

Although Paddy was involved in many activities over his life, including sailing, rugby, waterfowl shooting, gardening, and retriever training, falconry was undoubtedly his primary passion. Whether as President of the Saskatchewan Falconry Association (SFA), Canadian NAFA Director, looking after the Saskatchewan Cooperative Falcon Project (SCFP), annually urging members to get out and dig nest holes for prairie falcons, or mentoring new apprentices, Paddy was arguably the single person most responsible for the success and continuation of falconry activities in Saskatchewan over the past half century. Paddy had a cottage at Buffalo Pound lake that regularly served as a meeting place for SFA summer meetings where details for our annual field meets were planned.

W.J.P. (Paddy) Thompson

Born Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan July 20, 1952
Died Saskatoon, Saskatchewan July 13, 2023

Paddy was a real, down-to-earth people person, which was demonstrated by the huge crowd at his Celebration of Life held at the Wildlife Federation Building in Saskatoon. Falconers flew in from as far away as Ontario to attend, along with members of the Retriever Club, Wildlife Federation, long-time hunting partners, and old school chums. Everyone, it seemed, knew and admired this man and were already starting to feel the immense hole he has left in our lives.

His personal falconry career began like many of us with red-tails and a hand-me-down prairie falcon, but the open spaces and abundant ducks and upland birds soon led him into flying large falcons. These were primarily tame-hacked 4WW female peregrines but also included a gyrfalcon and a couple of hybrids including one male peregrine/prairie. During the 70s most of us were hawking mainly ducks but Paddy was among the first to seriously concentrate on hawking grouse. Grouse-hawking soon became his primary goal although he seldom passed up a Hun or duck flight if one presented itself. During his last two years he had set a goal of trapping and training a passage peregrine which unfortunately never happened.

In spite of the advantages of a pointing dog when flying grouse, Paddy's choice of dog was always the black Labrador retriever. This paired well with his love of gunning for geese and ducks using field decoys, a passion he inherited from his father. There was a constant succession of dogs over the years with his last two hunting companions, Ebony and Black Pearl, being his experimentation with "pointing labs." Paddy was an active member of the Saskatoon Retriever Club and spent untold hours working for the club and mentoring would be retriever enthusiasts.



The SFA is the oldest falconry group still in existence in North America having been founded by Richard Fyfe, who was a Canadian Wildlife Service biologist, and a small handful of would-be falconers in 1958. As our President, Paddy organized our 60th Anniversary Meet, held in Swift Current in conjunction with NAFA, which was attended by falconers from all over Canada. Martin Geleynse helped to get a special deal to facilitate crossing the border with falconry birds for US falconers and several came up with their birds and dogs. This was a culmination of a suggestion made by early NAFA President Dan Cover half a century ago that Saskatchewan would be a wonderful place for a NAFA field meet. Paddy's last female peregrine, Fantasia, put on an amazing show taking several sharp-tailed grouse in amazing flights at this meet.

The membership of the SFA has remained small with never more than 20 active members at one time but we are a branch member of the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation and Paddy was our primary liaison with this group. The SFA has had a long involvement with conservation efforts starting with fighting for legal protection of birds of prey in the 1960s and digging nest holes for prairie falcons. Paddy was able to get several

grants from the SWF to help with purchasing equipment and defray travel expenses for this annual project which he always helped to organize. Banding records indicate that over the years more than 1200 prairie falcons have fledged from artificial holes dug by SFA falconers.

When the peregrine falcon was classified as endangered due to contamination with pesticides such as DDT, the SFA became involved in captive-breeding and reintroduction efforts. In 1976, the Saskatchewan Cooperative Falcon Project was formed as a consortium of the SFA, Western College of Veterinary Medicine and what was then the Provincial Game Department. Its main focus was the construction of a breeding facility at the College where over 500 peregrines were produced for release and sent to sites in the US Midwest and Canada. Other than a couple of years when Paddy and his wife Wendy were in Germany, he managed the entire operation and was responsible for the day to day management of the falcons, a breeding colony of quail, falcon releases—everything and anything that needed to be done. Paddy was also a valued member of the Canadian Peregrine Recovery Team that oversaw the goals and operation of releases of captive-bred peregrines in Canada.

Paddy was survived by his last two dogs, Ebony and Black Pearl as well as his old hybrid gyr/peregrine Spook. Spook was given a "retirement home" at Lynn Oliphant's and lived for another year and a half to the ripe old age of 26. Paddy's wife Wendy "inherited" the dogs. Ebony was old and had to be euthanized soon after Paddy's death, but Pearl is a young dog and is keeping Wendy active.

When the SCFP was finally shut down, Paddy went into partnership with a gun-hunting partner running a lucrative security business which included using Labradors as "sniffer dogs" as well as electronic surveillance of homes and businesses. The pay was a bit better than running a falcon propagation project and Paddy was always very generous with his support for various conservation efforts. Both the SFA and the Archives were generously supported in his will. Paddy will be remembered by all who knew him as both a dedicated falconer and conservationist as well as a wonderful friend.

