

In Memoriam
RICHARD LOUIS GLINSKI
(5 March 1950 - 24 January 2025)

BY DOUG JENNESS

Rich Glinski, a prominent field ornithologist and expert on Arizona's raptors, passed away on 24 January at his home in Arivaca at the age of 74. He was a field biologist for the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGFD) for many years and later worked for the Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department (MCPRD). He was a long-time member of and contributor to the Arizona Field Ornithologists (AZFO) and was actively engaged in several raptor projects in his final days.

Rich was born on 5 March 1950, in East Chicago, Indiana. He moved with his family to Tucson in 1968, during his senior year of high school, where he graduated from Palo Verde High School. In 1972, he graduated from the University of Arizona (UA) with a degree in Wildlife Biology. Before starting graduate school at Arizona State University (ASU), he spent the summer of 1972 in Alaska's Aleutian Islands studying sea otters (*Enhydra lutris*). Acquaintances, however, recall that he spent much of his time discussing Alaska's raptors with students studying them. At ASU he worked on his master's degree, under Robert Ohmart, specializing in raptor biology. He studied the Common Black Hawk (*Buteogallus anthracinus*), Gray Hawk (*Buteo plagiatus*), and other raptors. In the summer of 1973, he assisted his friend Bill Mader in a study of Harris's Hawk (*Parabuteo unicinctus*) in northwest Tucson. His principal project was researching Mississippi Kites (*Ictinia mississippiensis*) along the lower San Pedro River, which led to publication of an article in 1983 on "Breeding Ecology of the Mississippi Kite in Arizona". The field work and its written summary remain a model for field ornithologists.

In 1979, Rich conducted roadside raptor surveys in South America with 2 other ornithologists, David Ellis and Dwight Smith, traveling 29,000 km in 9 countries. They observed 41 of the continent's 87 raptors, including the rare Pallid Peregrine Falcon, then a separate species (*Falco kreyenborgi*), and now considered a subspecies of Peregrine Falcon (*F. peregrinus cassini*). Previous to their discovery, there were only 5 known specimens and a handful of reported observations. In Tierra del Fuego, they obtained the first known photographs of this taxon.

In 1980, Rich decided to join AZGFD as a field biologist, but there were no openings at the time. A friend convinced him to take a job as an AZGFD Game Manager (game warden) until an opening in the nongame department opened up. In this capacity, he worked as an investigator of game violations, based out of the Mesa office. In 1984 he was



Rich Glinski with Gray Hawk, 28 June 2024. Photo by Michael Stewart

able to get a position with AZGFD's nongame section and moved to Wickenburg with his wife, Patti. He subsequently became Research and Nongame Program Manager. In this capacity, his field research and management efforts with Bald Eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) and Peregrine Falcons helped reestablish their nesting populations. Rich, a licensed pilot, participated in aerial surveys to locate Bald Eagle nests. One memorable moment occurred in 1985 when he and 3 other biologists were surveying eagle nests from an airplane. They spotted a fire threatening a nest near Alamo Lake, and they landed, fought the fire, and called for reinforcements, saving the nest. They were officially commended by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior for saving the eagle nest.

Rich recognized the unusual and unique character of Arizona's Bald Eagles, which nested in a desert habitat. When the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) delisted the Bald Eagle as an endangered species in June 2007, it had already rejected petitions from Arizona biologists to maintain Arizona's Bald Eagles on the list as a discrete and endangered population. The agency's reasoning was that insufficient habitat existed in the state for a distinct population. This decision was contested in court by many conservation organizations. Supporting their effort, Rich sent a forceful and persuasive letter to USFWS documenting the distinct character of eagles nesting in the Sonoran Desert habitat, the progress that had been made in increasing the nesting population, and the necessity of maintaining the protective measures of the Endangered Species Act. A federal court order in 2008 delayed taking the Bald Eagle off the endangered list until a review could take place. The USFWS removed Arizona's Bald Eagles from the list in 2010, but many protective steps have been continued, primarily by AZGFD.

