

DONORS:
Dale Patton, Jennifer (Nelson) Willes, North American Falconers Association, Alberta Falconers Association.

R. Wayne Nelson, Ph.D.
26 December 1945 – 15 February 2017



Wayne, Alora and Jennifer in Yukon Territory, 1978



Wayne's first bird Ulysses

Wayne Nelson passed away at home in Cambrose, Alberta, Canada with his wife of 49 years, Alora, and daughter Jennifer (Willes) by his side. Wayne's life was spent as a scientist, falconer, avid reader, writer, researcher, photographer, art and music aficionado, loving husband, father, and "Pa" to granddaughters Olivia and Vienna.

Robert Wayne Nelson was born 26 December 1945 in Vernon, British Columbia to Bob and Verna Nelson. At an early age, Wayne fell in love with hunting and observing wildlife. Around 1957, he saw an article in National Geographic "Life with an Indian Prince" by John and Frank Craighead and their earlier article "Adventures with Birds of Prey." He soon was handling a young retail and developing a lifelong appreciation of natural history.

He encouraged his father to join him as an avid birder. They received a copy of The Condor which contained Frank Beebe's paper on the Peale's Peregrines of the Queen Charlotte Islands. That article set the course for much of Wayne's life.

Wayne took his first falconry bird in 1959 – a red tail he named Ulysses (Uly) from Bald Hill in Vernon, B.C. He gave his last bird, a peregrine named Perri to Phil and Helen Trefry in 2016. A rich birding history spanned those years.

At the age of 15, Wayne fell in love with Alora; they married in 1967. They attended University of British Columbia (UBC). His imprint prairie, Dusty, shared his dorm room. After receiving his undergraduate degree, Wayne was a graduate student studying the behavior of peregrines on Langara Island, B.C. What began as a three year M.S. degree concluded with a PhD and several papers that captured peregrine behavior and falcon ecology. The self-funded and vacation timed, study continued for a remarkable 43 years!

In 1971, Wayne became very involved with the peregrine breeding program at John Campbell's project in Black Diamond, Alberta. They fledged the first captive bred anatum peregrines in Canada. They wrote several articles and produced a film on peregrine and merlin breeding behavior which was shown at Raptor Research conferences.

Wayne and Alora were among the founders of the Alberta Falconry Association. They were active members

and served in leadership capacities for over 20 years. They received service awards from the association. Wayne was made an Honorary Life Member.

Wayne professional career began as a biology instructor at Camrose Lutheran College. Then, with his raptor background, he was employed with Alberta Fish and Wildlife as a biologist for over 20 years. Wayne had a special condition of his employment – his supervisors understood he required time off to continue his research on the Langara Island peregrines!

After retiring in 2006, Wayne spent 5 days a week "working" on the massive amount of literature on the behavioral ecology of Peregrines, other raptors, and many other bird species. In retirement, his love of raptors continued with wing-tagging vultures in central Alberta. The next seven years were mostly consumed with field work, literature, correspondence and his voracious reading habit.

In the early years, Alora was his primary field assistant. In subsequent years, he had an assortment of able field assistants, including Keith Hodson and David Pitt-Brooke. With a bit of dark humor, Alora noted that the assistants' primary duty was to "return and report the location of Wayne's body!" Alora wasn't kidding about Wayne's potential for an early, field-related demise. Over the years, he survived a fall from a cliff, a Zodiac with a split bottom running through high waves, a fish tender sea rescue, engine repair in rolling seas, a fishing guide who needed rescue assistance, open sea runs to the islands. All these harrowing field days were usually related matter-of-factly by Wayne.

Wayne gained personal insight during his Langara visits. He watched as his beloved daughter became his field assistant and grew into an attractive, intelligent, competent young lady in her own right. He would often speak with pride about Jennifer's becoming a registered nurse with two beautiful daughters.

Wayne was a one-of-a-kind friend and an ever-inquisitive scientist whose passing leaves a major void in the raptor world. Wayne Nelson could be described as one of the last great Canadian naturalists who gathered information out of love of nature rather than notoriety. He created a data set that spans nearly 5 decades and is a remarkable contribution to those who love raptors. As Wayne once said: "Ordinary science cannot convey any proper sense of the creature at home in its environment – those great dark falcons enduring the fierceness of a west-coast winter. Perhaps it requires a different means of expression, closer to art and poetry, but no less essential in apprehending the lives of wild creatures."



Wayne in 1986



Wayne always observing wild areas



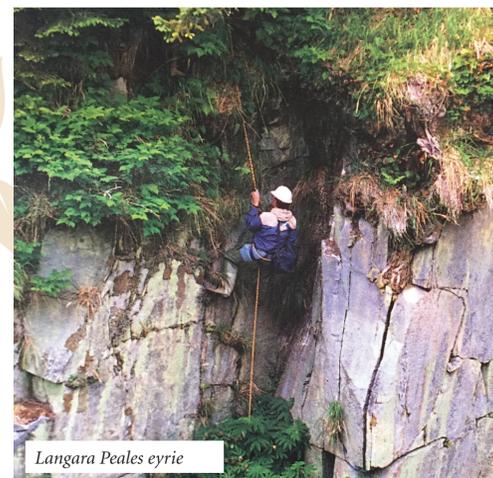
Wayne and Alora with grand daughters Olivia and Vienna in 2010



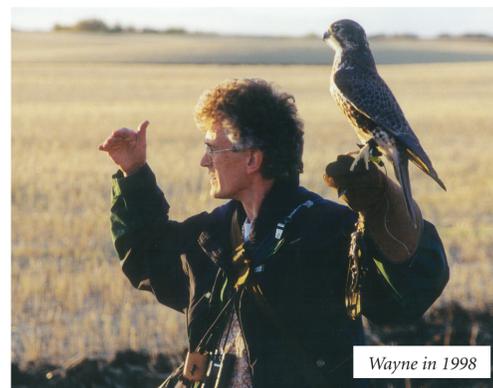
Wayne and Alora with daughter Jennifer and grand daughters Olivia and Vienna in 2016

Wayne was one of the last Canadian naturalists and his nearly five decades of data collection is a remarkable contribution to those who love raptors.

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Langara Peales eyrie



Wayne in 1998



Wayne's last bird Perry