



Dr. Steve Kress

2022 Conservation Leadership Award for Lifetime Achievement

for his pioneering work restoring and managing breeding colonies of Atlantic Puffins and other seabird species, in Maine and around the world, and for raising awareness about conservation and current threats to the world's ecosystems

Dr. Steve Kress is a giant of bird conservation. As a grad student at Cornell University years ago, I, like many birders, spent countless hours at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, widely considered the birders' capital of the world. Although Steve's seabird program was part of National Audubon, his project was stationed at the Lab of O, as we birders call it. There I saw firsthand how Steve's work inspired awe, and not just for his charismatic subject matter—who doesn't love puffins, right?—but also for his accessibility and desire to engage with anyone interested in birds and nature. After grad school, when I accepted a position at the Lab of O myself, my husband and I got to know Steve as a wonderful personal friend.

Those of you who have joined NRCM aboard the Hardy Boat on one of our annual puffin cruises to Eastern Egg Rock probably feel like you know Steve, too. His approachable style reflects his natural ability to educate, and there's seemingly no end to his knowledge and accomplishments. Steve's innovative conservation projects started right here in Maine, with the most famous being his reintroduction of Atlantic Puffins to Eastern Egg Rock after a hundred-year absence of the species. But his footprint extends across the world. The techniques he pioneered have now been used in hundreds of projects. Steve assembled a team to bring back and steward not only Atlantic Puffins, but also other seabird species across many Gulf of Maine islands—work that continues today as the Audubon Seabird Institute. Steve has trained and inspired hundreds of young seabird biologists who have gone on to carry out their own conservation projects far and wide, and has been a leader of National Audubon's famed Hog Island nature camp since the 1960s. He's written dozens of acclaimed books and has taught ornithology to the general public for decades. Because his work has been covered extensively by the media, Steve has been able to reach millions of people with a positive message of how individuals can be part of the solution to the biodiversity crisis, and remind them that appreciating and caring for nature makes for a healthier life and society.

Despite an active schedule of speaking engagements, Steve has graciously partnered with NRCM for almost a decade on our annual puffin cruise, donating his time to share with our members the story of how Maine's most famous summer residents were successfully reintroduced to our islands, how they disappeared in the first place, and why we all must pay attention and do what we can to protect our native wildlife. For all of these reasons and many more, it is my pleasure to present Dr. Steve Kress with NRCM's 2022 Conservation Leadership Award for Lifetime Achievement.