

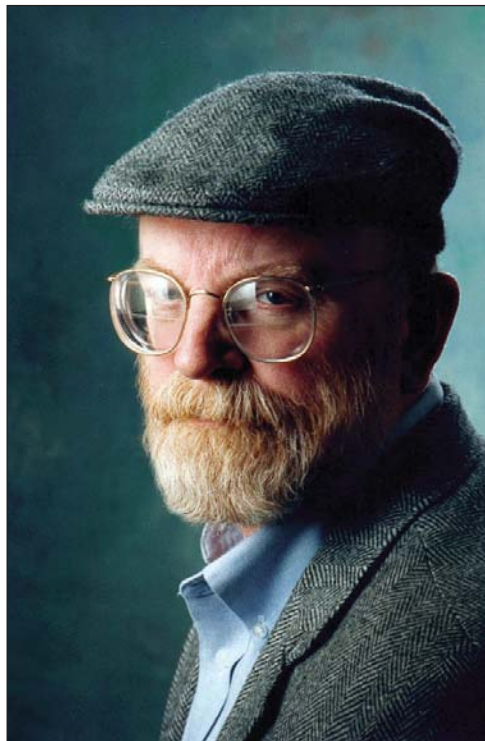
# Collinsorum

THE JOURNAL OF KANSAS HERPETOLOGY

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COMMEMORATIVE ISSUE  
CELEBRATING THE MEMORY OF  
KANSAS HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY FOUNDER



JOSEPH T. COLLINS

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# Collinsorum

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## INTRODUCING COLLINSORUM

### A NEW NAME, A NEW BEGINNING, THE CELEBRATION OF OUR PAST

With this issue we start a new beginning with the Kansas Herpetological Society's publications. The effects of change have been rippling through the Society since mid-January, when our leader, Joe Collins, unexpectedly passed away.

The Kansas Herpetological Society Executive Council voted unanimously to change the name of the Journal of Kansas Herpetology at its annual late-winter meeting held in Frontenac, Kansas.

The name *Collinsorum* was chosen to honor Joe and his wife Suzanne L. Collins, two of the Society's most influential and distinguished members.

The Executive Council considered the new name to be a fitting tribute to the man who created the KHS in 1974 and strived to maintain its commitment to excellence to his last day; and to his loving wife who has served

the KHS in countless capacities since 1983.

As we put this issue together Joe's absence was felt. He was our sounding board for ideas, our source for technical knowledge, and continuous source of content and editorial assistance. All of which made our tasks so much easier.

This issue is entirely dedicated to celebrating Joe's memory and consists of remembrances submitted by Joe's friends. *Collinsorum* will continue publishing these tributes as they are received throughout the year.

Even if you had never met Joe, you'll relate to the common thread in all these stories. Through generosity and kindness he brought people together.

Curtis J. Schmidt and Travis W. Taggart  
Sternberg Museum of Natural History  
3000 Sternberg Drive  
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Image by Travis W. Taggart

Suzanne and Joe Collins, in Lane County, Kansas on 16 May 2003.



## IN MEMORIAM

### JOSEPH THOMAS COLLINS JR. 1939 - 2012

Joe passed away Saturday, January 14, 2012, of a massive coronary at his vacation home on St. George Island, Florida.

He was born July 3, 1939, in Crooksville, Ohio, the son of Joseph Thomas Collins and Luvadelle Aichele Collins. After a childhood in Norwood, Ohio, he received an associate's degree from the University of Cincinnati.

He wrote his first scientific paper in 1959 and his first book in 1974. Since then, he has written over 300 scientific or semi-popular articles and 28 books.

At 19, Joe joined the recently formed regionally based Ohio Herpetological Society and immediately began to play a major role in its transformation into the internationally renowned, Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles the world's largest professional herpetological society. In his tenure Joe served the OHS/SSAR for over 40 years as an Editor, Secretary, Committee chair, and as its President in 1978.

In 1967 Joe joined the University of Kansas Museum of Natural History as a collections manager. He ultimately became the Editor of the Museum's publications until his retirement on 5 September 1997 following a distinguished 30-year career. Notable achievements while at KU included his recognition as Conservationist of the Year by the Kansas Wildlife Federation, President of the Kansas Academy of Science, and the 1979 Classified Employee of the Year at KU. Joe founded the Kansas Herpetological Society in 1974. Under Joe's watchful eye, the KHS grew to be largest and most active academically based regional herpetology organization.

Joe married Suzanne Cupp on 12 December 1984. They co-founded The Center for North American Herpetology in 1994 to benefit the amphibians, crocodylians, reptiles, and turtles of North America and the scientists that study them. CNAH and the KHS estab-

lished the Collins Award in 1998 in honor of Joe and Suzanne's contributions. Given annually, the Collins Award is the largest cash prize given for excellence in herpetological scholarship and photography.

