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RICHARD WILLIAM FYFE

by Tom J. Cade

Born in 1932 in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada, where he grew up on the Great Plains roaming the countryside as a boy, Richard Fyfe soon developed an inordinate fondness for birds and other wildlife, especially for birds of prey and the Peregrine Falcon in particular. He died at age 85 on 17 June 2017 in Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta after a long struggle with pneumonia.

His early interest in birds of prey and hunting led him to the pursuit of falconry. He was instrumental in establishing the Saskatchewan Falconry Association in the 1950s when he was in his early 20s. Later, he also helped establish a falconers' organization in Alberta. He flew several kinds of falcons. His favorite was always the Peregrine, a fine example of which he had in possession when he died. He was also a charter member of the Raptor Research Foundation.

Following graduation from the University of British Columbia, Richard soon married Lorraine Doll in 1957, his loving wife for 66 years. They embarked on several years of school teaching and community service at several Inuit villages in Arctic Canada. Along

the way they began accumulating a family of five children. They eventually left their work in the Arctic, returned to the south, and Richard took employment with the Canadian Wildlife Service. His first conservation research assignments were in Ottawa, Ontario and Sackville, New Brunswick before finally settling in at Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta.

I first met Richard in 1965 at the now famous International Peregrine Conference organized by Prof. J. J. Hickey (1969) at the University of Wisconsin to explore reasons why the Peregrine Falcon had declined so drastically in numbers in both Europe and North America in the previous 10 years. The cause of these unprecedented declines is now well known, but at the time of the conference there were many troubling unknowns still to be investigated. Particularly in North America there were large areas of suitable range where little or nothing was known about Peregrines. The potential for breeding falcons in captivity for restocking vacant range was a subject of considerable interest at the end of the conference.

Richard and I got to know each other pretty well during the three days of the conference. We thought alike on many issues, and we both became determined to change the course of our professional activities to pursue answers to why so many of our Peregrines had disappeared and to find solutions to the problem before extinction became inevitable. Other colleagues made similar decisions. This widespread focus on the Peregrine was the main accomplishment of Hickey's conference and why it became such a prominent episode in the early history of conservation biology.

Immediately after the conference in 1965, Richard began exploring the possibilities of establishing a captive breeding center for Peregrines in Canada under the jurisdiction of the Canadian Wildlife Service. In 1970 he finally got permission to take some wild nestlings into captivity for the purpose of breeding birds for reintroduction. Later a facility was constructed for that purpose at Camp Wainwright in Alberta. Richard had an uncanny ability to choose just the right people as his assistants, most of whom stayed with the program to the end, even after Richard retired, names like Phil and Helen Trefry, Harry Armbruster, Ursula Banasch. Successful reproduction soon began at Wainwright, and successful reintroductions followed. By 1985, 644 young falcons had been produced at Wainwright and 571 had been released in southern Canada. At the end of the program in 1996 a total of 1550 had been bred and released, and nearly 200 pairs were known to be nesting in the wild.

In August of 1984 the infamous law enforcement actions known as "Operation Falcon" jointly conducted by the law enforcement division of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and by law officers north of the border, including the Royal Canadian Mounted Police,



involving early morning raids on both private and public breeding facilities. Richard Fyfe's life was changed forever, as he fell under false accusations by a ruthless nest thief and falcon smuggler that he was not actually breeding falcons in captivity but was using the Wainwright operation as a cover to launder wild-taken birds to smuggle overseas. Incredibly, some Canadian authorities took this accusation seriously and

forced Fyfe to undergo an exacting inventory to account for every bird that had gone into and out of the Wainwright facility. Because of good book keeping records by his staff, after an emotionally stressful year, Fyfe was able to account for all but one bird. After some further insulting investigation by the Mounted Police, Richard was officially exonerated of any wrong doing, the director of CWS apologized, and he was told he could keep his job. Instead, Richard chose to take early retirement from CWS in 1997 because he felt that his professional reputation had been sullied by the prolonged and accusatory investigation. In 2000 Richard was inducted into the Order of Canada, the highest civilian honor given, for his efforts to recover the Peregrine Falcon; but even that honor was not enough to quell the hurt he received from his government. It should be noted that none of his many friends and raptor colleagues had other than the highest regard for his work.

After leaving CWS Richard went into semi-retirement, living a quiet but still active existence with his wife on their farm near Fort Saskatchewan, where they were frequently visited by members of their extended family. He kept busy with various community affairs, doing environmental consulting, and making educational videos with his wife for school children; and he resumed his practice of falconry, which had largely been abandoned during the busy years at Camp Wainwright.

In 1976 Richard and I found ourselves sitting together under a huge tent sheltering an audience of more than a hundred people waiting to hear a welcoming speech from the first president of the United Arab Emirates, Shaikh Zayed bin Sultan of Abu Dhabi. It would be a simultaneously translated speech from Arabic to English to welcome invited guests to the first international festival of falconry. Just before the program started, one of the managers approached Richard and asked if he would please give a brief reply to the president's welcome on behalf of the assembled falconers. Richard reluctantly said he would. After Zayed's performance ended with loud applause Richard stood up from where he was seated, and in his soft but clear voice began delivering the finest extemporaneous talk I ever heard. There was not a sound from the audience. A British expatriate who had lived for many years in the Middle East and was sitting by me leaned over and whispered, "He's saying all the right things." Yes, that was Richard: He thought the right things, and he wrote and spoke the right words.



RICHARD FYFE of Regina, organizer of the newly formed Saskatchewan Falconry Association, poses with "Trouble," a majestic female falcon caught in the Big Muddy district in southern Saskatchewan. "Trouble" will be seen along with other hawks, at Convocation Hall at the University as part of the Natural History Society program on Saturday.

One of Oldest Sports, Falconry, Revived Here



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