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**INTERVIEWEE:** Peter Jenny

**INTERVIEWER:** David Todd

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**Google Voice** [00:00:02] This call is now being recorded.

**David Todd** [00:00:05] Peter.

**Peter Jenny** [00:00:07] Plan B, I guess, is that the idea?

**David Todd** [00:00:08] Yes, I can hear you well. The only thing I might ask is if you could hold the phone up close to your mouth, we'll get a stronger signal. Otherwise, we lose some.

**Peter Jenny** [00:00:22] Is that better? Is that better?

**David Todd** [00:00:24] Yeah. Yeah. No, that's, that's super.

**Peter Jenny** [00:00:27] Okay.

**David Todd** [00:00:27] Thank you very much. Yeah, well, if you are willing, we could just jump into this and...

**Peter Jenny** [00:00:36] Let's do it. Let's do it.

**David Todd** [00:00:39] Okay.

**Peter Jenny** [00:00:39] David, I will say it's pretty damn thorough. I mean, this thing that you sent me, this draft, you pretty much covered everything. I mean, I don't even need to be on this call.

**David Todd** [00:00:51] Oh, no, no, no, no. These are just like, cues. You know so much about this. I'm just trying to remember things that you've been involved with and I just...

**Peter Jenny** [00:01:03] Pretty good.

**David Todd** [00:01:03] You know, I've just scratched the surface, so if you'll give this a little depth to this degree.

**Peter Jenny** [00:01:09] Sure. Big scratch. Okay.

**David Todd** [00:01:11] All right. Well, well, good. I will give a little introduction and then we'll just jump into the questions if you'll indulge us there. All right. Well, good morning. I am David Todd, and I have the privilege of being here with Peter Jenny. And with his permission,

we plan on recording this interview for research and educational work on behalf of a nonprofit group called the Conservation History Association of Texas, and for a book and web site for Texas A&M University Press, and finally, for an archive at the Briscoe Center for American History, which is at the University of Texas at Austin. Those are plans.

**David Todd** [00:01:51] But I want to stress here that Mr. Jenny would have all equal rights to use the recording as he sees fit, too.

**David Todd** [00:02:01] I want to make sure that's okay with you.

**Peter Jenny** [00:02:04] Yeah, that's fine, David.

**David Todd** [00:02:07] Great. Okay. Well, it is Friday, July 1st, 2022. It's about 10:45 Mountain Time, or Central Time, 9:45 Mountain Time. Again, my name is David Todd. I represent the Conservation History Association of Texas, and I'm in Austin. And we are fortunate to be conducting a remote interview with Mr. Jenny, who is based in the Sheridan, Wyoming, area.

**David Todd** [00:02:35] For over 50 years, Mr. Jenny has been involved with the study, capture, breeding and restoration of falcons, including the peregrine falcon, the orange-breasted falcon, and the Northern aplomado falcon. Much of that work and time was at the Peregrine Fund, where he served as vice president, president and CEO, and I believe is on the board there now, too.

**David Todd** [00:02:57] So today we will talk about his life and career to date and especially focus on his work with the aplomado falcon, just as an example of the kind of efforts that he's put into conservation.

**David Todd** [00:03:14] So we usually start these interviews with a question about your childhood and early years, and there might have been some people or events in that part of your life that interest you, you know, gave you some interest in animals and birds, and I guess here the relevant thing with the falcons, in particular.

**Peter Jenny** [00:03:34] Well, thanks, David. You know, I don't have a really great answer for that, but I guess I can try to frame that by, you know, I grew up on a farm in Pennsylvania. Both my parents were veterinarians. So, I grew up in a household full of animals, from elephants to lions to horses, cattle.

**Peter Jenny** [00:03:55] And, and to include my first exposure to a bird of prey, I guess I was seven, seven, maybe eight years old, but pretty young. And it was a barn owl with a broken wing. And it was in a box stall down in a barn. And it was an old stone barn, so kind of dim light. And if you know much about barn owls, they hiss and they click their beak and they move their head in sort of a circular manner. It was like giving a little boy, you know, charge of a dragon. I mean, you know, the thing was the scariest animal in the world. And I used to chuck a dead rabbit in there and run, run back, you know.

**Peter Jenny** [00:04:36] But, but you know, that kind of hooked me, I think. And so from that point on, I never really thought seriously about much besides birds of prey. I mean, it really, really captured my imagination.

**David Todd** [00:04:53] Did you have somebody that was either an adult or a peer who shared that interest? It sounds like your parents definitely would have been really knowledgeable and enthusiastic about interest in animals. Is that part of the world you had then?

**Peter Jenny** [00:05:11] Well, they did and they didn't. You know, my mother, her brother was sort of a, oh, not a very successful falconer. So, she saw the worst side of falconry. And so, they were not very encouraging when all of a sudden I developed this interest in birds of prey. And so, it was kind of a, you know, one of, they thought of it as sort of, oh, this is just sort of a passion he'll outgrow, you know, like a lot of kids do. Well, I guess I didn't. And, and even beyond that, you know, if you don't give a kid, you know, all he wants, it makes them want that even more, if you know what I mean.

**Peter Jenny** [00:05:57] So anyway, it kind of created a monster as far as my desire to work with birds of prey. And, you know, it was always something I wasn't supposed to be doing. I was always supposed to be, you know, working with the horses or doing this or doing that. And, you know, I'd come back from exercising the horses and and, you know, I would have found a red-tailed hawk nest, you know, and there'd be, you know, the horses were sort of scratched up as I was going through the brush looking for the hawks. And things like that, you know, you know, typical things that a child would do.

**Peter Jenny** [00:06:27] So they were kind of supportive to a point, but not really. It certainly wasn't their interest, but it certainly didn't deter me much. If anything, it encouraged me.

**David Todd** [00:06:41] Yeah, I guess there's sort of that tantalizing tempting of the forbidden.

**Peter Jenny** [00:06:48] Oh yeah. Yeah.

**David Todd** [00:06:49] The forbidden fruit.

**Peter Jenny** [00:06:51] Exactly. Yeah, unwittingly they, they really were pretty good at making a fanatic out of me, you know. So anyway, I guess I had that tendency anyway, so it didn't take much.

**David Todd** [00:07:05] Well, and I guess this growing up on a farm and being surrounded by wildlife and people who who cared and knew a lot about these animals was, was encouraging enough. But were there any books or films or TV shows or just sort of cultural artifacts out there that, you know, influenced you as well?

**Peter Jenny** [00:07:28] Yeah. You know, I had, I had one old book on falconry that a neighbor gave me. It was part of a, I don't know, 1830 Badminton Library collection, "Falconry and Coursing". You know, half of it was falconry - hunting hares with sight hounds. At any rate, that was sort of my source, my literary source of falconry back then.

**Peter Jenny** [00:07:51] So I was constantly trying to... You know, old British technology, it was pretty different. You know, for instance, you know, reading that book, the best source of leather for the jesses, the things that go around the bird's legs was either dog skin or porpoise hide, and both pretty hard to come by, you know, in the Philadelphia area, you know, in the, in the early '60s.

**Peter Jenny** [00:08:21] But at any rate, so, so yeah, it was, I got, you know, maybe the first step, but that's about it. And I didn't really meet many other falconers until much later, several

years later. But, you know, if you're a kid and you're really passionate about something, you remember how hard it was to get your parents to drive around because you didn't have a car, you know? And it was like, well, maybe next month or maybe next week. And, you know, kids are very impatient. So that was pretty frustrating. But, you know, again, that probably encouraged me as well.

**David Todd** [00:08:56] Well, and this may be skipping over things and please fill in gaps if I, if I'm doing that, but you went to the University of Montana and earned a degree in zoology. And I'm curious if there were classmates or teachers there that, again, you know, kind of fueled that interest that you had or guided it in some way.

**Peter Jenny** [00:09:20] You know, long before that, actually, I went to a boarding school called Millbrook in New York, and they had a zoo. And, in that zoo, they had a couple of goshawks and they had a golden eagle and, you know, lots of birds of prey. And I ultimately, you know, I became the head of the zoo. And we, we developed sort of an interesting group of kids that, you know, flew red-tailed hawks and goshawks, right there in Dutchess County, New York, and to include people like Bobby Kennedy, some pretty well-known people that have gone on and continued, you know, with an interest in birds of prey and conservation.