Recently Joe enjoyed his research positions at the Kansas Biological Survey and the Sternberg Museum of Natural History. He also found time to teach herpetology classes at the Regents Center in Overland Park and Washburn University. Although his primary interest was in herpetology, he also published on mammalogy, ichthyology, systematics, and taxonomy. Joe is the state's most prolific author about Kansas's wildlife. The Governor of Kansas proclaimed him the Kansas Wildlife Author Laureate in 1996. His titles include *Amphibians and Reptiles in Kansas* (three editions), *Fishes in Kansas*, and *Turtles in Kansas*. He also co-authored the Peterson Field Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians of Eastern and Central North America.

His parents and his brother, Jeffrey, preceded him in death. Survivors include his wife, Suzanne, a brother Jerry and wife Kay, a daughter Nancy Weaver (Randy), a granddaughter Chelsea (Jamie), and one great-granddaughter Laiken, his mother-in-law, Juanita Hunter, six nephews, one niece and many students whom he considered semi-adopted.

A memorial service will be held in the Kansas Room of the University of Kansas Memorial Union on Sunday 5 February 2012 at 2pm.

Contributions in memory of Joe may be given to the charity of the donor's choice or to the Collins Award through The Center for North American Herpetology (cnah.org).

*Lawrence Journal World*, 27 January 2012  
Suzanne L. Collins and Travis W. Taggart

MEMORIES OF THE “KANSAS COPPERHEAD” (AKA TOM OR JOE)  
Larry L. Miller, Wakarusa, Kansas

The first field trip I attended with Joseph T. Collins was the May 1975 KHS field trip to Kingman County, Kansas. I had been introduced to Joe (Tom as he was known to his friends back then) via some employees of the Kansas Fish and Game Commission (now the KDWP&T) after I sent some snake photos to them to identify. I wrote “Tom” a letter and explained to him that I taught science in Caldwell, Kansas and my students were interested in snakes. I also sent the photos.

I received a reply to my letter within a few days along with much information about the snakes my students had brought to class. Also enclosed was information about the newly formed Kansas Herpetological Society and an invitation to join. I quickly joined and when I found out about the May field trip I decided to attend.

Between that first field trip in May of 1975 and the last field trip I accompanied Joe on during January 2012, I have so many great memories of our times together. It is impossible to pick the most memorable! We traveled together through nearly every county in Kansas, in every state to the south, southeast, and southwest of Kansas as well as a few to the west, north, and east during that time frame. We attended meetings together, we camped together, and we talked! We talked a lot, and about such a variety of things over the years. We did not always fully agree, but we respected each other’s opinions and beliefs.

During many of those adventures, especially since the early 1990’s those wonderful trips included both Suzanne Collins, Joe’s wife and Suzanne Miller, my wife! Yes we both married Suzannes,

and both of our wives enjoy nature, are involved with photography, and they both put up with us! Both Joe and I at times were rather opinionated!

Joe was the most dedicated scientific researcher I have ever known. He took his work very seriously, and he documented everything! He also gave credit to everyone that assisted in any way with his herpetological work. It did not matter if that person was a third grade girl that caught one of the first animals of a particular species for the state or whether it was a well-known college professor. He was always appreciative and he always gave proper credit. Just look at the credit sections in the books he wrote over the years and you will see hundreds of names of those that assisted in some way. When I read something Joe wrote, I knew, and will always know, that it was well researched, documented, and accurately recorded.

I could write hundreds of pages relating to my experiences with Joe as well as many of the other herpetologists that I have had the pleasure of knowing over



Image by TLarry L. Miller

Joe at the 1975 KHS field trip in Kingman County, Kansas

the years, but will refrain from that for a number of reasons. Instead, since a picture is supposed to be worth a thousand words, I will refer to the following website in memory of Joe. It has many photos dating from the 1970's to January 2012 and will bring back memories for many who are reading this article. The site is <http://ksheritage.zenfolio.com/p359922359>

Oh yes, I am sure some of the younger people reading this are wondering why I picked "Kansas Copperhead" as part of the title to this article. That dates back to the 1970's and 80's BC (Before Cell Phones) when CB (Citizen Band) radios were very popular. There was a time when many of the KHS members used CB radios to communicate while on field trips. These radios worked great since one person could drive a few hundred meters ahead of another at a rather high speed, spot an animal on or by the road, and then radio back to the other vehicle the location. They were also useful for calling for help when your vehicle got stuck in the mud or when someone was lost! It also worked great for letting the

others in the group know that you had just been stopped by the local police and asked why there was a convoy of vehicles on a deserted country road playing with snakes!

A popular song of the times was "Convoy" by C.W. McCall and it would have been easy to change some words in that song to fit herpers rather than the truckers it featured. If I remember correctly, a few of the more creative KHS members did make some modifications to the song! I happened to hear it on the radio while I was considering how I was going to write this article, and it brought back some memories too!

