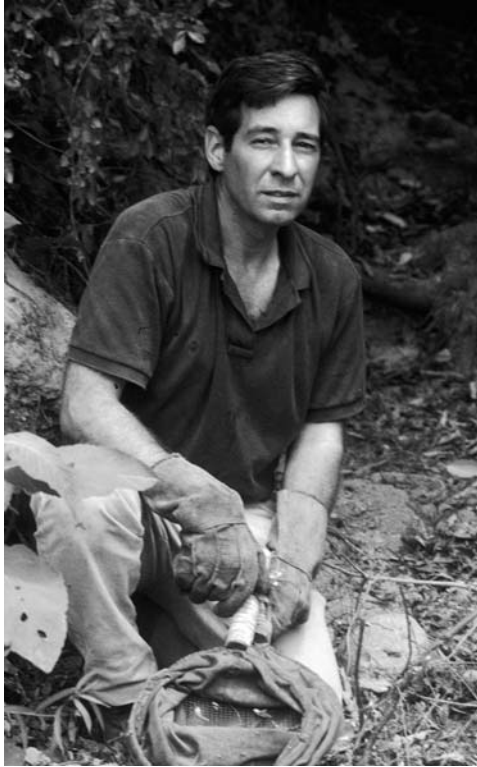


# KU ScholarWorks

## In memoriam, James Stephen "Steve" Ashe (1947–2005)

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## OBITUARY AND DEDICATION



Steve Ashe sifting in Chiapas, Mexico, 1991 (Photo by Mary Liz Jameson).

### **In Memoriam, James Stephen “Steve” Ashe (1947–2005)**

Our esteemed coleopterist colleague, Steve Ashe, died December 27, 2005, just days after attending the annual Entomological Society of America meeting in Fort Lauderdale, Florida and interacting with hundreds of other Coleopterists. Steve’s sudden death at the early age of 58 is tragic, not only for the personal loss to his friends and family, but due to the scientific impact of his loss as well.

After receiving his Ph.D. under the mentorship of George Ball at the University of Alberta, Steve became curator at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago in 1982. Steve worked there for six years, eventually becoming head of the Division of Insects, and brought in substantial resources to expand and develop the entomological collections. Steve arranged for the acquisition of the Luis Peña collection of South American (especially Chilean) Coleoptera. This collection contained over 170,000 pinned and papered specimens, including over 200 holotypes. Steve was the lead principal investigator of a large National Science Foundation collections enhancement grant that allowed, among other things, to begin databasing the Field Museum

entomological collection. Steve then took a position in 1988 as Associate Professor and Director of the Snow Entomological Museum at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, a move precipitated in large part by his desire to become more involved in the education and training of students. In 1994, Steve was promoted to Chief Curator, Division of Entomology, Museum of Natural History and Biodiversity Research Center and Professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at University of Kansas where he worked until his death.

While at the University of Kansas, Steve became one of the most influential and significant coleopterists of his generation and became a role model for everyone with his professional, ethical, and compassionate nature. He was the primary advisor of 11 students who received Ph.D. degrees (K.-J. Ahn, S. Chatzimanolis, J. Danoff-Burg, Z. Falin, R. Hanley, M. Jameson, C. Labandeira, R. Leschen, S. Lingafelter, G. Makranczy, and A. Slater) and 3 students who received M.Sc. degrees (M. Branham, C. Chaboo, and M. Gray) since 1989. Steve also supervised two post-doctoral fellows (K.-J. Ahn and V. Gusarov). Steve served as secondary advisor for dozens of other students at the University of Kansas. He had four students currently working on M.Sc. or Ph.D. degrees (S. Davis, M.-L. Jeng, M. Rightmyer, and J. Thomas). His involvement with students was not limited to Staphylinidae but included numerous other families and through his strong interest in beetle evolution and natural history, he trained his students to be fully cognizant of the principles and methods of modern systematics.