**Peter Jenny** [00:10:04] And there was one one teacher there named Frank Trevor that stood out. Kind of a scary guy, but he taught both biology and an advanced biology class and was a real mentor. I mean, he started more conservation biologists off than anybody I can think of - Tom Lovejoy, Rob Bierregaard, you know, both the Buckleys. Anyway, it goes on and on and on. And so I really kind of got my academic interest and conservation interest in birds of prey at Millbrook, before college.

**Peter Jenny** [00:10:45] And then I went to the University of Montana because of the Craigheads. They wrote, "Hawks in the Hand", which was a book that we all loved as kids and as adults. And both the Craigheads were professors at the University of Montana. And I had the privilege of working with them. And to this day, Derek Craighead, one of their one of their kids, is perhaps one of my best friends.

**Peter Jenny** [00:11:12] Does that answer that, David?

**David Todd** [00:11:14] Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. It sounds like the mold was, you know, cast pretty early from secondary grade school.

**David Todd** [00:11:24] Yeah, absolutely.

**Peter Jenny** [00:11:25] I think, and I think secondary school is pretty important because, at least for me, by the time I was in college, the dye was cast. I mean, I was interested in, in working with birds of prey and I was already well on that path.

**David Todd** [00:11:42] Well, and so I guess when you were at Millbrook, part of this was, I guess, learning the art of falconry, but part was maybe, as you said, you had this teacher, Frank Trevor, who was teaching you biology. And I was wondering how you kind of merged that, the sort of the, the art and craft of running these birds after prey, with the science of learning about the biology of the natural world.

**Peter Jenny** [00:12:10] Yeah. And that kind of blended it, because, you know, I went there already, you know, as a falconer. I mean, I had already flown a number of birds before I went

away to boarding school. And, and I remember when my parents took me around to look at all these different boarding schools, I got to Millbrook and I saw the zoo and I cut a deal with them right there. I said, "Okay, I can do this", you know. It was a good move.

**Peter Jenny** [00:12:35] But anyway, I can remember Frank Trevor showing up with a gunnysack with a goshawk in it that came from a game farm. And he hands me this goshawk, my first goshawk actually, and said, "Here's a goshawk, don't flunk out of school over this." So he, you know, he was, he was both instrumental, encouraging, but also very strict, too, you know. So, he was sort of like a second parent when it came to that. So, he was pretty, pretty darn important, I think. And to a lot of us, not just, not just myself.

**David Todd** [00:13:14] Well, it's interesting. He he recognized that these kind of passions can be really all-consuming, you know?

**Peter Jenny** [00:13:20] Yeah. Yeah, he was good about that. Oh, yeah. He, this wasn't his first rodeo, for sure.

**David Todd** [00:13:30] Well, and it sounds like you, this, this vein of falconry starts early in your life. And maybe we should talk a little bit about that before we go any further. So, you, you were flying birds before you went to Millbrook. It sounds like you worked with hawks and as well as the birds. Is that right?

**Peter Jenny** [00:13:51] Yeah. Not falcons yet. It was, well, it was mostly red-tailed hawks. Well, kestrels. I had kestrels as a kid. But, you know, when you're young, you have a lot of time. At least back in those days, you spent a lot of time in the streams, you know, goofing around, you know? Nowadays, you know, kids, you know, when I coached Little League, I said, look, when you go home, work on this, work on that, they give you this blank stare. Like, what do you mean? When I go home, I have cello practice, or I have this or I have that.

**Peter Jenny** [00:14:20] You know, when I grew up, it seemed like we had a lot more time to just be kids. And, you know, I spent a lot of time, you know, catching frogs and things. So, I think it's pretty important to develop that interest in birds of prey and in falconry, too, when I was pretty young and I had the time, you know, and, and I lived in the country and had pretty good access. We'd ride everywhere, you know, on horses, to get from here to there. And then bicycles were pretty good, too. But I covered a lot of ground, you know, even on foot.

**David Todd** [00:14:58] Well, can you rummage through one of your early adventures with a kestrel or a red-tailed hawk, I mean, how you captured one and then learned to work with it?

**Peter Jenny** [00:15:10] Yeah. The first thing is you'd find a nest, you know, and these are, you know, the eastern hardwood forest is, there's pretty big trees, mostly tulip poplar trees. And so, you had to figure out how to climb the trees to get a baby hawk out of the nest. And I remember using climbing spurs. Of course, the climbing spurs we had were pole spurs that linemen would use for climbing power poles. And I got, I had a friend that got a pair of those things. The trouble is the gaffs that come out of them are really short and a lot of them don't go all the way through the bark in the tree. And so they kind of cut out on you.

**Peter Jenny** [00:15:48] So kind of dangerous climbing these big trees. But, you know, as a kid, first of all, you're in great shape. So, you know, that was quite an adventure, climbing these trees to get to the nest, to get a baby hawk out of the nest. And then, and raising - raising was fun.

**Peter Jenny** [00:16:06] And then we caught all kinds of things with them as kids. You know, it's sort of like if you're a fly fisherman today, you start out as a worm fisherman. You know, you catch bass and things, you know, and flying a red-tailed hawk on things like rabbits and squirrels and things, you know, was, you know, sort of a simpler but very enjoyable form of falconry.

**David Todd** [00:16:28] So, sort of terrestrial prey at first and then you graduate to chasing other birds. Is that the kind of way it worked?

**Peter Jenny** [00:16:39] Yeah, exactly right. Yeah. You know, these, where you end up is flying falcons on upland game. And, of course, that requires really big open country. That's why I live in Wyoming. It requires pretty good game bird populations. It requires pointing dogs, you know.

**Peter Jenny** [00:16:58] So, so it gets, it gets, like a lot of passions, whether it's skiing or scuba diving or anything. You know, it just kind of expands exponentially, you know? So now I get to do a lot more than I used to, which is great.

**David Todd** [00:17:17] Cool.

**Peter Jenny** [00:17:18] Yeah.

**David Todd** [00:17:18] Great. Well, and I think I've read that you are enthusiastic about English setters. Were those the pointing dogs that you would use with falconry?

**Peter Jenny** [00:17:28] Yeah. I fell in love with the English setters as a breed, you know, gosh, probably, right as I started college. A guy gave me a setter. I didn't know, but it was it was gun-shy. At least he gave it to me. He didn't tell me that. But with falconry, it didn't matter. You know, there was no gun involved. And in fact, we used to, the dog actually was cured of being gun-shy because we used to shoot pigeons under bridges in college with these, these pellet guns. And so once he -and he loved to retrieve stuff - and so once he associated the gun with, you know, a pigeon dropping on the ground, he got to pick it up. The bigger the gun, the louder the noise, the better. He didn't mind that at all.

**Peter Jenny** [00:18:20] That was my first English setter. He was a great dog. And I had him for years. And but, you know, I didn't know anything about dogs then, you know, I didn't really have a dog. We had dogs growing up, but not like your dog, you know. I had him all through college and took him to Alaska and I took him everywhere with me. And from that point on, I've always had it at least one setter. I have two now.

**David Todd** [00:18:49] And so if you're, let's see, working with a falcon or a hawk, and you've got an English setter by your side, is the setter there mostly for retrieving whatever prey is caught, or is it more for flushing birds? What do they typically do?

**Peter Jenny** [00:19:06] No, no, actually, their job is, you have this falcon and put it on your fist, and kind of ready to go. But it's hooded so it can't see. And it's still attached to your hand. And you let the dogs go. And they course across the field until they go on point. Once they go on point, and you think it's a pretty good chance that there's bird there, then you let the falcon go and the falcon circles above the dog as high as possible, and then you very carefully go in

and flush the game. And the falcon rolls over in this dive, called a "stoop". And once in a while hits one of the birds, knocks it out of the air, and it's a success.

**Peter Jenny** [00:19:52] Generally, it's not successful. It's, you know, it's like fox hunting or a lot of field sports. It's, it's a sport of chase, not killing, you know. And the best results are you get feathers maybe or nothing, you know. And it's, it's funny. It's a real four-ring circus, even worse than a three-ring circus because, you know, you have you, the falcon, the dog and the game. And it all has to happen in a certain way for it to be successful.

**Peter Jenny** [00:20:25] And for positive, the game doesn't want to cooperate, because you're pitting natural predator against natural prey. And so, the game is is much more concerned about the falcon than it is you. So, they'll let you walk right by them. And then when the falcon is downwind or out of position, they get up and go.