Those using CB radios at the time picked names for themselves "handles" and the "Kansas Copperhead" was the handle Joe picked for himself. We now have "screen names" and facebook! Facebook is nothing more than CB radio of the present!

Joe was really something to listen to on CB during some of those earlier field trips just like he was always the person that people wanted to be around.

There will never be another Joe Collins!



Image by Suzanne Miller

Joe with friends on the boat as we returned from a wonderful day of herping on Little St. George Island in January of 2012.

ROCK CHALK JOEHAWK  
Curtis J. Schmidt, Hays, Kansas

Not to sound like a broken record, but Joe Collins was a teacher, mentor, colleague, and above all else...a good friend. As many of us, I could go on and on about his influence and special place in my life, but I will share two stories that have a special place in my heart.

A brief background. As we all know, good friends are who they are because of the certain things that we share in common with them. For me, it was very easy to become very close friends with both Joe and Suzanne because of the many things that we have in common. Obviously, herpetology was the most important at first establishing a relationship. I came into the KHS scene as a 13-year old in 1990. Generally shy and retiring, I had very little to do with most of the people in KHS for many of my younger years but stayed relatively close to both Karen Toepfer (longtime KHS Secretary/Treasurer) and Travis Taggart (semi-adopted son of Joe and Suzanne, current KHS President, and long-time friend), both of whom were vital building blocks in my herpetological development. It was several years later, through my friendship and professional relationship with Travis that I would finally get the opportunity to begin a professional relationship with Joe and Suzanne that thrives to this day.

The relationship that continued to build with Joe and Suzanne soon grew into a good friendship, with almost daily phone calls and routine visits. It was in 2007 that the visits became more routine and one of my favorite relationships was built. Joe and Suzanne were avid KU Jayhawk fans and didn't miss a game, play, scrimmage, anything. Although never attending school there, I grew up with a passion for Jayhawk athletics that continues to this day. In 2007 Joe and Suzanne offered up a pair of basketball season tickets to my father and I, tickets that were

EXTREMELY hard to come by and usually involved being on a waiting list. We jumped at the opportunity.

The basketball season came and my Dad (or wife, or friend) and I made the 3-hour commute from Hays to Lawrence at least once a week. We began a game day ritual of picking up the Collins's and going out for a pre-game meal and cocktails. This was truly a treat. During these pre-game meetings we discussed nearly all the things that were near and dear to my heart: family, friends, herpetology, KU athletics, all while enjoying an adult beverage or two. It didn't get any better than that. EXCEPT...when later on that season, for the first time in 20 years, the Jayhawks won the National Championship! That made that year and all the pre-game meetings that much more special, and a year that I will most certainly NEVER forget. I will cherish those days, and those pre-game chat sessions forever.

My second story is a bit more self-centered and one that gave me a good amount of pride. We have to take a step back a ways, as I believe the year was 2006. Some of Joe's friends (now friends of mine as well) in Kentucky were planning a "Kentucky Herp Derby", where they assembled some of the best herpers and herpetologists from several states, broke them into teams, and had a friendly competition or "herp-off" to see which team could out-herp the others. It was based on a point system, with certain species worth a certain amount of points. The team with the most points after a 24-hour period won. Moment of pride #1: Joe (with the help of my good friend Travis) picked me to be part of the Kansas crew, which also included him, Suzanne, and Travis. I was tickled pink to say the least that they would consider me among the best in Kansas!

We all assembled at a cabin at Ken-



Lake State Park on Friday evening to socialize. John MacGregor, Kentucky herpetologist and friend of Joe, had put together a herps of Kentucky identification quiz for all of us to take. Obviously, this was a breeze for the Kentucky herpers, but a little more difficult for me, mainly because this was the first time I had ever even set foot in Kentucky. All in all, I thought I did pretty well, except for the tapdpoles, which were pretty much all guesses. However, my confidence hit an

all-time high when, moment of pride #2: I SCORED HIGHER THAN JOE!!! This was amazing to me. I had just scored better on an identification quiz than the guy who wrote the book that I learned them from!!

Gloating aside, the weekend ended up being one I'll never forget. The thrill of herping new territory, the new friends that I had made, and the camaraderie of my good Kansas friends made for a memorable occasion, even if my team finished 3rd!



Image by Suzanne L. Collins

## WHY ME? I MAY NEVER KNOW Dan Fogell, Omaha, Nebraska

I'm not a native of the Plains. I'm a transplant from the east coast, and in fact I never thought I'd EVER go to Kansas for ANY reason except maybe to drive through it on my way to somewhere else. It was one of those "square states" that I knew very little of, and I most certainly was unaware of Kansas' rich herpetofaunal diversity. But these days I can't get to Kansas enough. Herpetology, beautiful vistas, and friends whom I consider family bring me to Kansas several times a year. This story is about how Kansas, Joe Collins, and the Kansas Herpetological Society changed the direction of my life.