To all of us, Steve was the person who offered logic to quell strong debate within a group. He was a person who did not share in off-color jokes and did not engage in harsh or profane language. And, if you confided in him, he was a trusted person who would offer guidance or advice to help you through a difficult time. All of this he did quietly and thoughtfully.

Steve was born on February 23, 1947 in Charlotte, North Carolina, and like most of the coleopterists who knew him, he was very interested in natural history as a youngster. The Staphylinidae later became the vehicle for Steve to exploit his passions in his professional career. He sometimes lamented that staphylinids were so poorly known that he needed to spend his time working on systematic problems rather than researching the natural history that he found even more interesting. Steve loved fieldwork. In the mid 1970's, before transferring to the University of Alberta with George Ball, Steve made his first trip into the Neotropics, traveling to Oaxaca and Chiapas, Mexico with Horace Burke and Joe Schaffner, among others. On that trip he got so sick that when he stopped collecting and set up his cot in order to recover, he noticed that vultures started to congregate in the trees above him! When Steve returned there with George Ball in 1979, he reminisced about his surreal experience.

In 1986, Steve made his first trip south beyond Mexico, joining Bob Timm in Costa Rica. Their primary goal was to study the ecology and systematics of amblyopinine beetles and their rodent hosts (they eventually made three such trips). Steve was terribly anxious to experience the true tropics first-hand, and he thrived on the rigors of fieldwork and the diversity he encountered. Their trip was highly productive and eye-opening. Many discoveries were made, not only of mammal host symbiosis, but other complex relationships of inquilines, myrmecophiles, and termitophiles, as well (see Ashe & Timm 1986a-b, 1987a-c; Timm & Ashe 1987). Their last day of fieldwork on the amblyopinines in Monteverde was celebrated by hauling wine, Monteverde cheese, and homemade bread up the trail for a mountaintop picnic. Steve wanted to celebrate their first successful expedition properly!

On the second amblyopinine trip to Costa Rica, Steve made a really remarkable discovery. He became curious about working out the association of the aleocharine genus *Tachiona* with the webs of hepialid moths at Monteverde. He discovered that the



Steve Ashe in Laguna Negra, Venezuela, 1998 (photo by Bob Anderson).

beetles, which were considered extremely rare at the time, were found abundantly inside the webs that covered the ghost moth burrows and were found only on trunks of trees of the genus *Trema* (Ashe 1990). His discoveries were a combination of first-rate field observations and unrelenting detective work that characterized all of his expeditions.

Steve was highly driven and focused, both in the office and in the field. When Steve was in town, most students do not remember him missing a day of work. He also worked most Saturdays for at least half a day. Steve was a keystone to the Snow Museum. His work ethic carried over into his fieldwork as well. In 1994, Steve happened to be in Honduras with Bob Anderson and Rob Brooks at a small hotel in the coastal town of Tela when the infamous O. J. Simpson white bronco pursuit was live on every TV channel! With everyone around glued to this absurd scene and interested in the developing situation, Steve just wondered if the weather would hold off so they would be able to get out to do some night collecting! This was vintage Steve.

Traveling with Steve in the field gave us some special glimpses of his character when he would spontaneously reminisce about another trip, or effuse over a discovery of the day. One example of this was in Coatepec, Mexico, in 1991. Brett Ratcliffe, Mary Liz Jameson, and Miguel Morón escaped with Steve from the rain into an open-air eatery. As the rain began to pound harder on the roof and the smell of dobladas emanated from



Cana Field Station, Darién, Panama, 1996. Steve Ashe standing second from right. Also, from middle to left, Henry Stockwell (rear), Rob Brooks (rear), Steve Lingafelter (front), Al Gillogly (standing), Bob Anderson (rear) and Don Windsor (front).

the greasy grill, Steve relaxed into his chair, slowly imbibed a beer, and beamed about the staphylinids he had collected that day from isolated pockets of leaf litter and fungi. He told stories about collecting with George Ball on an early trip to Chiapas and laughed deeply about their timely escape from the pouring rain.