**Peter Jenny** [00:20:45] So, it's, it's really fun. I mean, it's, it's very frustrating, but when it works, it's great. So, that's part of the fascination. You know, it's sort of like you can never, this can never be perfected. You know, you can always do better. So.

**David Todd** [00:21:04] You know, this is fascinating - to sort of, you know, to use your four-ring circus, you're not just a ringside kind of observant, but you're a witness plus a participant. You're in the middle of it, a player. That's, that's very exciting.

**Peter Jenny** [00:21:23] And it's really more than hunting, David, it's more, it's a kind of a funny form of bird watching, because you're really rigging the deck so that you get a ringside seat of what, you know, say a peregrine falcon does by nature, you know, these, these incredible power dives that they do at 200 miles an hour. And you're right there, you get a ringside seat.

**Peter Jenny** [00:21:46] So, but then it also can go wrong, too. You lose birds. They, they don't want to fly. You know, they're distracted by other things. A golden eagle comes in, you know. Or, you know, it's a false point, or an "unproductive", they call it, you know, where, you know, there was scent, but there's no game there. And, you know, you got to, it's all, it's all reward, reward, reward. There's no punishment. So, you know, if you don't produce, you know, on a regular basis for the falcon, you know, they'll just, they'll just leave.

**Peter Jenny** [00:22:18] There's a, you know, that Yeats poem, "Second Coming", and he was, he's a falconer, and you know, he's got a great passage, or a section, in there about, you know, that when the center is lost, you know, everybody just goes to hell. And, you know, that's all about waiting on falcon and not being able to produce the game. And he even goes further and he says, he even says, you know, the best (I'm paraphrasing here), but the best, you know, you know, don't really rely on this. There is no center. You know, they're, they're very independent. And that is true. The very best falcons are really easy to lose, you know, and, of course, the ones that aren't so good, and they all vary like crazy, you can't lose them, you know.

**David Todd** [00:23:08] Well, that's a great metaphor for lots of things beyond falconry.

**Peter Jenny** [00:23:13] Well yeah, and you know, literature class it wasn't about falconry. It was about religion and that, you know, the Sphinx slouches towards Bethlehem and all that stuff. So there's all that stuff that of course, that didn't interest me at all. But the falconry stuff was really good. I clicked on that pretty quickly.

**David Todd** [00:23:29] Yeah, well, a lot of literature...

**Peter Jenny** [00:23:34] A lot of literature deals with falconry. You know, Shakespeare was, a lot about falconry in those Shakespearean plays.

**David Todd** [00:23:42] I need to look this up. This is a really great teaser, just to check it out.

**David Todd** [00:23:49] So, you know, we talked a little bit before about your, your episode in Millbrook, in boarding school, and then you went on to the University of Montana. And can you talk a little bit about your experiences there? I mean, you went to see and worked with the Craigheads, I guess.

**Peter Jenny** [00:24:10] That's why I went there. But of course, they were never around. You know how it is. Real famous guys are like that. Yeah, they're on the faculty, but they're not really there. I got to know them almost more outside of the university than within the university. But yeah, you know, I, it was a really good education. You know, it, it was a very formative part of my life. And I graduated with a degree in zoology, which is it just, it's pre-med, basically. The only difference is I think we had to have a year of foreign language and maybe something else.

**Peter Jenny** [00:24:49] But at any rate, so, so then I went on to vet school at University of Pennsylvania, and that's where it kind of goes down. And this is kind of an interesting thing, in hindsight. Now that I'm 70 years old, I can kind of look back at this philosophically.

**Peter Jenny** [00:25:07] But, you know, so I go to vet school and I'm living in Philadelphia. Horrible place. I've gone from Montana to West Philadelphia right in that time when, you know, Rizzo was running the city and they had MOVE headquarters and fire bombings. And, you know, I did have a falcon with me, actually, and I had a friend who had a sort of a backyard. And so, on my way to class, I would put the falcon out in his backyard on a perch, you know, and we had chicken wire enclosing, you know, sort of covering the backyard. And it's weird living in a city. I'd come back, there'd be rocks and bottles and sticks, up on top of the chicken wire where people just going by and throwing stuff at these birds, you know? And I'd never really observed that kind of behavior before.

**Peter Jenny** [00:26:01] So, it was, it was a, I mean, the academics was good. Vet school was great. But you know how life can kind of hit you in the stomach sometimes? And I think a lot of things, none of which would have, would have... well, long story short, I, I dropped out of vet school after my first year. You know, the girlfriend I had ran off with a Spanish exchange student that broke both my wrists. So, both arms were in casts. And so when I was laying in the hospital, I'll never forget this, you know, "Do I really want to do this?" And the question is, "No", you know, I didn't want to be a vet, really. I just never, you know, you try so hard to get into these schools that when you get in, you don't really stop and think, "Well, is this really what I want to do?" Really, what I wanted to do is study falcons.

**Peter Jenny** [00:26:51] And so I went to Cornell, met Tom Cade, and said, "Look, I want to study this." Fine, and then studied the orange-breasted falcon, which is which is sort of the ecological replacement for the peregrine falcon in Amazonia, in climax tropical forest. And it was known for, by a couple of study skins, no, nothing about the biology of the bird, just that this was a cool-looking bird. And, you know, just by looking at the skin that this thing was really fast and pretty incredible.



**Peter Jenny** [00:27:29] So I put together a program and I spent a lot of time in Guatemala, in Ecuador, some in Peru, found some birds, wrote a bunch of papers, and then ended up working for the Peregrine Fund.

**Peter Jenny** [00:27:42] And that's really where my academics stopped. I got kind of side-tracked by this and I got this job, you know, working, you know, releasing peregrines and, and, you know, developing this project called the Maya Project. We studied the whole community of birds of prey in a tropical forest setting in Guatemala and the aplomado falcon and other things, just started snowballing.

**Peter Jenny** [00:28:10] So, going back to this thing, it's funny how, if not for, you know, these were dark days when I was in Philadelphia. This was the worst year of my life, without a doubt. But without that worst year of my life, I wouldn't have, I wouldn't have been able to embark on the career that I ended up, you know, that, you know, on. And so, I really kind of, in hindsight, I'm really thankful for, for those screw-ups, I guess. Yeah. And that's, that's a lesson, you know, I think, you know, you need to, there's always some good that goes with the bad.

**Peter Jenny** [00:28:47] Does any of that make sense to you, David?

**David Todd** [00:28:49] Oh yeah. No. I think I've heard people say that bad experiences can be great teachers.

**Peter Jenny** [00:28:56] Oh God, I mean, it was just and I remember my classmates were going, like, "You're not going back to school?" And I go, "No, I don't think I am." "You're crazy", you know. And I think I probably was crazy, you know, at the time or, you know. But you have to kind of shuffle the deck once in a while. And I was, I was pretty, you know, in a track, you know, and pretty focused on what I wanted to do. And that's not necessarily healthy. At any rate, and so I'm very, very fortunate, you know, to, the way things have turned out.

**David Todd** [00:29:37] Yeah. Well, it sounds like you've found something you really care about. And there can never be a mistake about that.

**Peter Jenny** [00:29:47] But not without a lot of pretty tough bumps along the way, you know?

**David Todd** [00:29:52] I hear you. Yeah. I mean, it seems like you made your own career as. It was not completely mapped out.

**Peter Jenny** [00:30:01] Exactly.

**David Todd** [00:30:04] Well, so I was curious about some of the early work that you did in collaboration with two folks, it sounds like were important partners and maybe mentors, Robert Berry and William Burnham.

**Peter Jenny** [00:30:20] Yes.

**David Todd** [00:30:21] Can you tell us a little bit about those two folks?

**Peter Jenny** [00:30:24] Yeah. Bob Berry was one of the original founders of the Peregrine Fund. He was a falconer and he lived, well, you know, a little bit farther than a bike ride from where I lived in Pennsylvania. But he was a pretty important mentor to me as a falconer. And

when the whole Peregrine Fund was formed to try to reverse the decline and recover the then highly endangered peregrine falcon in 1970, and I was able to accompany Bob Berry to the Eastern Arctic to collect some of the first peregrines we used for captive breeding.

