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In Memoriam: Richard W. Fyfe, 1932–2017

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IN MEMORIAM

RICHARD W. FYFE

1932–2017



Richard Fyfe with "Lady," his last falconry bird. (Photo by Gordon Court)

Richard Fyfe died on 17 June 2017 in Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta, after multiple battles with pneumonia; he was 85 years old. Richard enjoyed a long and very rich life, blessed with a loving family, an amazing and varied career, and a close association with his home community. Born in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, in 1932, Richard spent his formative years on the prairies where he developed a fascination for bird life, especially raptors. In those early years, he was employed by the Royal Saskatchewan Museum and, in his free time, was instrumental in helping to establish the Saskatchewan Falconry Association. He went on to study at the University of British Columbia and, ever ready for an adventure, eventually took postgraduate employment teaching elementary school in the remote Inuit community of Coral Harbour in the Canadian Arctic. With his wife Lorraine, the nurse for the community, Richard was to provide formal education to young Inuit men and women, many of whom belonged to families that were living in a settled community for the first time. Several of Richard's students went on to become prominent members of the Inuit First Nation, including a member of the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut government formed in 1999.

Upon returning to southern Canada, Richard took employment with the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) that would span over three decades, with service in Ontario, New Brunswick, and, finally, Alberta. Richard worked on a variety of birds and was particularly interested in the effects of biocides on raptor species. He was among the few Canadians to attend the Madison Peregrine Conference in 1965, an event that would connect him with like-minded colleagues, many of whom he would befriend for life. Richard

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would spearhead conservation efforts for the Peregrine Falcon in Canada and would eventually oversee the construction and operation of the Canadian Wildlife Service Endangered Species Facility at Camp Wainwright, Alberta. Blessed with a dedicated and talented staff, and by the mutual sharing of knowledge with primarily American counterparts, the Wainwright staff would begin producing enough young *anatum* peregrines to allow experimentation with reintroduction as early as 1975. Richard was to enjoy almost immediate success with this work when he documented the first successful breeding of a captive-raised Peregrine Falcon in the wild at Flett Lake, Alberta, in July 1977—a bird produced two years earlier at the Wainwright facility that had been fostered to a wild nest in 1975. That surely was a "red letter" day for Richard and his colleagues in the Canadian program, something made all the more special as he shared that particular day in the field with long-term friend, raptor conservation icon, Morley Nelson. Richard was fortunate enough to report on this event almost immediately, announcing it while presenting a paper at the symposium "Management Techniques for Preserving Endangered Birds" held at the University of Wisconsin in August 1977.

Richard Fyfe was rarely an idle man and, in addition to being a husband and a father of five children, he always had time for home, community, and nongovernment conservation organizations. He always had a garden going on his farm near Fort Saskatchewan, he passed on his considerable public speaking abilities through teaching Christopher Leadership Courses, and worked tirelessly with Dr. Mike Person and John Campbell Sr. to legalize falconry in Alberta and to establish the Alberta Falconry Association. Richard volunteered at the national level assisting the Wildlife Preservation Canada with the New Noahs program, something that would not only assist with the conservation of endangered species, but would train a new generation of Canadian biologists in hands-on wildlife conservation skills. Internationally, Richard would devote time to several organizations, including a term as Chair of the IUCN, ICBP Specialist Group on Birds of Prey from 1975 to 1982. At the same time, he continued to prepare and present important papers at major conferences on biodiversity conservation, expedited large projects for the Canadian Wildlife Service, such as the Latin American pesticide residue monitoring project, all in addition to overseeing the *anatum* peregrine falcon breeding and reintroduction program. With the latter, Richard used his considerable charm and negotiating skills to work with several provincial wildlife departments in Canada to collaborate on re-introduction of the species in southern Canada; he was successful in ensuring that they were all "pulling on the same rope."

For all Richard's passion, industry, and talent, he was to fall victim, like others, to the specter that was "Operation Falcon." With one leaked memo, Richard, and others, would be implicated in investigations by wildlife enforcement agencies and the senior law enforcement agencies of both Canada and the United States that were launched to establish whether falcon breeding projects (government-funded or otherwise) were a front for the illegal trade in these raptors. Overnight, Richard and the others would never again enjoy the reputation they had enjoyed with many domestic and international colleagues. As history has shown, "Operation Falcon" would eventually disintegrate into a wildlife law-enforcement fiasco and one that deserves as little mention here as possible. However, to put the record straight, an audit of the Canadian Wildlife Service Endangered Species Facility, overseen by Dr. Geoffrey Holroyd of the CWS, was to counter any and all ill-founded accusations of impropriety. Though fully exonerated, Richard felt alienated from the raptor research community and took early retirement in 1987.

Of resilient Saskatchewan stock, Richard would put the unfortunate final years of his government service behind him. In semiretirement, he took on consultation work, orchestrating efforts to mitigate the loss of raptor nesting habitat during the construction of the Oldman River Dam. He also conducted some of the earliest investigations of raptor electrocutions with power companies in Alberta and also produced a series of wildlife videos, with his wife Lorraine, for use by school children, something that featured his considerable talent behind the lens of a camera.

Richard's life's work was formally celebrated by Canada in 2000, when he was invested into the Order of Canada, the nation's highest civilian award, in recognition for his role in the restoration of the *anatum* Peregrine Falcon in Canada. Such a profile and remarkable career does, at times, seem difficult to ascribe to the soft-spoken "Bud" from Saskatchewan, with the mischievous nature, sharp wit, and great slow smile. Richard was a quietly successful man who immersed himself in the world of raptors and

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mentored many to the same—he is owed a great debt of gratitude. During his funeral, the words of eulogy for Richard would end with a simple statement that he would enjoy, and one that seems perfectly suitable for remembering him: Richard Fyfe—he was a gentleman who knew and loved the falcons.—**Gordon Court (email address: gord.court@gov.ab.ca), Alberta Fish and Wildlife Division, Alberta Environment and Parks, 2nd Floor, Great West Life Building, 9920-108 Street, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T5K 2M4**

In Memoriam Editor: Joel E. Pagel

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