

NAFA President 1972-1983

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**R**oger Thacker, 71, of Versailles, Kentucky, passed away on July 18, 2011, surrounded by the love of his wife and daughter, after a courageous battle against Parkinson's disease. He lived a life hallmarked by many great adventures and accomplishments.

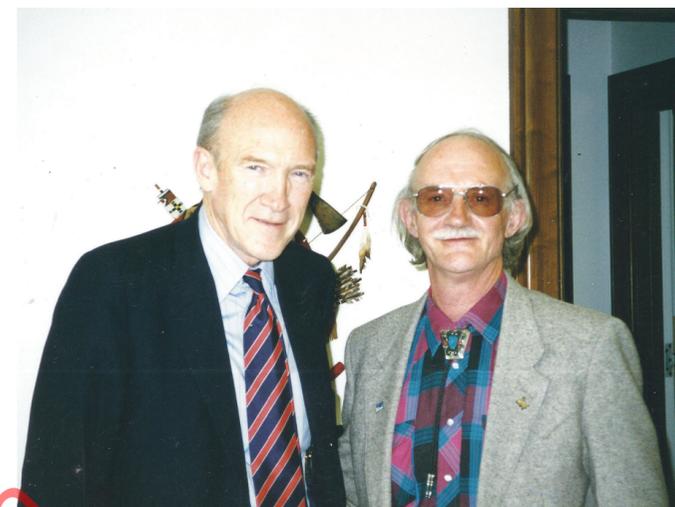
Born in London, England, Roger came to the United States at the request of Ohio State University to assume management of the OSU Animal Research Services and Operations. After ten years there, he accepted a position of Animal Care Manager at the University of Connecticut.

In 1975, he became Director of Northwest Trek Wildlife Park in Eatonville, Washington. He left Northwest Trek to accept the position of Manager of Research Animal Care Services at the University of Kentucky, where he remained until his retirement.

With life-long interests in conservation and agricultural organizations, Mr. Thacker held numerous offices within those fields, including The North American Falconers' Association, the North American Peregrine Foundation, the North American Wolf Society, American Sheep Industry, North American Woolgrowers Association and the Kentucky Woolgrowers Association. He was instrumental and nationally respected for his work assisting with recovery efforts that ultimately brought the peregrine falcon back from near extinction due to DDT exposure.

Mr. Thacker was a member of St. Andrew's Anglican Church in Versailles and was survived by his wife, Linda; daughter Devon Thacker Thomas; son Paul; and his sister Rosemary Emmett of England. He was preceded in death by a son, David, and his parents Evelyn and George Thacker of Bournemouth, England.

Roger is best remembered as the president of NAFA from 1972-1983. He served as president for the longest period of time in NAFA's history, and during a period of important changes in US falconry. Roger steered the falconry community through the adoption of federal regulations, the decline of the peregrine falcon and the consequences of the Endangered Species Act, the growth and need of a strong national falconry organization. Roger was ably assisted during this difficult time by his good friends Ed and Charlotte Friemuth (Colorado) and Will and Joby Shor (California).



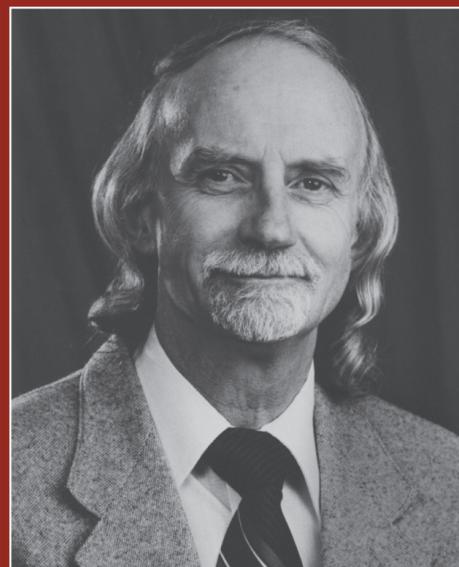
U.S. Senator Alan Simpson and Roger



To Roger Thacker: my thanks for helping educate me  
John Breau  
1985

Together, they formed a team that kept NAFA on course to preserve falconry as a hunting sport, provide longwings for falconers (for example, at the 1981 NAFA meet in Joplin, Missouri, there were only 2 longwings present!), and ensure that NAFA had a strong voice in Washington, D.C.