**Peter Jenny** [00:31:11] And I will say that at that point, no one had bred peregrine falcons in captivity. So, we really didn't know how to do it. But, you know, there's something about people that if they really want to do something, there's almost nothing they won't accomplish. And this was, the backdrop here was the federal government had tried for years to breed these guys in captivity, gave up and said, you know, it wasn't possible. But, you know, it wasn't sort of a 9 to 5 sort of a proposition. You really had to have, you know, that we can't afford to fail, you know, mentality to make this happen.

**Peter Jenny** [00:31:45] And in fact, long story short, we became very successful. We had to develop artificial insemination with birds of prey. We had to train ... this was pretty bizarre stuff we had to do. We had to, you know, it's one thing to get a female falcon to lay eggs in captivity. But what's really hard is to get a pair to actually copulate, to produce fertile eggs in captivity. So, we developed a technique to either strip semen from the, from the males and then artificially disseminate the females.

**Peter Jenny** [00:32:22] Or even better, and even more bizarre, we trained, through imprinting, these males to think that either they were humans or we were falcons, and we trained them to land on a specially designed hat. And they would copulate with that hat and they produced better quantities and quality semen over a longer period of time. And that was a real boon. So, then we had plenty of semen to use for artificial insemination.

**Peter Jenny** [00:32:50] This is bizarre. This is really some bizarre stuff. But I'll tell you on a sideline. There was a joke in The New Yorker that came out about that time. It was an issue on the environment. And you know, The New Yorker magazine, they have these cartoons in there.

**David Todd** [00:33:08] Sure.

**Peter Jenny** [00:33:08] They're pretty, you know, I never gotten more than about 1% of those cartoons. And because of this, I understood why. This is a little sideline: they had a cartoon of a couple of people at a bar. And there's a falcon at the bar, and the guy across the bar was wearing a hat. And the falcon leans over to the bartender and he said, "Can you buy that gentleman across the way there a drink, with a hat. Would you buy him a drink?"

**Peter Jenny** [00:33:39] And I mean, who the hell would know that that would get that, you know, except, you know, this strange group of raptor propagators, you know.

**Peter Jenny** [00:33:48] So anyway, I kind of digress on that. But, you know, this was a real grand experiment. You know, and then that was really the first step, was trying to get these things to breed in captivity. Then we had to figure out a way to get them to breed, you know, at scale, where you could actually recover a species, you know. And we figured that out. And then the next step was, "Okay, you let these birds go, how are you going to do that?"

**Peter Jenny** [00:34:20] So we went back to the falconry roots. Falconers over the years have developed a technique called, "hacking", where they would take these nestlings out of the nest and try to make them into wild-caught raptors, falcons, because they're much better at flying and much better at catching game if they kind of know what they're doing.

**Peter Jenny** [00:34:40] And so what they would do is basically turn them loose, and give them liberty and provide them with food. And just when they started catching food, cap them back. And it was the next best thing to a wild-caught bird. Well, we just took that technique called, "hacking", and let it go one step further and never called them back.

**Peter Jenny** [00:35:01] And then the next pretty amazing step was, you know, these birds disappeared for two or three years and damn, if they didn't show up two or three years later as adults and start breeding, many of which on those very, those very structures that we produced, you know, to release them as hack towers.

**Peter Jenny** [00:35:21] And so, you know, the rest is history. You know, it was, it was perhaps the largest and most successful endangered species recovery effort in history, and right across the country, you know, and other countries as well. And it was copied worldwide, and we applied those same techniques to other species.

**Peter Jenny** [00:35:40] You mentioned the aplomado falcon, and we're doing it with California condors, with Mauritius kestrels. We'd even done it with bald eagles early on. So it's, it's, it's been a very successful technique over the years.

**David Todd** [00:35:57] So some of this work was with Bob Berry. And...

**Peter Jenny** [00:36:02] Yeah.

**David Todd** [00:36:02] And I think you mentioned some of the work with the orange-breasted falcon. Was that with Mr. Burnham?

**Peter Jenny** [00:36:10] Yeah. Yes and no. I went to Tom Page, who was the founder of the Peregrine Fund, and said, "Hey, here's something I want to do". And through Cornell, we put together this research program, and then the Peregrine Fund had, at this point, the timeline moving forward now at the time, and now we're in the late '70s. The peregrine recovery was well underway, we knew it was successful, and the Peregrine Fund started branching out.

**Peter Jenny** [00:36:43] And the neotropics, you know, were an area that was really of great interest to a lot of people in conservation. And we wanted to study the whole community of birds of prey in a tropical forest setting. And so Bill Burnham and I put together this thing called the Maya Project, starting in Tikal, in Guatemala, in northern Guatemala.

**Peter Jenny** [00:37:12] And we developed these transects and had these emergent trees. And we had luring trials. The first thing you have to do is find the birds of prey in a tropical forest setting. And the reason that hadn't been done is because it's pretty hard. But long story short, we figured out how to census birds of prey, and we ran, how many graduate students - probably 50, through this program over the years, both in-country and from other countries.

**Peter Jenny** [00:37:47] A lot of papers came out of that. We published a book with what, basically a monograph of all the species. And developed techniques for actually finding these birds so you could actually study them, in addition to, you know, basic natural history of poorly known species of birds of prey in tropical forests, and parts of which have been copied throughout the world.

**Peter Jenny** [00:38:14] And that was a very gratifying project. And what was really kind of fun about that. I was talking to my wife, Bonnie, at a dinner party last night. A friend of ours had gone down to Tikal and visited, and, you know, these kids that we were working with, climbing these trees, were these chicleros. And you know, they would harvest chicle, which is a sap out of the sapodilla tree, which they used for, back then, for chewing gum. Now it's all synthetic. But then they were using it for chewing gum - sort of like the maple syrup industry in Vermont.

**Peter Jenny** [00:38:46] But these guys could really climb, and they were great, and they were, you know, part of the team. And these kids, you know, we put them all through high school, grade school, you know, whatever, taught them how to drive cars. And they're now, today, they're, they're, you know, they're adults and they're running the parks. They're running NGOs in Guatemala. I mean, they've become, you know, a lot of them have become sort of movers and shakers in Guatemalan conservation. So, I feel really good about that.

**David Todd** [00:39:20] You kind of have tempted me to find out a little bit more about how you would find one of these orange-breasted falcons in a dense forest with lots of cover and places to hide.

**Peter Jenny** [00:39:34] Well, they, they actually weren't so hard to find because they typically would perch in emergent trees. So you learn to glass the skyline for emergent trees to locate these birds.

**Peter Jenny** [00:39:48] The tough ones were these, the forest falcons and these accipiters, these sort of forest-dwelling raptors that actually lived in the forest. The problem with the orange-breasted falcon is it occurs at extremely low densities and the kinds of habitat that they may prefer is climax tropical forest habitat. And they're making a living catching birds above the canopy. And to find them, you know, you're limited by either rivers or a few roads, but, you know, you really can't get around in a tropical forest, you know, and using aircraft or helicopters is just too expensive. You know, it's just, it's just not a very effective mechanism. So, it just takes time. It was, it was hard to do.

**Peter Jenny** [00:40:36] But we, you know, we were able to do it and we found and studied populations now in Panama, in Colombia, in Ecuador, in Guatemala, and Belize - still very, very low numbers. And we started breeding them in captivity and doing some releases, but not at conservation scale. That species probably is, is doing fine were the habitat remains, you know, with regard to deforestation. But we're not, unlike the peregrine, we're not able to proactively recover a population because it's just too darn hard to study and too darn hard to breed in captivity.

**David Todd** [00:41:26] I see.

**Peter Jenny** [00:41:28] I'm probably giving you way too much information, David. I don't know.

**David Todd** [00:41:32] No, no. This is great. It is, it's fascinating. What, what an amazing experience. And thanks for sharing it with us. All good.

**David Todd** [00:41:42] I did want to maybe segue on to talk a little bit about the Northern aplomado falcon and ...

**Peter Jenny** [00:41:48] Yeah.

**David Todd** [00:41:48] Maybe, as a place to start, just, if you would, tell me what your first encounter with a aplomado might have been.

**Peter Jenny** [00:41:58] Probably, you know, secondary, I had a classmate, again at Millbrook, named Dennis Sanchez, and he was from a family in Brownsville. And I remember when I was in boarding school asking Dennis if he'd ever seen an aplomado falcon. I had seen one, but, you know, I'd seen pictures of them and read about them in bird books, and I thought they were pretty interesting. And he hadn't seen one either. But he happened to live right in an area where they used to be found.