Rich's favorite bird was the Peregrine Falcon, as he was quick to tell people, and he dedicated much time and effort to restore the nesting population in Arizona, working with many organizations and biologists, including conducting extensive surveys in the Grand Canyon. Falconers were among those who contributed greatly to the effort to protect the Peregrine Falcon. Rich knew many of them and was a long-time member of the Arizona Falconers Association. He included a chapter on falconry in *The Raptors of Arizona* book, which he edited. In 1999, this falcon was removed from the endangered species list, signifying one of the most successful recoveries of an endangered species. You knew that you had won Rich's respect and trust when he offered to show you a Peregrine eyrie.

In 2000, Rich retired from the AZGFD and went to work for the MCPRD as supervisor of its Desert Outdoor Center at Lake Pleasant. There, his work shifted away from field surveys to educating young people about the richness of nature and an appreciation for the outdoors. Rich placed great importance on interesting youth in wildlife and the need to protect it. When he presented the keynote talk at the 2011 annual AZFO meeting, the subject was billed as the "Current Status of Hawks in Arizona," but his main theme was encouraging AZFO to use its field activities to win youth to appreciate nature. In her tribute to Rich, Chrissy Kondrat, AZGFD Permits Biologist and long-time AZFO leader, affirmed that he "was a remarkable teacher and mentor whose influence stretched across generations, touching the lives of many, including me and my daughter, Sydney. I will always cherish his unrestrained enthusiasm for inspiring young minds, particularly when fostering a love for the natural world and its magnificent raptors. He shared his vast knowledge about these awe-inspiring birds, igniting a spark in many young people, such as Sydney, that would lead her to discover a newfound fascination with raptors, far surpassing her previous interest in passerine banding.... Our last trapping expedition with Sydney close by his side was at the top of the list of most treasured memories. I will always be thankful for the time he spent with her, giving her an extraordinary opportunity to engage deeply in science and even life-mentoring advice while also holding some stunning birds, and creating memories that will forever echo in her memory." And there are many others who could make similar testimonies of Rich's interest in and inspiring impact on young people, including catching raptors, usually Red-tailed Hawks (*Buteo jamaicensis*), that they could hold and then release.

In April 2007, Rich became involved in studying Crested Caracaras (*Caracara plancus*) and continued in this effort up to the time of his passing, bringing his substantial field experience to the project. He and I collaborated in organizing 2 AZFO field expeditions to search for Crested Caracara nests in March 2013 and April 2014 and started monitoring caracara communal roosts in 2014. In March 2015, Rich and I made a presentation on what we had been discovering about caracaras to the fourth annual Tri-National Symposium with representatives from the Tohono O'odham Nation,



Rich with Red-tailed Hawk and Sydney Smith, January 2018. Photo by Chrissy Kondrat

Mexico, and the United States. We were joined by Joan Morrison in our surveys in 2015 and began putting solar-powered transmitters on caracaras in 2017 to study their movements. Rich was adept at climbing ladders to reach nestlings high in saguaros. We had many enjoyable campouts under the open stars in all seasons, not only comparing notes about our study of caracaras, but discussing all manner of questions from history and politics, conservation and raptors, science and bureaucracies, to philosophy. As many colleagues know who enjoyed similar campouts, Rich had strong opinions about bureaucrats, with little or no field experience, making decisions about scientific research and management. However, he had much tolerance for differing views of colleagues and attempted to learn from others. He was midway writing a book about his own outlook on the meaning of life. We had camped out in mid-December 2024 (Rich, as usual, sleeping in the open on a cot) and were planning another campout in early February to discuss and complete field work on an article about caracara communal foraging and roosting we were collaborating on.

Over the years, Rich conducted many surveys of the Gray Hawk and was a coauthor of Cornell University's *Birds of the World* article on this species (as well as coauthoring the article on Zone-tailed Hawk: *Buteo albonotatus*). He had many notebooks filled with data that friends and colleagues urged him to publish in scientific journals. Rich, however, was thinking of writing a book on Gray Hawks in lighter prose but still scientifically rigorous. When he retired in 2018 and moved to Arivaca, he was thrilled to have Gray Hawks nesting on his property. In the summer of 2024, he helped his neighbor and fellow ornithologist, Kathy Groschupf, trap a nesting female Gray Hawk on her property and outfit it with a solar-powered transmitter. The bird wintered near Mazatlán, Mexico. He would have been



Rich holding Crested Caracara fledgling being banded and outfitted with transmitter, 24 June 2022. Photo by Doug Jenness



Rich climbing ladder to capture fledgling caracara, 21 June 2023. Photo by Doug Jenness

pleased to learn that it returned to the nest site with a mate in March 2025. He was collaborating with Kathy on an article on Gray Hawk vocalizations, which will be published in *Arizona Birds*.