I met Joe Collins for the first time in Orlando, Florida at the very first Annual Reptile Breeder's Expo. Joe was a guest speaker back when they used to have guest speakers at those gatherings. I shook his hand and told him what an honor it was to meet him. I doubt Joe would have remembered... hundreds of attendees shook his hand that day, and who was I, really?

That was 22 years ago. Two years later I moved to Nebraska, met some local herpetologists, and embarked on what would eventually become a career in Great Plains herpetology, though I didn't know it at the time. I abandoned my computer programming career, returned to college as a biology student, and surrounded myself with scientists of all disciplines...thirsty for knowledge as all eager students are. I eventually earned bachelor's and master's degrees in biology and was determined to practice my newly acquired skills somewhere else, perhaps Florida or my home state of Rhode Island, but not the prairie. However a series of events and a collection of conditions kept me in Nebraska where I would ultimately trade the oceans of the east for seas of grass. But this story isn't about me, it's about Joe.

I attended my first Kansas Herpetologi-

cal Society (KHS) meeting in 1998. It was their 25th annual meeting and it was a huge event. Three days of presentations, a banquet, an auction, booksellers, and a lot of my heroes: Henry Fitch, Hobart Smith, Joe Collins, and an up and coming herpetologist named Joe Slowinski who, like Joe, would be taken from our community much too soon. The first ever Collins Award was presented to another of my heroes, Travis Taggart. I was surrounded by greatness and I desperately wanted to be a part of this group. But again, who was I, really?

With my advisor's encouragement I presented some preliminary thesis data at the next annual KHS meeting. He said it would be a great venue because the KHS encouraged student participation. It was, and it still is a great venue. At this meeting the second Collins Award was going to be given for an outstanding photograph of a native Kansas amphibian or reptile (turtles were still part of the Class Reptilia back then). I entered the maximum of five photos. I didn't expect to win, and I didn't win. But I was a finalist. And after the award was presented to the winner, Joe Collins came over to talk to me. To ME. Who was I? Just a Nebraskan – not even a native one – at a meeting of Kansans. He gave me words of encouragement and said that my photo was "outstanding" and that I should continue to submit entries in the future. I listened, took his advice, and two years later when The Collins Award was once again presented for a photograph, my photo was selected. If this was the only personal interaction I'd ever had with Joe Collins, it would have been enough to have affected my life. Fortunately, there were more. Many more.

I went back to Nebraska feeling like maybe Joe and the other KHS'ers would remember me at the next meeting. Sometime between

the two Novembers I got a call. It was Joe Collins. He asked if I might be interested in replacing another KHS member as the chairperson of the KHS Awards Committee. I guess he remembered me. I agreed to do it, though I had no idea what I would have to do. It was Joe Collins...asking me to participate in an official KHS capacity. What else could I say? And before the conversation ended, he asked "what's the title of your talk for this year's meeting?" Not "will you be speaking at the next meeting?" Or "can you give a presentation in November?" He simply asked "What's your title?" I told all of this to my friend Ted Leonard, and he looked at me and said "Danny, you have arrived." Somehow, some way, I had caught the eye of Joe Collins. He knew me, he liked me, and I was about to enter the club. Still, I'm asking myself who am I, really?

Over the years Joe made that same call each year: "I need your title," in that authoritative baritone voice. And I always gave him one. But there were more calls as well. One of them was "I want you to be a part of JTC Enterprises" – Joe and Suzanne's consulting business. Another one was "when is that field guide gonna be finished?" And when it was, Joe came to Nebraska for my book release. "How would you like to be on the Board of Directors of CNAH?" – the Center for North American Herpetology – he asked. Surely there were others more appropriate for this appointment, but Joe asked me. "We'd like you to be the keynote speaker at this year's KHS meeting." Me? Seriously? Then there was "I need you to help me with the auction this year," and I assumed

he meant setting all the items out on tables for display before the auction began. No... he needed another auctioneer. Joe was the auctioneer. EVERYBODY knew that. How could I fill those shoes? How could anyone? It turns out it takes three of us to be as awesome as one Joe.

But of all the phone calls Joe has made to me, none compares to the one I'd get every year on November 21st...when he would call and sing Happy Birthday to me. Last year, in 2011, the call didn't come. I was somewhat disappointed, but I just figured Joe was busy. The next day I had a phone message from Joe. He sang: "Happy birthday to you...one day late, happy birthday to you...one day late..." adding "one day late" throughout the entire song. I still have that message on my cell phone. This year that call won't come at all, and on November 22nd, I'll listen to last year's message.