Another example was on the trip to the Darién region of Panama trip in 1996. A temporary camp had been set up in the cloud forest on Cerro Pirre and the large group of coleopterists (including Bob Anderson, Rob Brooks, Al Gillogly, Steve Lingafelter, Henry Stockwell, and Don Windsor) took turns hiking up in twos and threes as there was limited tent space at the higher elevation. Steve and his hiking partners were determined to get an early start on their allotted day. That morning, Steve was leading the way up the trail. He was very fit and a strong hiker and soon left the others trailing behind. On the upper trail, people noticed footprints of a large mammal. When Steve met the rest of the group later in the day, he shared his excitement at observing for some time a jaguar, the source of the footprints! It is extremely rare to encounter these in the wild, and he recounted his fortunate experience with unbridled excitement.

After the Darién leg of this same 1996 Panama trip, Steve met Ratibor Hartmann, owner of the famous coffee farm in Panama, just across the border from Costa Rica. Over drinks one evening, Mr. Hartmann described to Steve a somewhat mythical, isolated valley high in the mountains of Costa Rica, dominated by majestic oak trees, festooned with epiphytes, divided by a river flowing quietly through the forest. It was very difficult to access, requiring a guide and hours of hiking, but it sounded like a biologist's Shangri La. The name of the place was Valle de Silencio and for the next few years Steve talked frequently and enthusiastically about getting there. Just a few months ago, Steve was forwarded some staphylinids by Bob Anderson who finally had a chance to visit this locality. Steve was ecstatic to see the material and eagerly talked of making the trip. Hard work in the field was no obstacle to Steve and he would often hike for many hours to access special places. Steve confessed that he wanted to get in as much of this 'difficult' field work as he could while he was still young, fit and able and

would save the cushy 'La Selva Biology Station type' work for when he was older and less able to get around. Alas, he did not get that opportunity.

Steve was always concerned about the safety and security of his partners on field expeditions so on the 2000 Costa Rica trip, walky-talkies were employed to keep tabs on the team members—and boast about what exciting captures were being made. On that trip, Zack Falin communicated to Steve that he had just taken a single specimen of *Bolitogyrus* (an ostensibly rare, higher elevation staphylinine) in a location near San Gerardo de Dota, on the Pacific side of Cerro de la Muerte. Four years later, Steve and Zack again found themselves at this locality. Steve remembered vividly how he had not taken *Bolitogyrus* on the first trip, and he was determined not to leave the place until he succeeded in capturing a specimen. There were no cans of Raid (invaluable for extracting fungus beetles) or unmolested fungi-laden logs left, but Steve did get a specimen in 2004 (as did Zack), and afterwards they both celebrated with beers.

Steve spent nearly two years of his career (over 30 trips during the period 1974–2005) doing fieldwork in the U.S. and in 10 other countries in the Neotropics. In addition, he recently spent nearly a year on sabbatical in Australia. These expeditions were the foundation for Steve's important natural history collections and publication legacy and were an integral part of his professional life.

While at the University of Kansas, Steve nearly tripled the size of the collections (less than 2 million specimens when he arrived to over 4.5 million specimens in 2005) through his tireless Staphylinidae expeditions in the Neotropics. Most of these trips are listed on the University of Kansas website: <http://www.nhm.ku.edu/ksem/features/expeditions.html>. Steve developed a highly productive and efficient system of employing and training undergraduates to mount the huge number of specimens collected in his flight intercept traps. Each student would point hundreds of beetles each day, and thus Steve avoided (or at least tempered) a major problem plaguing most museums, that of an overwhelming backlog of unprepared material. Worldwide, many researchers in other beetle families can attest to the valuable material collected, prepared, and disseminated from the Snow Museum resulting from Steve's expeditions. Thus, the impact Steve had in this regard is immeasurable.