**Peter Jenny** [00:42:28] So fast forward a few years and we started, we were able to borrow some nestlings from Chihuahua, not Chihuahua, from Tabasco and Veracruz, Mexico, and develop a captive breeding program. And we started releasing aplomado falcons. And the very first pair of reestablished aplomado falcons was right in Dennis's backyard. And as he said, it's funny because I used to drive right by this area where those birds were nesting, right at the Port of Brownsville. And he goes, "And I'd always be looking for those aplomado falcons that you were asking about."

**David Todd** [00:43:11] That's great. Well, what better host.

**Peter Jenny** [00:43:15] Yeah. And he was, he was one of those guys, David, from Millbrook, that was, you know, he was part of that whole falcon group. You know, we are all crazy about birds of prey.

**Peter Jenny** [00:43:27] And, you know, Dennis went on to become a very successful attorney in the area. So, he knew everybody. So, when it came time to start releasing birds, you know, he, gosh, he knew all the landowners, you know. So, he was very, very important in the whole recovery effort of the aplomado falcon.

**David Todd** [00:43:48] Well, we should get into that. I was hoping that you could just, you know, do us the favor of introducing us to the life history of the bird and maybe the niche that it fills, the ecological place that it has.

**Peter Jenny** [00:44:03] It's a grassland species. And, you know, its big challenge is habitat. And, you know, it was a species that at one time was pretty common in South Texas and New Mexico, and we know that because of egg collections, you know, egg collecting was a big deal at the turn of the century. And, and there were a lot of aplomado falcon eggs collected in south Texas and in New Mexico. So, we know historically that the bird was fairly common in those areas.

**Peter Jenny** [00:44:34] Well, they're no longer common. And the most compelling rationale is that those grasslands have grown up into brush country. And the problem with brush is it also supports great horned owls. And when a great horned owl tends to get above a certain point, they don't, aplomado falcons can no longer coexist with great horned owls, because the great-horned owls go way out of their way to kill aplomado falcons. There's this sort of understanding that this is a potential competitor.

**Peter Jenny** [00:45:11] So, you know, we had to find places where we released aplomado falcons that still had remnants of the Wild Horse Prairie, for instance, you know, and that was

right along the coast, or even islands off the coast, like Matagorda Island or San Jose Island, just because they didn't, they didn't have the brush encroachment that did farther-inland, former grasslands now have.

**Peter Jenny** [00:45:42] For instance, the first, the first place we released of aplomado falcons, once we had birds available, was on the King Ranch in an area where they were last observed. And boy, that was a real learning experience. The scissor-tailed flycatchers were all over the aplomado falcons, not letting them get back to the tower for food. And then the great horned owls picked them off, you know, in the brush.

**Peter Jenny** [00:46:09] So, we learned very quickly that former habitat was not necessarily contemporary habitat for aplomado falcons. So, we kind of had to rethink things. And so we went to more non-traditional habitats in more open country in the same geographical region. But we had to pick areas as far away from brush as possible.

**David Todd** [00:46:36] So it sounds like the reason behind the bird's decline is that the habitat change or loss, you know, shifting from grassland to more brushy land. Do you have any thoughts about why that was occurring?

**Peter Jenny** [00:46:53] Yeah. Yeah. I mean, it was, it was a tendency, a trend for a long time. You know, the Wild Horse Desert is a good example. You know, that coastal grassland, you know, people had to stand up in the stirrups and wave their hat, you know, to see the next person. It was that open - very high grass - perfect aplomado falcon habitat, and almost endless. I mean, they went all the way along the coast. But they start they started controlling burns, you know, and, you know, mesquite started growing up with the cattle drives. And then, you know, that open, open grassland started shrinking.

**Peter Jenny** [00:47:40] And where it still occurs, you know, there's still, you know, we have what varies between 20 and 40 pairs of aplomado falcons in any given year nesting in that area. And it's really hemmed in by brush. I mean, it's what, if there's more habitat they do well. You know, if there's less habitat, they do less well. So, it, really, it's a function of land use changes, and habitat, like a lot of things. I mean, nothing, nothing new there with that scenario.

**Peter Jenny** [00:48:15] Yeah. Yeah, absolutely.

**David Todd** [00:48:17] And I think you mentioned that collection was a factor in at least understanding where the birds were. Do you think that that had much impact on, you know, the ability of the birds to reproduce? Were enough eggs collected that that contributed?

**Peter Jenny** [00:48:34] You know, probably not. But, you know, it was a very useful tool to know what the status was historically in those areas.

**Peter Jenny** [00:48:42] More, more of an impact was probably shooting. You know, it wasn't that long ago where if you saw a hawk, you shot it. You know, I mean, that's just, you know, birds of prey were shot. You know, that's just ... it's really interesting, the evolution of birds of prey and human interactions with birds of prey. You know, you know, as a, as a predator, we're pretty puny. You know, we're not very fast. We have good eyesight. We're very clever, but we don't have a very good sense of smell.

**Peter Jenny** [00:49:16] But all of a sudden you partner with a dog, you can find game. You get a horse, you can move around really fast. And we become a, and you get a bird of prey, and you become a very competent predator.

**Peter Jenny** [00:49:29] Well, fast forward to the advent of gunpowder, and just overnight, birds of prey went from man's best friend status, like a dog or a horse, to a competitor and vermin.

**Peter Jenny** [00:49:42] And so, you know, they were persecuted. So, it's, it's funny. We have, we have gunpowder to thank for that, you know.

**Peter Jenny** [00:49:52] So I think shooting probably was, you know, you have a population of aplomado falcons that's already declining because of habitat loss and then the few that remain were probably shot out.

**Peter Jenny** [00:50:05] They're also, as a species, they are also very confiding. They're really easy to approach, that they follow you around because they think you're going to flush game for them. So, there would be no species I can think of, a bird of prey, to be easier to shoot than an aplomado falcon.

**David Todd** [00:50:21] I see.

**David Todd** [00:50:24] So I had read a little bit, and I know that can make you dangerous, but that the aplomado falcon had a kind of, um, I don't know of some sort of synchronized relationship with prairie dogs and that they preyed on prairie dogs.

**Peter Jenny** [00:50:44] No. Yeah, I remember where that came from, but that was just. Yeah, and no. No, they're not even designed to eat. The only mammals we ever saw in their diet, what they're really good at is pirating food from other birds of prey. And they're always together as a pair. They're very social. They hunt socially, which is unusual for birds of prey. But these guys are good at it. And it's probably a function of being in kind of, you know, grassland, kind of heavy cover brushland country. And it made them very, very effective predators.

**Peter Jenny** [00:51:20] And so they'll see a white-tailed hawk or a red-tailed hawk with a, you know, a gopher, or a mouse or something. And they'll just go after that guy and force him to drop the prey and they'll fly home with it.

**Peter Jenny** [00:51:33] But they they're not big enough or even designed properly to dispatch things like prairie dogs. No, that's not. That's just crazy. No.

**David Todd** [00:51:44] Okay.

**Peter Jenny** [00:51:45] I kind of do know where that came from. And that was. Yeah, no.

**David Todd** [00:51:48] And you mentioned that they were sort of cooperative hunters. I've heard that they hunted sometimes that bonded pairs would, would hunt together. How would that work?

**Peter Jenny** [00:52:03] Yeah, well, it's amazing how well that works. We had, early on, when we were starting to breed aplomados in captivity, they were hard to breed. We weren't very

good at it. And we suspected that we had some sort of nutritional problem. Basically, you are what you eat when you're a bird of prey. And so we didn't have basic information about what are the normal, you know, trace minerals, vitamins, you know, components of their diet. You know, what should their, what should a healthy aplomado falcon's blood level be with regard to those?

**Peter Jenny** [00:52:38] And so we went down to Chihuahua and we had to, we trapped wild aplomado falcons, healthy, wild aplomado falcons, during the breeding season. And they were really, really hard to capture because this cooperative hunting thing. We'd have a little set-up with a sparrow in front of a net, all set up, and they collect the sparrow and, all of a sudden, they see another bird come flying by. The two would just go after that and we'd go, "Well, there's no way they're going to catch that thing." And darned if they wouldn't.

**Peter Jenny** [00:53:10] They'd put that little sparrow into a bush and then one would be hopping around on the bush. The sparrow is perfectly safe. And the other bird would be perched up in a higher bush. And eventually that little sparrow would just lose it and just leave the cover and they'd catch it.

