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In Memoriam: James S. "Steve" Ashe, 1947–2005[1]

James Steven ''Steve'' Ashe (age 58), Past-President of the Kansas Entomological Society, passed away on December 27, 2005, after suffering from a stroke. One of the world's experts on the staphylinid subfamily Aleocharinae, Steve was a member of the faculty of the University of Kansas, where he was a professor in the Department of Ecology & Evolutionary Biology, Director of the Snow Entomological Museum (1988–1994), and chief curator in the Division of Entomology of the Natural History Museum and Biodiversity Research Center. Not only was Steve passionate about his work as an award-winning educator, writer, and researcher, he also relished his role as mentor and friend to his students.

Steve was born in Charlotte, North Carolina on February 23, 1947. His father, C. Wayne Ashe, a Baptist minister who loved learning, had a profound influence on the course of Steve's life. Unfortunately, he passed away when Steve was in his early twenties. Both Steve's father and his mother, Leah, instilled in their only child a strong sense of family, integrity, and compassion. Leah recalls Steve's early interests in insects and the natural world; she fondly remembers his collection of insects.

[1] The photograph of Steve in his office in Snow Hall included herein is courtesy of University Relations, The University of Kansas.

In 1969, Steve earned a bachelor's degree from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte; he completed his master's degree at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina, in 1972. His service as a demolitions expert for the U.S. Army in Germany during the Vietnam War left Steve with partial hearing loss.

Steve began his doctoral studies at Texas A&M in 1974, but, upon the departure of his mentor a year later, he switched to study insect systematics at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. Steve loved the collecting trips to Mexico which were an integral part of study with his new mentor and friend, George Ball.

Upon completing his doctoral studies on the systematics and evolution of mushroom-inhabiting beetles in 1982, Steve joined the staff at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago. During his eight years at the Field Museum, Steve served as Curator in the Division of Insects, and as Division Head of Insects, Chairman of the Department of Zoology, Chairman of the Science Advisory Council, and Editor for the Fieldiana publication series. He also served as a faculty member of the Committee on Evolutionary Biology at the University of Chicago. One of Steve's favorite Neotropical research projects with Bob Timm—featured by David Attenborough in one of his Life on Earth programs—involved the long-neglected study of the complex relationship between amblyopinine beetles and their mammal hosts.

Also, during his time at Field Museum, Steve met his future wife, Aagje, who was working on a grant in the Insect Collections there. The couple married on December 25, 1984. When the position of Director of the Snow Entomological Museum became available at the University of Kansas in 1988, Steve and Aagje welcomed the move to Lawrence, Kansas. A gifted administrator, Steve immediately assumed leadership roles as the Museum Director and as professor in the Department of Entomology, as well as the Department of Systematics & Ecology. For the next several years, Steve played a critical role when the Snow Entomological Museum, the McGregor Herbarium, and the Museum of Invertebrate Paleontology merged with the Museum of Natural History, and later when the Department of Entomology merged with the departments of Botany and Systematics & Ecology.

Under Steve's supervision, the Snow entomological collections grew to more than 4.3 million specimens. The staphylinid beetles, the primary subject of Steve's research, comprise one of the fastest growing segments of the collections, now numbering more than 350,000 specimens. This steady expansion prompted Steve to incorporate new technology and data management. After assuming the Directorship of the Museum in 1988, he obtained state-of-the-art computers for entomology students and staff. In later years, he organized the implementation of a searchable database to manage the large entomological collections. In addition, Steve planned and oversaw major renovations of Snow Hall. In the months preceding his death, Steve was beginning work with architects and engineers on the re-design of a building on KU's west campus to accommodate the expansion of the entomology collections and office space for students and staff.

Notwithstanding his successful work on campus, Steve loved field work above all. The host associations and complex relationships of inquilines, myrmecophiles, and termitophiles captivated him and he spent as many hours in the field as possible to make observations. Enjoying all aspects of field research, Steve delighted in travel to exotic places, experiencing new cultures and environments, the rigors of long hikes with heavy loads under sometimes less than ideal conditions, the challenges of sampling the biotic diversity as completely as possible, and the marvels of the new insects he obtained. Thus, Steve led an active field research program, believing that a steady flow of new material coming into the collections was necessary for the viability of the entomology program and the

professional training of the students. He personally collected throughout the Neotropics and western North America, and also arranged for collection managers and students to pursue active field work.

A committed educator of both undergraduate and graduate students, he was honored with KU's prestigious W. T. Kemper Fellowship for Teaching Excellence in 2001. Among other courses, he regularly taught undergraduate, high-enrollment service courses, dealing with introductory biology, animal diversity, and systematics. Steve routinely received glowing evaluations from students, who emphasized his uncanny ability to organize vast amounts of difficult material and to present this information in an easily understood and engaging manner. Steve worked exceedingly hard on his university lectures and scientific presentations so that he could communicate effectively with audiences of all backgrounds. An active participant in the scientific community, Steve was a member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Coleopterists Society, the Entomological Society of America, Kansas (Central States) Entomological Society, New York Academy of Sciences, New York Entomological Society, Sigma Xi, and the Society for the Study of Evolution. He was a regular and respected reviewer for many scientific journals and grant proposals.

Although as a scientist, Steve may be remembered primarily as one of the outstanding beetle systematist of his generation, basic natural history and complex biotic associations most captivated him. Steve loved natural history and was a keen observer of nature, delighting in discovering a beetle new to him, or an unknown aspect of beetle biology. He lamented that many groups of staphylinids were so poorly known that he needed to spend his time working on species-level problems rather than investigating their natural history. Steve was enthralled with the natural history of all species around him, not just insects, and the beauty and complexity of the natural world. He saw nature through the eyes of a scientist, naturalist, educator, artist, and poet.

Along with Aagje and their son, Thomas, Steve enjoyed travel, camping, hiking, scuba diving, and observing the natural world from the deck of their home in the country. Although Steve always enjoyed astronomy, poetry, and photography, as he grew older, he put more emphasis upon a good meal, good wine, fishing, reading, and exercising. He was a skilled musician who played both the saxophone and piano; before pursuing entomology, Steve had contemplated a career as a professional musician. One of Steve's favorite pastimes was sharing his music with his son, Thomas, who is becoming an accomplished musician in his own right. Steve truly enjoyed helping people, although he was an intensely private and humble person who seldom talked about his personal life. Yet, he was quick to share the marvels of insects, natural history, and the intricacies of systematics with all who were interested.

Steve left an amazing mark on entomology, systematics, education, and his friends and family. His dedication to excellence in all aspects of life was remarkable. Steve's family has requested that anyone wishing to contribute memorial donations to send them to the Steve Ashe Scholarship Fund [c/o the Kansas University Endowment Association].

—Robert M. Timm
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