

Dr. Steve K. Sherrod grew up in Lawton, Oklahoma near the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge. It is an environment that fostered a love of nature and exploration in young Steve. Collecting snakes, lizards and all things creepy-crawly, his boyhood adventures assured a future in biological sciences. Steve attended the University of Oklahoma and graduated with a B.S. degree in Ornithology under Dr. George Miksch Sutton. Along the way, and already fascinated with birds, the art of falconry captured Steve's imagination!

Steve Sherrod

by Dr. Ken Riddle

Steve had a dynamic professional career; one that was co-mingled with avian and raptor conservation and a lifetime of master-class falconry. His life's work made a significant difference in the conservation of native wildlife, birds and raptors in and around Oklahoma, North America, and globally. He graduated from the University of Oklahoma and began a lifetime of studies taking him on excursions around the world.

Steve continued graduate studies at Brigham Young University leading to a masters degree under Dr. Clayton White. While there, he studied bald eagle ecology in Alaska's Aleutian Islands.

Steve continued his studies at Cornell University under the leadership of Dr. Tom Cade, earning his Ph.D. working on the recovery of endangered peregrine falcons. Steve was a key biologist and Peregrine Fund team leader in the reintroduction efforts with Cornell University. Many of Steve's reintroduction strategies were employed in the successful reintroduction of captive-raised peregrines on cliffs and man-made structures up and down the east coast. He travelled to Australia and later Greenland conducting field work and observational studies of fledgling peregrines behavior. In Addition to publishing the *Behavior of Fledgling Peregrines*. Steve also published *Hacking; A method for Releasing Peregrine Falcons and Other Birds of Prey*.

Stevens post-graduate work laid the groundwork for his return to Oklahoma as founding Executive Director of the George Miksch Sutton Avian Research Center in Bartlesville, Oklahoma. There, he was the driving force behind the recovery of the southern bald eagle through reintroduction projects in Oklahoma and beyond. Steve was a leader in Sutton Center's state-of-the-art research on native grassland grouse species. Later he headed the Attwater's prairie-chicken captive breeding project at Sutton Center and developed novel methods in the housing and reintroduction of Attwater's prairie-chickens in South Texas.



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I met Steve through his budding interest in falconry during 1966 in Stillwater, Oklahoma. He was a sophomore at the University of Oklahoma, and I was a pre-veterinary candidate at Oklahoma State University. Steve impressed me with his keen interest in falconry, intensity of focus on the subject and unlimited energy, and I agreed to mentor him. I was hawking ducks with a passage peregrine in my pre-veterinary college days and that was enough to entice Steve and his friend Mike Brewer to accompany me in Stillwater when they could make the trip from O.U. Our weekends around Stillwater and in the tallgrass prairies of the Osage hawking ducks and prairie chickens welded our friendships. Steve and Mike were quick studies, assimilating all they could in the art of falconry; flying their birds successfully at fur, waterfowl, and then prairie chickens.

Over the years I have had many opportunities to observe Steve in action and have always come away with a sense of wonder at his unlimited energy, stickler for details, passion for wildlife, and deep-thinking approach to all challenges including his passionate pursuit of falconry.

Steve was an inveterate competitor. When it came to sports, one would quickly realize that when challenging him to a game of ping pong, volleyball, or collegiate sports, it was best to avoid being an opponent! Steve was relentless in his support and might heap loads of taunting on the loser. However, his competitiveness wasn't reflected in his falconry practice. For him, as with many falconers, competition only concerned the personal challenges in the art of successfully hawking challenging quarry. That energy and focus was also responsible for his success as a leader in the North American Falconers Association as a celebrated CEO and conservationist.

Steve was innovative and talented in his work with birds. He once raised a starling that had fallen from the nest and trained it to whistle the entire National Anthem! Later, he commissioned an educational bird show on wheels and recruited Ryan Van Zant to lead a Sutton Center team to travel the State of Oklahoma, entertaining school children and spreading the knowledge of birds. These efforts contributed to an appreciation of birds and wildlife of all Oklahomans, and in countless ways enriched the lives of those who love and cherish nature.

Many of Steve's ideas and innovations are now common practice in avian field work, including novel veterinary procedures, falconry techniques, and captive breeding protocols in endangered species.

New concepts in breeding and raising falcons for reintroduction with applications to the practice of falconry are noteworthy. His private falcon breeding project also produced outstanding purebred and hybrid falcons including chamber-raised and wild-hacked falcons for American falconers and falconers of the President of the United Arab Emirates. Steve was in the finishing process of writing a comprehensive book on falcons prior to his passing. Efforts are being made by Sutton staff and others to complete this work.

Steve always assumed leadership roles whenever he was able to do so. He had a lifelong presence in The Oklahoma Falconers Association contributing to and fostering high quality ethical practice among young and upcoming falconers. His contributions to NAFA publications, the North American Grouse Partnership and other falconry conservation endeavors were always appreciated.

Steve was a witty character and quick to retort with a unique and witty sense of humor. Steve will be missed.

Following his groundbreaking work to reintroduce the bald eagle to Oklahoma, it is incredible that there are presently a pair of bald eagles nesting just down the hill from the Sutton Center (viewable on Sutton Center's Live Bald Eagle Nest Cam). This occurrence is a poignant tribute to Steve's vision and a fitting highlight to a remarkable life on this day of Remembrance.