**Peter Jenny** [00:53:26] So it made it really hard to catch these things because they're so successful at what they did. And plus the pirating, you know, a red-tail would fly by and they'd just go up and take the food away from them. And of course, once they're, once they fed, you know, you're not going to catch that pair till the next day.

**Peter Jenny** [00:53:41] So it was a really, it was a fun trip. We were so far away from the electricity that we had to, we had to spin the blood samples down. We had to hitch up a centrifuge on the car battery and kind of run it down. And we had, we had dry ice that we would, and oh, we had liquid nitrogen - that's right - to freeze the samples with. But it was, it was really fun. I mean, we were on a very remote ranch.

**Peter Jenny** [00:54:09] And but anyway, long story short, we did get the samples that we needed and a graduate student got a degree out of this whole thing. And we did a study, I think it was done at whatever the New York Zoological Society is now called. They changed their name. But they had a research arm that actually did the work.

**Peter Jenny** [00:54:29] And we, we figured that there were two or three trace minerals that were deficient in the diet. And so, we fortified those things in the diet that was fed to the quail that were in turn fed to the aplomado falcons. And almost overnight, you know, our success, our breeding success, increased. So, so, it was kind of cool when science actually works.

**Peter Jenny** [00:54:57] So much for your segue, but anyway.

**David Todd** [00:54:59] No, this is, this is really fascinating.

**David Todd** [00:55:02] So just to knock out one question I had, which is again about this decline, I think you said that a lot of your birds were caught and studied in in eastern Mexico. And I'm wondering if part of the problem with the decline of the birds in the U.S. was just that it was kind of on the verge, on the edge, the northern limit, of its natural range, and so little fluctuations in habitat or whatever might have affected it. Is that, is that fair to say?

**Peter Jenny** [00:55:35] Yeah, that is fair to say, in a contemporary sense. That is fair to say. But for the fact that we knew how common they were at one time, say, in the thirties, from the



amount of eggs. There was one egg collector alone, who collected over 100 sets of eggs right in Cameron County. I mean, you know, so this bird was fairly common at one time.

**Peter Jenny** [00:55:59] So except for that, yeah, it is an northern limit of their range. What's fascinating to me is, you know, why aren't they in Kansas? You know why? Because their species is also found in Patagonia. So, it's not a temperature thing, you know. But hey, in Patagonia, there are no great horned owls. And in Veracruz, in those, you know, big savannas down there, there aren't great horned owls.

**Peter Jenny** [00:56:27] Great horned owls really sculpt, you know, the avifauna in many areas. And it's one of those species that's really benefited from human activities, not just aplomado falcons, peregrine falcons as well. You know, the peregrine falcon used to nest extensively in the, in the Mississippi River. And, you know, we were never able to effectively reestablish them there because there's also an awful lot of great horned owls there now.

**Peter Jenny** [00:56:57] So, you know, things are always changing, you know? You know, habitat, habitat is sort of like a movie. You know, you have this filmstrip, right? And it's constantly changing. And we have this problem in the way we deal with, you know, traditional habitat. And you just, you clip a couple of frames out of this cinema and say, "Okay, this is the way it should be."

**Peter Jenny** [00:57:27] Well, that may never occur again. You know, it could be that's where it was at one time. And you got to move forward. You got to be creative. You got to give species a chance, a second chance, because a lot of these species, particularly birds of prey, are very specialist. And you end up, they end up being painted into a corner. And so a lot of our work was to, you know, take them out of that corner and give them a second chance, sometimes in fairly novel habitats.

**Peter Jenny** [00:57:58] You know, I mean, you can be the most successful fish in the world, but if you happen to be in a puddle that dries up, well, guess what? You go extinct.

**Peter Jenny** [00:58:06] And so, you know, we do a pretty good job of accelerating extinction rates. But we can also, we're the only species I can think of that can actually reverse that. You know, we can actually do something about it. And so that's sort of a moral obligation, I guess.

**David Todd** [00:58:23] Yeah. Yeah. Well, maybe you can take some time to just sort of run us through the effort that you and the Peregrine Fund were active in, in trying to bring this bird back, from capturing the birds, to breeding them in captivity, and then releasing them, and making that a success.

**Peter Jenny** [00:58:47] David, it followed a lot of the same timelines, not so much timelines, but the same steps that we developed for the peregrine falcon. You know, a little bit different. The difference was there were habitat issues to deal with. You know, when we recovered the peregrine falcon, we released those birds right across the country.

**Peter Jenny** [00:59:06] But back then, you know, life was simple. They didn't, the Endangered Species Act, oh, gosh, you know, it wasn't so damn political. You know, there was a lot of species in the Endangered Species Act, and that was sort of the focus.

**Peter Jenny** [00:59:21] It became a tool that was used for controlling things without really much thought for species, per se. You know, if someone didn't want development to use that as a very effective tool to shut down development.

**Peter Jenny** [00:59:36] So, you know, it became, when we first had aplomado falcons to be able to reintroduce, we wanted to release them in Texas. Texas is, what, 87% privately held. And can you imagine going to a landowner where the habitat looked pretty good and saying, "We want to introduce an endangered species on your private property?" I mean, you could just hear the tumblers click in the gates, you know. This was not a very popular idea.

**Peter Jenny** [01:00:08] Anyway, we built this thing with Fish & Wildlife Service called the Safe Harbor Program, and we basically said, "Look, in return for giving us access to experimentally release these birds on your property, if and when they become established, you know, it will be invisible to the Endangered Species Act. You will not be, you know, held responsible. You will not have what you do impacted by this endangered species or the Endangered Species Act, because we're not giving up anything. You know, we have nothing right now. You have the habitat. We just want to give the species a second chance without putting you and your livelihood in jeopardy."

**Peter Jenny** [01:00:47] And, you know, when you talk to these landowners, I mean, they love wildlife, but they're also worried about making a living, put the kids through school. You know, it makes sense.

**Peter Jenny** [01:00:57] And, you know, like a lot of government things, they went too darned far, I think. And so I remember meeting with, I think it was Tobin Armstrong on the Armstrong ranch, and I said, we were having lunch with him, "What would it take to do this, to release aplomado falcons on the Armstrong Ranch?" And he goes, "Oh, my God." He said, "You know, we can't even, as a family, we can't even agree on an oil lease, let alone something that is this bizarre." "Well, so just, hypothetically, what would it take?" So he gave me a whole shopping list of things.

**Peter Jenny** [01:01:30] And then I went back with that list to the Fish and Wildlife Service said, "Look, I think we could do this, but this is what it's going to take."

**Peter Jenny** [01:01:38] So we got this Safe Harbor put together and we got some landowners to agree with it. Tobin never did. But the King Ranch did. And a bunch of big ranches did. We got, you know, several million acres. And I think it's still the largest of all the Safe Harbors. And there wasn't a single hiccup. I mean, you know, all these pairs we have establish now are all on private property.

**Peter Jenny** [01:02:03] You know, we also started releasing birds in New Mexico, on public lands. And guess what? Public lands weren't worth a darn. I mean, they're just not, they don't have that richness. They don't have the species diversity that private property has.

**Peter Jenny** [01:02:17] So, you know, basically, and this is so cool, David, what's good for cattle, as it turns out, is good for aplomado falcons. You know, in Chihuahua, where we are working with these wild aplomado falcons, there would be nesting pairs one year where there were cattle in these pastures; they move the cattle out of these pastures into another pasture, the falcons would go with them. You know, those pastures became unproductive for the falcons once the cattle were moved off. So, it was a, it was a pretty good fit.

**Peter Jenny** [01:02:50] You know, and you mentioned earlier that, you know, unlike introducing wolves in Yellowstone Park, you know, it wasn't a problem for landowners. Well, aplomado falcons aren't going to kill, you know, livestock. You know, it's a small bird. They do catch quail, you know, but they're not going to catch many of them. But they also catch a lot of birds that compete with quail, you know, for, for forage. So, you know.

**Peter Jenny** [01:03:18] And then let me digress about that as a quail hunter.

**David Todd** [01:03:19] Yes, please.

**Peter Jenny** [01:03:21] The reason South Texas has such great quail hunting, those quail act like wild birds. They hold beautifully for a dog. Well, the only reason a quail holds for a dog is because there's something out there that can fly at them out of the air, something faster than he is.