During his long career, Rich trapped scores of raptors of many species. Some were adults caught along roadsides, and many were fledglings about to leave nests reached only by scaling cliffs, rope climbing trees, and working up saguaros on ladders. Some birds he banded, some he outfitted with radio or satellite transmitters, and some were rescue operations. While a student he and a friend made local news in Tucson when they recaptured an Aplomado Falcon (*Falco femoralis*), using a pigeon as bait, on the UA campus. It had been stolen from the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum. In all of his trapping, he put the well-being of the birds first. He employed precautions to make sure birds were not injured or killed, and if a capture method led to harming birds, he was upset and discarded its further use. From his earliest days as a field researcher, he found that a few birders and photographers, in order to tick off a new "life bird" or get the perfect photo, would get too close to nests when the eggs or nestlings were most vulnerable. He had seen too many nests fail as a result. In response, he coauthored an article, "Birdwatching etiquette: The need for a developing philosophy", published in 1978 in *American Birds*.

Rich was an early member of AZFO and, in addition to the contributions already cited, played a pivotal role in the program honoring Arizona pioneer ornithologist Gale Monson at the 2012 annual meeting in Lake Havasu City. He was coeditor of the book *Counting Birds with Gale Monson* published in 2012 and proceeds from sale of the book helped finance AZFO's Gale Monson Research Grants. Monson's meticulous notetaking greatly impressed Rich, and he often pointed to it as an example to other field researchers. He helped get Monson's voluminous notebooks placed at the UA library where they have been indexed. From 2018 through 2024, he served as the coordinator of AZFO's Achievement Awards.

Rich participated in the annual, 1-day survey of wintering raptors at Santa Cruz Flats for over a decade, including the count 1 week before he passed away. He called me a couple of times following that count with suggestions for the 20-year summary of the survey I was preparing for *Arizona Birds*.

A facile writer and competent editor, Rich believed it was important to acquaint a broader audience with the knowledge that research biologists were discovering through their field work. He was the lead editor and a contributor to a 1988 collection of raptor research studies published by the National Wildlife Federation in the *Proceedings of the Southwest Raptor*



Rich and Gray Hawk with transmitter, 29 June 2024. Photo by Kathy Groschupf



Rich camped out at the Santa Cruz Flats, 11 December 2024. Note his cot in the back. Photo by Doug Jenness

Management Symposium and Workshop. He edited the 1998 book, *The Raptors of Arizona*, and wrote many of the essays in it. In 2002, he collaborated with photographer Tom Vezo to produce *Birds of Prey in the American West*, which presented striking descriptions of raptors for a wider hearing than more rigorous scientific publications provide.

Rich was an experienced hunter with both bow and gun and was a long-time member of the Arizona Wildlife Federation. In 2010 he was chosen to write the organization's *Wildlife 2010 Trophies: The Official Record Book of Arizona's Big Game Trophies*.

He also wrote a novel set in Arizona's borderland desert country, *Satan's Crossing, When Walls Won't Work*, published in 2018, which has received many positive reviews.

Rich's family and friends knew him to be generous and sharing. He had dozens of birthdays listed on his phone and many of us fondly recall that the first greeting we received on our birthdays was a text or voice message from him, and occasionally, as Chrissy noted, "his best karaoke version of Happy Birthday."

During campfire discussions, Rich often commented how much he liked the refrain from *Big Yellow Taxi*, a Joni Mitchell song lamenting the destruction of the environment: "Don't it always seem to go, That you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone." For Rich this sentiment was about more than the environment; it was about life itself. He appreciated and was happy with his life and what he had accomplished, and his relations with family, colleagues, and friends. Chrissy expressed the feelings of those who knew him well: "Rich's unwavering passion for life and deep love for people, his family, and the natural world will forever resonate in our hearts, creating an enduring legacy that will never fade. Thank you, Rich. You are missed."