All these great honors were bestowed upon someone who never expected to make the Great Plains his permanent home, and by a man who was a hero to me. But why? Why me? If I could ask Joe one more question, that would be it. Joe changed my life. Not that I had a plan, or a direction, but he provided me with both. My debt of gratitude to Joe can only be repaid by helping to perpetuate his vision and his legacy. I hope these words I've written here, these personal memories, can help those who didn't know Joe to understand the force that he was. So to answer the question I've been asking... who am I, really? I'm Joe's colleague, employee, minion, and best of all, friend. And I miss my friend.



## I MISS MY FRIEND, JOE

Walter E. Meshaka, Jr., Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

I was fortunate enough that Joe took an interest in me after formally meeting him with my old boss Stan Trauth in 1987-1988. I don't count the time I fetched animals for him and others, such as the late Ray Ashton, to photograph in the live animal room at the 1982 Tampa meetings. His visit to the Archbold Station with Suzanne in 1990 really cemented things. He even served as an outside committee member for my doctorate and was then until his passing a kind and generous source of sage advice in the struggles and adventures of life, professional and personal.

I miss being able to ask his advice on things, listen carefully to his insights, laugh it up in the field, revel in banter-sometimes just us but evermore fun in a rollicking group. This was especially true of KHS meetings, where camaraderie would reign supreme. Royal-hearted, Joe was the leader and our pal. It sure was funny when he and Suzanne purloined my underwear for the KHS auction, and only Joe could sell it for an eye-popping 100+ dollars. Drives back to Lawrence al-



Image by Suzanne L. Collins

ways included ritualized stops at Starbucks, collecting, and long discussions about topics in herpetology, and work we were doing together. I learned a lot from Joe. Having Joe in my life was a fortunate thing. He was my friend, and I miss him.

Jan Perry  
Tucson, Arizona

I first met Joe back in the days when he was Tom Collins. I was in the first group of Lawrence High students to work closely with the natural history museum folks to develop presentations to give to grade school kids to help ease the load on the folks at the museum. I wanted to do presentations on snakes and Ray Ashton, the museum's education director and organizer of this program, put me in contact with Tom. After that I pretty much became a natural history museum groupie. I volunteered for the museum doing various duties that Tom would come up with and Tom would 'pay' me in natural history museum reprints and publications!

After high school graduation, Tom found me paying jobs at the natural history museum mostly in herpetology, but also in mammalogy, vertebrate paleontology, and ichthyology. I also worked for the animal care department and part of my duties included caring for the snakes in the museum's live snake exhibit. The jobs were quite helpful, as it was up to me to pay my way through college.

After graduation, Tom (he was still known as Tom) was instrumental in getting me my first zoo job in the Herpetology Department at the Dallas Zoo. I know with 100% certainty that I got the job because of who I knew and not what I knew (which was pretty much squat!).



You see, Tom was very good friends with the curator, Jim Murphy. Zoo work has been the career path I have chosen for my life, and if it weren't for Joe, I can't imagine where I would have ended up or what I would be doing.

Two years ago when my mother died, much to my surprise I got a Kansas Herpetology Society Newsletter in the mail. Joe had put an obituary for my mother in the newsletter. She had been an officer at one time, but neither of us had been members for quite a while. I was quite touched by his thoughtfulness.

I seldom have found my way back to Lawrence as I no longer have any family living in the area. Therefore, I haven't had many opportunities to visit with Joe and Suzanne over the years. This past June, I did make it back to Lawrence and was able to dine with Joe and Suzanne. Little did I know that would be the last time I would see Joe. He was always larger than life to me and I always thought of him as immortal. Heck, I figured he'd be writing my obituary for the Journal of Kansas Herpetology!

### Representative Tom Sloan Lawrence, Kansas

Joseph Thomas Collins was a unique, inspirational, gregarious mentor to many of us. More than that, he was a partner with each of us, but especially to Suzanne. I cannot think of Joe without thinking of Suzanne – his partner professionally and in life.

Each of us has stories of Joe's influence in our lives. He knew that I was traumatized as a child by a giant, aggressive, vicious --- garter snake. He knew that I worked to overcome that fear by deliberately going to snake exhibits and learning to identify the difference between dangerous and potential pet snakes. He knew that my efforts were only partially successful, but he reveled in my work to make the change in my attitude and life by accepting the "critters."

When he was chasing "critters" or mentoring us, Suzanne was by his side. When he was creating the books that brought amphibians and reptiles to our attention, it was Suzanne's photographs that brought his words to life. When he was telling stories and inviting us to join him in some new hunt, she was organizing so that none of us starved and each had a place to sleep.

Joe was many things to us, but most of all he was a partner and husband to the woman he loved with all his heart. Suzanne's mother, Juanita, was never his 'mother in

law', she was "Mom" and his affection for her was always evident.

Joe's entrepreneurial skills (some would call it "hustling") were legendary. Finding sponsors for publications that he knew the public would want, supporting his organizational efforts, and encouraging the rest of us to pursue our dreams always were important, but secondary to supporting us as individuals.