**Peter Jenny** [01:03:37] You know, if you go to Europe, where there they've wiped out all the aerial predators, those birds run like crazy. They're terrible to hunt, you know?

**Peter Jenny** [01:03:46] So, you know, that, that robust avian predator component, any of this, all of the predators, actually, in south Texas is what makes south Texas quail so viable, so, so wild, so fun to hunt, you know.

**Peter Jenny** [01:04:04] You know, the quail hunting in Virginia is terrible in comparison. It has nothing to do with genetics. It has to do with the whole system being intact.

**Peter Jenny** [01:04:13] And, yeah, they're going to catch a few quail, but you know that's, that's part of the price you pay. That's nature's way. Right?

**David Todd** [01:04:20] Yeah. Well, and I guess that goes back to this, you know, the niche that the aplomado fits and that influences the behavior of the quail and other birds.

**Peter Jenny** [01:04:33] Yeah.

**David Todd** [01:04:33] Well, one of the things I was just really intrigued by, we had the good fortune to be down in South Texas near the Ship Channel and saw some of the aplomado falcon nesting boxes. And somebody told me that they were critical to how the falcon releases were so successful. I was wondering if you could talk about how you developed that.

[01:04:58] Yeah. Again, trial by error. You know, a lot of this is kind of low tech. It was basically the model we used for peregrine falcons with a lot of modifications - a lot of things like those towers. Caracaras like those towers, great horned owls like those towers. And we had to adjust the bars, the width of the bars - how far apart, the spacing on the bars, I should say, so that the aplomados could pass through the bars into the little box to nest in, but caracaras and great horned owls couldn't. So that was that was one big, one big thing.

**Peter Jenny** [01:05:36] Yeah, they worked really well and you know what an aplomado nests in naturally is the abandoned nests of other medium-sized birds of prey - white-tailed hawks, even caracaras, in yuccas. That's, that's the classic aplomado falcon nest structure. They don't build their own nest. But, you know, so you also need, you need those guys too. You need the nest, the nest structure builders have to be present as well.

**Peter Jenny** [01:06:08] In lieu of that, you could put one of these structures out in the middle of nothing, like the ship channel. That area's like the surface of the moon. Well, there's no great horned owls out there, but it is pretty good habitat for an aplomado falcon to make a living? And it's worked really well.

**Peter Jenny** [01:06:23] In fact, the Port of Brownsville, you know, was part of that Safe Harbor program. They were actually pretty good about that, and were able to move pairs around on their property. They wouldn't develop an area: that was one of the, one of the sort of checklists we had that, you know, if a guy was engaged or enrolled in the Safe Harbor program, if they wanted to do legal things on their property like development, that was okay. And they were able to, they could make it, we were just able to go in and move these pairs around to kind of accommodate them.

**Peter Jenny** [01:06:59] But again, we weren't giving up anything because we had, we had a population of zero. It was no baseline. And we just wanted to have access to habitat, you know, you know, these were all grand experiments when you deal with nature. You really don't know how they're going to turn out.

**Peter Jenny** [01:07:15] And there's a lot of trust. You know, a lot of this stuff came down to handshakes and you know, these guys look you in the eye. I remember on the King Ranch when we first started releasing there, Tio Kleberg looks at me, "Well, just don't screw this up." He said, "We've never done anything like this before, but I hope you're right."

**Peter Jenny** [01:07:30] I mean, you know, that puts some pressure there, you know? So, you're, as a non-governmental entity, the Peregrine Fund, we were in between the federal government and these private landowners. You know, the federal government could not broker these agreements because there was, there was no trust. You know, they felt like they had already been abused by the federal government. But a private sector like the Peregrine Fund was a pretty good intermediary in kind of making this happen.

**Peter Jenny** [01:08:00] So, you know. When you look at the aplomado project, David, more important than recovering that species and having the species return, you know, when it's been gone for a half a century, more important than that, actually, you know, how do you do conservation in a private landowner landscape like that, you know, without... How do you, how do you get the job done? How can you actually function? And the aplomado has done a brilliant job of doing that. I mean, to me, that's, that's the value.

**Peter Jenny** [01:08:35] You know, the California condor, it's not so much, yeah, there are condors flying around, it's that we're dealing with the effects of, you know, secondary exposure to lead from lead bullets, from high-powered rifles. You know, the Asian vulture program is all about alerting us to the problems with pharmaceutical contaminants, you know, affecting population change.

**Peter Jenny** [01:09:06] You know, going back to that whole thing about birds of prey and gunpowder, you know, we now use birds of prey quite effectively as indicator species because they're so sensitive to changes in the quality and the quantity of their habitat that they're really damn good bellwether of environmental health. And, you know, I would argue that we need them more than they need us at this point in time. You know, they're...

**David Todd** [01:09:32] They're sort of the canary in the coal mine.

**Peter Jenny** [01:09:35] Absolutely. Yeah, absolutely. It's a very good analogy.

**David Todd** [01:09:40] Well, tell me something about these releases that you and the Peregrine Fund experimented with. You had a lot of success down in South Texas, but my understanding is that you were also trying to get them established out in Trans-Pecos.

**Peter Jenny** [01:09:57] Yeah, it didn't work.

**David Todd** [01:09:58] That release didn't work out as well. Why is that?

**Peter Jenny** [01:10:01] It was really, again, that it's in the category of grand experiments. It worked really well for, oh, four or five years, man, they were doing great. We didn't have any problems with great horned owls. They were doing really, really well.

**Peter Jenny** [01:10:13] Then a drought set in. You have these temporal, you know, climate change things. These, these sort of short, you know. Oh, yeah. Well, anyway, there were three or four years of drought, and everybody started eating everybody. I mean, there were things like, there were white-tailed hawks and Harris hawks eating aplomado falcons. And, you know, they weren't doing so well anyway. You know, it just didn't work, you know?

**Peter Jenny** [01:10:41] So, I think, I think in a natural setting, you would see these waxes and wanes of populations. In a few years, they do fine in some of these areas, and in other areas, and then they would retreat down into Mexico into more suitable habitat. And in fact, we did have, we did have examples of birds coming up from Mexico in that breeding population. And conversely, birds that we released, you know, into New Mexico and west Texas, going back down into Mexico.

**Peter Jenny** [01:11:10] And they, we had birds we released them in the Port of Brownsville that, you know, within a week of fledging were up on Matagorda Island. I mean, they really can cover some ground. So yeah, I think that's, you know, when you're talking about something like that a falcon, you know, the world is a pretty small place.

**Peter Jenny** [01:11:28] So these are big picture issues, you know, and rainfall and weather events - you know, that hurricane that that hit Matagorda dead-on, you know, knocked our population of aplomado falcons down to about half. I mean, they'll come back, but they still haven't come back, you know, completely so, you know, yeah, it's a tough world out there.

**Peter Jenny** [01:11:52] But again, again, the bottom line, I think, when I try to justify the expense and the effort of trying to reestablish species is it just gives us another mechanism to understand changes in environment.

**Peter Jenny** [01:12:06] You know, I mean, we'll never we'll never be able to to develop instrumentation that's more sensitive to you know, than a critter trying to make a living out there, like a bird of prey, in my mind.

**David Todd** [01:12:20] Well, so I guess maybe you can walk through some of the indicators, some of the indications that an aplomado falcon could serve. And I've heard that they got affected by DDT and DDE, and maybe some of these new rodenticides.

**Peter Jenny** [01:12:40] I, yeah, I don't know about that. Maybe, I'm sure they're, they were affected, but not on a population level. I mean not, not compared to habitat, you know, the

increase in brush country, brush taking over grasslands, or drought. You know, I think, I think those are much more significant than, than pesticides. You know, aplomado falcons are insectivorous, so, yeah, pesticides could be a bit of an issue. But um, I don't think to the extent that, say, peregrine falcons, you know, were affected by DDT.

**Peter Jenny** [01:13:20] Anyway, but I could be wrong, you know, it's why you monitor things. And you know, one cc of blood from any of these species, and we bled all these birds that we would trap and release over time. I mean talk about, I mean, it's an environmental sponge. If there's anything out there, you know, you'll detect it in these blood samples. And we've, in fact, done that. Yeah.

**David Todd** [01:13:47] Well, one of the things I think is really interesting about your work is that a lot of it has been with the Peregrine Fund. And, you know, it's intriguing to me, like you said, that it was kind of an honest-broker organization that could do conservation but not carry the baggage that the government might. And that you all had the leeway to experiment with different techniques in ways that were maybe more venturesome than other groups could do.

