

## **In Memoriam: Thomas Lowell Maechtle, 1958–2016**

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IN MEMORIAM  
THOMAS LOWELL MAECHTLE  
1958–2016

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Tom Maechtle passed away at home in Ocala, FL, on 25 December 2016 after a brief struggle with pancreatic cancer. A fascination with hawks and falcons in his early teen years led Tom to a rich life as an accomplished falconer, raptor biologist, recognized authority on tundra peregrines (*Falco peregrinus tundrius*) and author. Owner of a successful environmental consulting business and Director of a not-for-profit research organization, Tom was also a spokesperson for the natural world, a falcon breeder, a renowned falcon hood maker, and a devoted husband and father.

Born on 8 December 1958, in Geneva, IL, Tom's early interest in falconry and birds of prey quickly became a passion that raged within him until his passing. His boyhood home in Geneva allowed him access (with the help of his mother driving him until he was older) to some of North America's more respected falconry practitioners (including Jack Oar and Jim Weaver), who helped him learn and excel at falconry. It was soon apparent that Tom would excel at falconry and other undertakings with uncommon ability. Traveling west after high school graduation with friend and hawking partner Sam Lindberg, they crossed the Bighorn Mountains to the area east of Cody, WY, and met other falconers on a western tour. Tom would later come to call Sheridan, WY, his permanent home base for much of his career. He and Sam soon gravitated naturally to the Peregrine Fund's hawk barns in Ithaca, NY, volunteering as hack-site attendants for peregrine release sites along the Mississippi River. They honed their rappelling skills on local rock faces, and Tom later specialized in fostering captive-raised young into unproductive eyries.

In 1981, Tom was elated at being invited by Bill Mattox to participate in the *Greenland Peregrine Falcon Survey*. During the ensuing 18 summers, he would prove to be an essential asset. Fearless, tireless, knowledgeable, skilled, and dependable, he was a constant upon whom everyone relied to assure the work was completed successfully and safely. Greenland became a second home and place of refuge for Tom; he was truly in his element on the tundra, lakes, and cliff faces. Tom was a founding member and later Director of the not-for-profit environmental research and education organization Earthspan (along with peregrine-research colleagues including Mattox, Seegar, Yates, Fuller, and Whitney). He participated in or oversaw many of its projects on peregrines and other species, and was a cooperater in its principals' development and miniaturization of satellite-received telemetry for birds. Tom became an expert at the incorporation of these technologies into field studies and the physical deployment of devices in most of his subsequent research. He directed Earthspan's *Padre Island (TX) Peregrine Falcon Survey* for two decades, and carried out fieldwork in Mexico on wintering tundra peregrines. Tom conducted peregrine projects with Earthspan colleagues in Arctic Russia and Alaska. He joined Bud Anderson of the Falcon Research Group for several years of South American studies, including work in Peru, Argentina, and Chile. They captured and blood-sampled peregrines, and Tom was instrumental in the deployment of telemetry devices in Bud's *Southern Cross Peregrine Project*. Tom Maechtle's efforts resulted in the banding and blood-sampling of thousands of peregrines, the remote tracking of dozens of others, the critical insights gained through these initiatives, and the numerous scientific publications he authored or coauthored.

At home in Sheridan, he created Bighorn Environmental Consultants; its success was attributable to his talents and the fact that everyone who ever knew Tom liked and respected him. His gentle, patient nature and sense of humor were legend, as was his ribald and profane side in informal settings. He mentored dozens of young biologists, just as he had always done in Greenland and with Earthspan. Tom sat on conservation

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and wildlife panels, was a spokesperson for environmental issues, and raised gyrfalcons in captivity and flew them at sage-grouse. Tom and his wife Kathy bought a winter home in Ocala, FL, to train and show horses with daughter Ireland. It was from there that his sudden illness and passing dismayed so many in the falconry and raptor research worlds. Tom embraced his raptor-focused journey and carved out a life we can all admire. Everything falconry, raptor research, and our natural world gave him he repaid through his tireless quest to leave it all better than he found it. His was a life well-lived, but far too brief, and much too soon he leaves Kathy, Ireland, and his many close friends, colleagues, and admirers; Tom's many friends within our community will forever feel his loss.

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