His memory for most people will be as the author of books and articles revealing the world of herps; in my mind he will always be the man who inspired us to grow as people and professionals. Joe was the man who often believed in us more than we believed in ourselves; the man who lived large, and was a true partner with Suzanne.

We all miss Joe and his contributions to his professional field and to our individual lives. As we go forward, I encourage you to continue including Suzanne in your lives. Her photographic skills can help us show the world of "critters" to new generations; her calm demeanor can help bring tranquility to our hectic lives; her words of wisdom can serve as an anchor in our lives; and together we hear Joe's laugh, see the twinkle in his eyes, and hear his encouraging words.

## HERPETOLOGY, RANDOM PHONE CALLS, AND BEER

J. Daren Riedle, Jefferson City, Missouri

I first came across Joe's name in the early 1980's when I found a copy of the *Amphibians and Reptiles of Kansas* in my middle school library. Of course I think he was still going by Tom back then. Even in 6th grade I wanted to be a herpetologist, and the fact that there was a field guide for my home state was pretty amazing to me! Just a couple of years later someone gave me a copy of the *Kansas Herpetological Society Newsletter*. After quickly skimming the contents I immediately mailed Karen Toepfer a check and KHS became the first professional society that I joined, something that I am sure can be said by many. It was not until 1992 that I was able to attend my first KHS meeting in Newton. It was a very overwhelming weekend for me, finally being exposed to herpetology at a professional level, and interacting with other folks in the field. Of course a highlight of that weekend was getting to meet Joe. Joe was friendly and very encouraging, qualities that I have learned are sometimes lacking when you finally meet other folks whose work you have admired. The encouragement that Joe gave was exactly what this newbie needed to hear to keep me motivated and excited early in my career.

I took about a five to six-year hiatus from KHS meetings when I took a job with the Arizona Game and Fish Department. Needless to say, when I began my PhD work at Texas A&M I was pretty stoked to once again fill in that first weekend of November on my calendar. My first meeting back was 2006 in Hays. I remember walking into the social that Friday night, and of course the first two people I run into are Joe and Suzanne. Joe gives me his usual big hug, stepped back and said "we have been keeping an eye on you, and expect great things. I cannot wait to see where you end up". This was something he repeated to me at every meeting after that

and something that meant a lot to me. To finally be able to bring my own students to the 2011 meeting in Wichita so that they could meet Joe, as I once had, will always be one of the biggest highlights of my professional career.

Most of Joe and my interactions over the years have been pretty casual, chatting at meetings and the occasional e-mail exchange. Joe's stalker-esque (I say this jokingly) qualities when he needed something was always amazing. I was never sure how he always seemed to know where I was and the phone number required to catch me at that location, but he did. Two occasions in particular really stand out. Once, while working on my Master's Degree at Oklahoma State University the communal phone in the grad office rang. I answered it and it was Joe wanting to discuss some society business (I was the KHS Secretary at the time). I had never posted nor gave that phone number out that I was aware of, but Joe found it. A couple of years later, while working for the Arizona Game and Fish Department, I returned home from the office to find a message from Joe on my cell phone. It seems he was looking for application information for scientific collecting permits. The funny thing was I had only recently acquired that cell phone so had not yet widely distributed the number. But yet again, Joe found me!

My favorite Joe moment though took place in the mid-1990's at a spring field trip to Kanapolis Reservoir. Many of you might remember that trip as the Western Diamondback Rattlesnake trip. I was currently assisting a professor from Emporia State University on a rattlesnake physiology project and was looking to collect four or five *Massasaugas*. Kurt Grimm, Matt Combes, and I were walking a small ravine that at one time was used as a dump site. I remember Matt and I were

on one side and Kurt on the other. Near the bottom Kurt started to cross over to Matt and I, but immediately made a hop when a rattlesnake began rattling beneath his feet. We immediately, and carefully, began removing an old washing machine and other debris trying to find this snake! In just a matter of a minute or less we had cleared all the debris yet snake was nowhere to be found. This was quite disconcerting as the rattling was still emanating from the original spot in which it was heard, right in the middle of the three of

us. Finally Kurt laughs and points towards an old beer can, the kind with the pull tab. Sure enough a small rattler was hanging outside of the can just going to town. The bottom of the can was rusted out and the Massasauga had crawled inside of the can to hide. We simply rolled the can, snake and all, into a bag and headed back to camp. Upon showing Joe the can and snake, and telling him the story, he simply leaned forward with that twinkle in his eye and said "just further proof that beer and herpetology go together".