Despite the serious threats to US falconry during his tenure, Roger knew how to have a good time: He served as best man for Ed and Judy Henkel's wedding as exercise presidential privilege in kissing all ladies while presenting their game pins – during the meets he would make sure that they went to the best hawking fields!



## A LIFELONG DEDICATION *Stan Marcus*

**Roger Thacker served in an official capacity for the North American Falconers Association (NAFA) for 23 years, first as its secretary for two years ('71-'72), then as its president for 11 years ('72-'83), and, lastly, as a director-at-large for 10 years ('84-'93). He worked tirelessly to obtain, protect, and preserve freedoms to practice responsible falconry in the face of the ever continuing encroachment of irrational protectionism.**

Initially, Roger's top priority project was to promote the USFW's adoption of a set of falconry regulations. In January of 1976 the long awaited "Federal Falconry Regulations," largely designed and promoted by NAFA, were issued. However they contained no provisions regarding the captive breeding of raptors nor the use of the progeny therefrom for falconry. It took seven long years during Roger's presidency, but finally, in July of 1983, "Raptor Propagation Regulations" were published by the Service.

During this same period Roger worked to overcome one of the most formidable legal problems for falconers in the United States – the use, for falconry, of captive bred progeny of legally held endangered raptors. This was prohibited by the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA). An amendment to the congressional act was required to remove the restriction. In November of 1978 the sought after exemption for raptors was enacted to the delight of the falconry community. No other order of the animal kingdom has a similar exemption from the ESA. Roger deserves a great deal of credit for this accomplishment, but he would be the first to insist that many NAFA member and non-member falconers provided very crucial contributions to the effort.

These advances created ancillary issues to be attended: identification markers for individual birds, how to avoid corruption of wild species lines by accidentally released captive bred hybrids, and safe methods for transporting endangered species. Also, during Roger's term of office, NAFA created a "Breeding Registry" for the raptor breeding community.

Another major campaign was for the legalization of taking and using golden eagles for falconry. Roger was fortunate to see his and his committee's efforts successful with the publication of suitable regulations in the Federal Register in 1982. These regulations allowed "depredating immature golden eagles" to be captured and used for falconry instead of their being shot.

As to his efforts regarding hunting with raptors, in 1977 Roger began to pursue hawking privileges in federal refuges. That privilege has finally been granted in at least one refuge. Another milestone was reached when in 1979 NAFA applied for and falconers were granted an opportunity to obtain special and expanded seasons for hunting federally protected waterfowl.

In 1975 Roger became president of the North American Peregrine Foundation (NAPF) which had been formed to solicit financial support for research projects in falcon breeding for the endangered peregrine falcon. The organization had a number of breeders who donated captive bred prairie falcons and Harris' hawks which were made available to falconer/contributors. By 1980 NAPF had produced and distributed 49 falcons. The organization closed some years later but not before donating the funds to purchase the land for the World Center for Birds of Prey.

One of the quite daunting tasks Roger took upon himself was to scrutinize the Federal Register and a broad range of literature and other resources for any activity which might conceivably impact the sport of falconry. This included laws, regulations, international treaties, and publications by conservation organizations. He interacted with many government officials at all levels up to and including the Secretary of the Interior. He was also in contact with officials in the largest conservation organizations in this country, and of course, he kept NAFA abreast of the information he gathered.

Roger's activities were not limited to domestic challenges. Early in his presidency he worked on matters associated with obtaining birds from foreign countries. One item of concern was covered by the "Injurious Wildlife Regulations" which required that imported birds had to be subjected to an expensive (and potentially quite hazardous) quarantine period in a government facility before the importing party

could receive them. Naturally, the objective there was to avoid the introduction of any harmful avian pathogens or parasites. However, falconers were able to justify an exemption which allows them to maintain their bird in quarantine in their private, personal facility. Another major challenge was presented by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species

(CITES) which listed gyrfalcons and peregrine falcons among the most critically endangered birds in the world. Roger crusaded, first for an exemption for falconry, then for downlisting the peales and tundra peregrine subspecies and the gyrfalcon to a less critical category. His gyrfalcon objective was achieved in 1983.

Many things Roger achieved on behalf of NAFA and falconry have been omitted. However, the fact that he was assisted by and grateful to many dedicated falconers in achieving his objectives should not be omitted. During his term as president, NAFA membership increased from 200 to 1500 and the number of NAFA affiliates increased from 2 to 21.

In 1983, still devoted to NAFA, Roger ran for and was elected as a Director-at-Large. He continued tracking legal and political matters for the Association but promised to spend a lot more time afield with his birds.

