakistani Friends



Tiquin



Greenland 2004. Photo by Bill Heinrich



Greenland 2005. Photo by Bill Heinrich



Public Flight Demonstration with colleague Trish Nixon. Photo by David Wells, Oct. 2008



This photo and below by David Wells, Oct. 2008



Jim with Harpy Eagle, *Luigi*. Photo by David Wells, Feb. 2009



Tom Cade, Kent Carnie, Frank Bond, Bill Burnham, Willard Heck, Jim Weaver, Jim, Tom Smylie