### *JOE COLLINS: THE GREAT CONSERVATIONIST AND BETTER FRIEND*

Ken Brunson, Pratt, Kansas

It was in the early eighties. Dr. Frank Cross wanted to do a general survey of stream fishes in Western Kansas to assess changes in species composition. Joe Collins was co-leader of the expedition. I think it was Randy Moss who was along when I begged space in the van for a couple of days. It was an adventure that, at the time, I took totally for granted thinking there would be many more opportunities. While there were some opportunities, this one certainly had a unique flavor. Night road herping was, of course, a part of the whole adventure. This was a special treat for me as it was the first chance I had to do road herping with Joe who already had become a respected Kansas herp mentor. Following a pleasant day of seining in the Cimar-ron River, I found myself riding in the back seat next to the van's side door. I was anxious for the first sighting. Then, there it was, a snake in the road. Even driving relatively slowly, Joe had overshot the lively serpent. In my exuberance to demonstrate my herping prowess, I immediately shoved the side door open and leaped from the still moving vehicle in hopes of corralling the escaping serpent. Of course, being past the animal, I couldn't see it well enough to pounce on it let alone identify it. While it slithered away

in the safety of the road ditch, I slinked back into my seat covered in embarrassment. Joe was exceedingly gracious as he calmly but succinctly explained (paraphrased from old memory but still pretty accurate) the appropriate procedure: "Ok, to review, we first come to a stop so as not to run over any riders, then we slowly back trying to not run over the animal then shine our headlights on it. Then....we open the door and collect the animal." I was totally ashamed of my childlike exuberance but very appreciative of Joe's calm but clear instructions. I don't recall any particularly remarkable herps collected that night but I sure remember the one I screwed up. I always appreciated Joe's ability to always try to encourage and reward enthusiasm in herping and never try to humiliate a youngster's or, in my case, an adult's ditzy behavior or lack of skill and knowledge. For whatever qualities may be extended to Joe Collins, none can be greater than his ability to instill an interest and enthusiasm in others for these animals.

Joe was the KHS representative to the Kansas Nongame Wildlife Advisory Council for many years. As the Wildlife Diversity Coordinator for the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, I had the pleasure of co-

ordinating these meetings and seeing Joe on a regular basis as part of many nongame issues and concerns. Joe always brought interesting ideas and observations to these sessions. His presence added interest and exuberant anecdotes and reports. He was always an incredibly valuable advocate for herps as well as overall wildlife conservation and environmental protection. He consistently presented honest, gut-level opinions and appropriate courses of actions. He made meetings worth attending! His long-term and dedicated contributions to the Kansas Nongame Wildlife Advisory Council on behalf of KHS and herps, while recognized by some, probably deserve much more praise and appreciation.

He was equally active in behind-the-scenes legislative efforts, starting from issues like minimum desirable streamflow legislation in the early 80's to protection of the Threatened and Endangered Species statute in the 90's.

His numerous contributions to fund raising auctions of several organizations put valuable dollars into coffers destined for good conservation causes. He was always a go-to person for so many conservation and environmental bills and issues. I, like many others, took those incredible assets for granted, but we all continue to reap the positive results of that sincere dedication. Joe never undervalued the simple pleasure and worth of any herp and yet never overestimated the need for more public education and understanding. Through all these years, his faithful and talented Suzanne, always so gracious and helpful, was there in support. We are praising and recognizing Joe Collins in our testimonials but it must be acknowledged that Joe's incredible contributions to herpetology and herps in general would have never seen such achievement without the amazing contributions and support of Suzanne. An amazing team!

#### MEMORIES OF JOSEPH T. COLLINS Pablo R. Delis, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

In 1987, coming from Spain with a fresh B.S. degree in Biology with a concentration in Chordates, I knew little about North American Herpetology. I first heard about Joseph T. Collins, "Joe" to everyone, in 1989 when I entered the Graduate Program at the University of South Florida. Doctor Henry R. Mushinsky (From the Old World, I brought with me the Victorian academy etiquette) handed me the Peterson Field Guide to Eastern North American Amphibians and Reptiles and said "memorize this little but handy book, it is going to be helpful to you in the near future and perhaps for the rest of your life." I looked at the names of the authors (Conant and Collins) and said "I have never heard of these names before," to what Henry (he eventually forced me to call him by his first name) replied smiling; "Roger Conant and Joe Collins are wonderful persons and exceptional

herpetologists".

Since 1991, the year of my first "big" herpetology meeting, I have had the opportunity to meet Joe briefly in person several times. At some of the subsequent professional meetings, as part of the rushed whirlwind of activities going on in national gatherings of the American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists, the Herpetologists' League, and the Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles, Joe was often the cheerful auctioneer of the famous "herpetology live auctions." During all these years, I have also heard indirectly about Joe from many other colleagues and friends, reading the prolific Center for North American Herpetology notes, vicariously through a common friend (Walter Meshaka), and through many short collegial interactions via mail on common research or herpetological issues over the



last two years. In all occasions, through the spirit of the conversations and exchanges, it transpired, in undeniable terms, that Joe was an exceptional individual.