**David Todd** [01:14:21] Can you talk about the formation of the Fund and, you know, some of the high points, low points and sort of the goals as it goes forward?

**Peter Jenny** [01:14:28] Yeah. You kind of touched on it. You know, we're, we're basically, we're private sector. And so, you know, we weren't in a position to arrest people. You know, we tried to be as apolitical as possible. You know, we were able to broker deals with landowners, you know, where government entities would be either less inclined to do so, or even less able to do so.

**Peter Jenny** [01:15:00] So yeah, I think you touched on that. We are highly focused, non-political, and probably non-threatening was probably pretty important as well.

**David Todd** [01:15:14] And where do you think it goes from? From here, I mean, you've got a lot of sort of notches in your, in your belt now that you could, I guess, move on. You could retire and feel proud. But I imagine the group has, has things in the works.

**Peter Jenny** [01:15:33] Oh, there's a lot of work in progress on every one of these species. These are just sort of the first steps, you know? An example would be the work with the California condor. We were able to tease out the main issue, which is exposure, continuing exposure to lead. Well, okay, great. Now, what do you do?

**Peter Jenny** [01:15:55] You know, we need hunters up on the Kaibab Plateau shooting elk and deer, because the gut piles are what support the condors through the winter, and other species.

**Peter Jenny** [01:16:08] But we found out that these high-powered bullets, when they go through tissue, even when they don't hit bone, they, they leave sort of a ghost trail of very fine lead particles. And we know this from taking radiographs of the entire carcasses. It looks like smoke, but you can't see it or even feel it. But the smaller the lead particle, the more easily it's absorbed across the gut mucosa and enters the bloodstream. And condors are uniquely sensitive to lead in the environment.

**Peter Jenny** [01:16:45] And so, that's keeping it ... if it's not for the lead exposure, the California condor would be well on the way to total recovery. They're breeding on their own. They're dispersing. The behavior is doing really, is just fine. You know, the habitat's there. It's just the lead exposure.

**Peter Jenny** [01:17:07] So, okay, we know, we know the problem now. How are you going to address that? You know, hunters, manufacturers of, hunters want to do the right thing. But then you've got the NRA that just wants everybody, not just hunters, but everybody, to be afraid of losing their guns and losing their ability to bear arms. And so they're very good at that. And we've had lots of discussions with the NRA to the point where, you know, I said, "Look, we'll give you, we'll give the NRA credit for recovering the California condor, if you help us educate hunters to use these superior non-lead, you know, copper bullets, which, you know, thank goodness, are superior to lead. They just cost a little bit more. I mean you can't get the pickup truck to the end of the street for the price differential.

**Peter Jenny** [01:18:09] And we've talked to the ammunition manufacturers say, "Look, we'll make this stuff out of platinum if we think the hunters want this. But right now, we think hunters want the cheapest ammunition that's available and that still is lead. So we're, we're fighting that. That has nothing to do with conservation, well, it kind of has to do with conservation.

**Peter Jenny** [01:18:28] But, you know, right now we have, but we don't want to, again this is the Peregrine Fund way, we don't want to enact legislation to control that. We have a voluntary program. We're in Arizona right now. We have a 90% voluntary compliance in using non lead ammunition within the condors' range. And we've got donors: we provide free ammunition. And the people that use that stuff are able to enter into a drawing for different prizes and all this kind of stuff.

**Peter Jenny** [01:19:05] But that last 10% is all it takes. Because with the condor, they are communal feeders. One carcass has got lead in it, they all go to it, and they all feed, and they all get exposed. So, it needs to be 100% and we're not there yet. So, there's a lot of work that needs to be done.

**Peter Jenny** [01:19:22] And then you've got the NRA saying junk science and all this crap, excuse me. You know. It's tough. You know people, people don't like to change, you know? You know, if I told you that the sky is green, and you go, "No, it's blue." You know, once you've made up your mind one way or the other, it's pretty hard to change someone's, you know, opinions. But at any rate, so there's a lot of work that needs to be done.

**David Todd** [01:19:51] Yeah. Well, speaking of change, I think you said you, when we spoke before, that you had retired from the Peregrine Fund about six years ago. And, and although you're back on the board, what is your future look like for birds and conservation and other, other interests.

**Peter Jenny** [01:20:18] I think you might have just said it. You know, I retired as president and CEO six years ago, I think it was, I think it's six years ago. I think that's right. And then I just sort of a hiatus. I wanted to let the new guy ... You know, I didn't want to be looking over his shoulder. So, you know, I just sort of kept a low profile and yeah, you know, I finally kind of agreed to go back on the board. In fact, let's see, last month or so was the first meeting that I attended.

**Peter Jenny** [01:20:56] And I don't know. We'll see how that goes. You know, there's a lot of things that I'm involved in, but, you know, going backwards is maybe not something I'm really interested in. I don't want to work full-time for the Peregrine Fund. You know, I've spent a lot of years of my life doing that.

**Peter Jenny** [01:21:16] There's other things that I want to do, you know. Fly my birds, run my dogs, sail the boat, you know, play with my grandkids. That Peregrine Fund job took an unbelievable amount of time. I mean, I traveled and traveled and traveled. I spent a lot of time in Washington. It was tough. And I tell you what it was like. You know, David, I wake up in the morning as an optimist because I'm that way by nature. But every night I was pretty worn down, you know?

**Peter Jenny** [01:21:47] I mean, it's, it was, it's hard. I mean, these are big problems. And if you're really emotionally involved in it, it's really a drain, you know? And, you know, people, people are hard to deal with. And conservation is all about people. And, you know, you can, you can have the solution to a problem, you think. Right? But by the time you get done with meetings, and the government, and whatnot, they can take a perfect, you know, window, crystal-clear window and just turn it into a kaleidoscope, you know?

**Peter Jenny** [01:22:24] And, you know, I don't know. It, it does wear you down. And so, I, I kind of miss it, but not a lot. And I think being on the board will be okay. You know, you have the Peregrine Fund is has, you know, it has a lot of the same projects, but it also has a lot of new projects that I'm learning a lot about. So that's kind of exciting.

**Peter Jenny** [01:22:51] But, you know, we'll see a lot of new people, you know, a lot of, a lot of new faces, new biologists. And that is one thing that's really encouraging, being around a lot of young students, you know, that are just gung-ho, you know, I mean, that's, that's kind of fun. That keeps a guy young.

**Peter Jenny** [01:23:08] But again, it sort of goes to that thing about what I kind of joked about that COVID has been very, very good to Pete Jenny, that, you know, just taking a few years off has been really good. I needed it, you know. I feel like a retired politician.

**David Todd** [01:23:32] Well, it sounds like you have plenty going on still and new stuff. And I wish you well with that.

**David Todd** [01:23:39] Is there anything you'd like to add before we break off?

**Peter Jenny** [01:23:43] No, not really. I just, just, it was, it's always been an incredible privilege to be able to be involved in an endangered species recovery effort. You know, I mean, to be able to put something back is really a rare treat. You know, I think most people go through life making a widget for a dollar and selling it for two, you know. And, you know, to be involved even in a small way and try to make the world a little bit better place, you know, even if it's unsuccessful, is really, that's a, that's a rare opportunity. So, I feel very privileged in having been involved in that, in some way anyway.

**David Todd** [01:24:25] Well, thanks for helping put the pieces back together. And for spending time with us today. I really appreciate it.

**Peter Jenny** [01:24:36] Thanks, David. And thank you so much to your family, too. You know, your mom, she was wonderful. She was so helpful to us. You know, I was just a biologist. And



to have to do all the development work we had to do to make all of this happen. She was so good at introducing us to people and taking me around and just wonderful. Anyway, so, you know, I sure miss her. She was a wonderful lady.

**David Todd** [01:24:59] Well, thank you. I appreciate that. And I'll share that with my family.

**Peter Jenny** [01:25:04] Thank you very much, David.

**David Todd** [01:25:05] Well, you have a good day. And speaking of that, I hope you have lots of fun with the grandkids when they descend upon you.

**Peter Jenny** [01:25:13] Thank you. Have a great Fourth.

**David Todd** [01:25:15] All right. You too. You take care.

**Peter Jenny** [01:25:17] Okay, David. Thanks. See you. Bye, bye.