At the University of Kansas, Steve continued the remarkable grantsmanship he started while at the Field Museum. It is astonishing to realize that Steve, in his short career, wrote successful grant proposals for nearly \$3 million—unheard of in systematics. He received two National Science Foundation PEET grants while at KU, and was among the first to receive such grants. This allowed for his impressive student training program and resulted in opening up the coleopterological "black hole" of the Aleocharinae. Because of the resources Steve acquired combined with his enthusiasm, this subfamily is now accessible and is being studied by a team of researchers in many different countries.

Steve placed a high value on making collections accessible to the world community. He made a commitment to specimen-level databasing, and led the charge by creating over 630,000 database records from the KU collections with his team of collection managers and other staff. This may be one of the largest entomological databases in existence, and had been an intense labor for ten years.

Steve made an important contribution to the education of undergraduate and graduate students. In 2001, Steve received the Kemper Fellowship of Teaching Excellence, one of the highest awards at the University of Kansas. While spontaneous conversation didn't come easily to Steve, he worked extremely hard at preparing the subject matter for his lectures in exhaustive detail. His lectures were immaculately organized and thorough. In all his lectures and scientific presentations, audiences knew immediately of Steve's high standards of excellence. This was evident in the last scientific presentation Steve gave (at the Entomological Society of America meetings in December,

2005). Steve always synthesized complex concepts exceedingly well, and clearly articulated the pros and cons of theories in a balanced and unbiased manner. He provided the data for his audience to arrive at their own conclusion regarding the validity of an idea. He often tested his students in this way, forcing them to articulate their positions on various theories or concepts to be sure they understood the methods and underlying principles and not just the answer.

Steve made a great impact in his career through his generous service to societies in many capacities and his service on various review committees and panels. Steve served as a Scientific Editor for two journals for a total of 6 years (Fieldiana & Thomas Say Monographs of the Entomological Society of America). Steve served as Section A Secretary and Chairman for the Entomological Society of America. Steve was President of the Coleopterists Society in 1990–1991. In the last few years, Steve was called on to serve on various panels to review and evaluate entomological departments at several universities. Steve was a member of the following societies at the time of his death: American Association for the Advancement of Science, The Coleopterists Society, Society of Systematic Biology, Entomological Society of America, Kansas Entomological Society, New York Academy of Sciences, New York Entomological Society, Society for the Study of Evolution and Sigma Xi.

One of the greatest signs of respect that can be shown for our colleagues is to name species in their honor. Steve had 25 species patronyms, mostly in Coleoptera (spanning 6 families), but also two in Hymenoptera. Undoubtedly, there will be many more over the coming years. Many are based on specimens that Steve collected. These patronyms are listed chronologically below:

- Oxyporus ashei* Campbell 1978 (Coleoptera: Staphylinidae)  
*Lordithon ashei* Campbell 1982 (Coleoptera: Staphylinidae)  
*Pterostichus ashei* Ball & Roughly 1982 (Coleoptera: Carabidae)  
*Coenonica ashei* Pace 1988 (Coleoptera: Staphylinidae)  
*Ichnosoma ashei* Campbell 1991 (Coleoptera: Staphylinidae)  
*Labidopullus ashei* Jacobson & Kistner 1991 (Coleoptera: Staphylinidae)  
*Megalopinus ashei* Puthz 1994 (Coleoptera: Staphylinidae)  
*Ontherus ashei* Génier 1996 (Coleoptera: Scarabaeidae)  
*Megarthus ashei* Cuccodoro & Löbl 1996 (Coleoptera: Staphylinidae)  
*Ectioxenidia ashei* Kistner 1996 (Coleoptera: Staphylinidae)  
*Corticarina ashei* Johnson 1997 (Coleoptera: Latridiidae)  
*Tagmalycera ashei* Kirejtshuk & Leschen 1998 (Coleoptera: Nitidulidae)  
*Tetradonia ashei* Jacobson & Kistner 1998 (Coleoptera: Staphylinidae)  
*Dryinus ashei* Olmi 1998 (Hymenoptera: Dryinidae)  
*Aleochara ashei* Maus 2000 (Coleoptera: Staphylinidae)  
*Bdelyrus ashei* Cook 2000 (Coleoptera: Scarabaeidae)  
*Phloeoxena ashei* Ball & Shpeley 2000 (Coleoptera: Carabidae)  
*Lispinus ashei* Imler 2001 (Coleoptera: Staphylinidae)  
*Edaphus ashei* Puthz 2001 (Coleoptera: Staphylinidae)  
*Deinodryinus ashei* Olmi 2001 (Hymenoptera: Dryinidae)  
*Anaulacus ashei* Ball & Shpeley 2002 (Coleoptera: Carabidae)  
*Leptandria ashei* Hanley 2003 (Coleoptera: Staphylinidae)  
*Chelonarhister ashei* Dégallier 2004 (Coleoptera: Histeridae)  
*Holotrochus ashei* Imler 2005 (Coleoptera: Staphylinidae)  
*Scaphidium ashei* Fierros-López 2005 (Coleoptera: Staphylinidae)

Of course, the most lasting legacy of Steve's contribution to entomology is his voluminous scientific publication record. During the period 1973–2005, Steve published over 100 mostly peer-reviewed papers, including many large monographs, and numerous web pages for the *Tree of Life* and other projects. These are listed below in chronological order. Perusing this impressive list of publications allows one to quickly

see the breadth of knowledge Steve possessed in Staphylinidae, and demonstrates his world class standing as a preeminent researcher in this group of beetles. In total, Steve described at least 103 new species and 17 new genera in these papers. Steve was a strong proponent of the use of the internet for the dissemination of research results and loved the fact that one could post numerous photographs at little expense, a limiting factor in traditional paper publications. He was always actively exploring new ways to make scientific information increasingly accessible to the public, and many examples can be seen at the University of Kansas website.

Steve was a very generous researcher as evidenced by the high number of collaborations in which he engaged. Approximately half of his research publications involved one or more coauthors, totaling over 20 different individuals. These collaborations resulted in many seminal papers. For example, his 1984 larval chaetotaxy paper with Watrous is still being used as a model for larval descriptions in Staphylinoida.

Although Steve's life was cut short, he lived it with endless curiosity about the natural world, with great joy, enthusiasm and excitement at even the smallest of new discoveries. He partook of innumerable experiences that most people never have. While we mourn his loss, Steve's influence on his colleagues and students and his scientific legacy will always be a part of us and our science.

Steve spoke extensively about his wife Aagje and son Thomas with many of his friends and colleagues, and they accompanied him on some of his field trips. The Coleopterist community extends deepest sympathies to them for their loss. We dedicate this issue of The Coleopterists Bulletin to Steve's memory.

*Steve Lingafelter, Bob Anderson, Bob Timm, Zack Falin, Mary Liz Jameson, Al Newton, George Ball, Kee-Jeong Ahn & Rich Leschen*

*Additional details of Steve's life and career are included in Timm, R. M. 2006. In Memoriam: James S. "Steve" Ashe, 1947–2005. Journal of the Kansas Entomological Society, 79.*

### **Publications by J. Steve Ashe (in chronological order)**

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- Ashe, J. S. 1980.** The gyrophaenines (Staphylinidae: Aleocharinae), a group of obligatory mushroom-inhabiting rove beetles: the mushroom as a habitat. *Proceedings of the Entomological Society of Alberta* 27:14 (Abstract).
- Ashe, J. S. 1981.** Studies of the life history and habits of *Phanerota fasciata* (Say) (Coleoptera: Staphylinidae: Aleocharinae) with notes on the mushroom as a habitat and descriptions of the immature stages. *The Coleopterists Bulletin* 35(1):83–96.
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