In 2011, at the KHS annual meeting in Topeka, Kansas, I got the chance to finally spend a significant amount of time with Joe and the leadership of the society in a group setting, as well as in one-on-one interaction. I can say that I really met Joe also for the first time at this event. I attended this meeting for the first time, and I brought one of my students (Bill Humbert) to benefit from the experience. As soon as we stepped out of the airplane, we sensed Joe's presence with the warmth of the Kansas sun, a welcoming change from the shoveling of snow in Pennsylvania.

From the moment I was picked up from the hotel that evening by colleagues/friends of Joe, I experienced the tremendous admiration and love that the members of the KHS have for Joe and I quickly discovered why: Joe loved family, friends, herpetology, and life. Joe was a social creature, friendly with everyone, talkative, jovial, and funny. He definitely lived in practice the spirit of "Work

Hard, Party Hard." Joe was kind and helpful to those in need and generous without boasting. He displayed great devotion for Suzanne Collins, who also matched him in grace and kindness. From day one in Kansas, Joe was energetic beyond boundaries, participating and helping with every aspect of the meeting that needed his attention. From the first "hello" to the last "goodbye," Joe treated Bill and me like he has known us throughout our lives. Joe made my student feel like he was his son, discussing research or family life with amazing ease. Overall, Joe was humble and unassuming at all times and without reservations passionate about herpetology.

Joseph T. Collins will be missed on Earth by all of us who knew him. On the other hand, he will be ecstatically received by his late friends in eternal paradise, where he will finally discover the true systematics of the Lissamphibia. I feel so sorry that the first time that I was able to really meet and know Joe was also my last, albeit I will always remember his footprint among us when I open again and again that handy book that Henry recommended in 1989.

Elizabeth Pyron  
Port St. Joe, Florida

Having snakes in the house and the freedom to self-teach was great, but having Joe Collins mentor you as a thirteen-year old??? As it turned out, it was simply meant to be.

Joe was patient and kind, even as he made us all earn our chops. That included me as well, probably mostly:) I knew I had gone as far as I could on my own, when lo, here came Joe and Suzanne. Now I was not only out of my league with my thirteen-year old, but clearly with them and theirs! They suffered through my questions patiently though, and eventually I managed to (barely) hold my own while the serious discussions ensued.

By this I mean that I knew enough to be quiet and listen, help clean up, and bring wine and candles. They welcomed us each winter at St. George. They are part of our family. We miss him.

Joe gave an irreplaceable gift to all four of us, both with his guiding of Alex (and direction for me), and with the friendship of he and Suzanne. He was a central and integral part of the shaping of our lives, and we will always remember him and the time, experience, and teaching he gave to us freely.

Rest in peace my friend. We will remember you.

## MY MEMORIES OF A GREAT MAN, JOESPH T. COLLINS "JOE"

*Michael Rochford, Vacaville, California*

It's clear that Joe has affected so many people and that even those who only knew him briefly were touched deeply by his kindness and generosity. I feel as though I need to share my experiences and memories of him as many others have. I first met Joe in January of 1998. My mom saw an advertisement in the Kansas City Herpetological Society's newsletter for a class at the University of Kansas entitled "Amphibians and Reptiles of Kansas." I was only a junior in high school at the time but my mom called the instructor and he was happy to have me join the class. On the first day of class the instructor introduced himself as Joseph T. Collins. It was then that I realized who was standing before me. Joe was the author of many books. Two of which were considered "Bibles". He wrote the Peterson Field Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians of the Eastern United States, often simply referred to as "Conant and Collins." This was major. However, I was more familiar with his field guide of Kansas herps. John Baldwin and I had been sitting in our rooms stewing over that book for years already. It was our dream to find a county record so we could have our own dot on one of the distribution maps. I am now honored to have been thanked early in the acknowledgments of the most recent edition (along with many of my close friends).

The class was absolutely amazing. Here I was, 16 years old, sitting and listening to a new lecture every week from one of the most famous herpetologists in the country, or maybe even the world. Every week there were detailed species accounts, eventually covering every species in the state. I'll never forget Joe stressing the importance of Wiley's Evolutionary Species Concept. Of course, I didn't realize how controversial that was at the time. Joe's views on taxono-

my have been the subject of much debate. But, agree or disagree, Joe's dissenting voice played a valuable role in the global dialogue of herp taxonomy. Without his input, we may not have had the truly rigorous debate about gene flow and how that affects the definition of a species. If nothing else, we thought more deeply about the subject. And after years of internally debating various viewpoints, I'd say it taught me that nobody is right. However, this note is intended to be more personal than professional. And it is my hope that people will put aside their scientific biases for at least a short period of time to see the person that he was. I also hope to give life and character to a man that so many may only know through his writings.

By far, the best parts of Joe's class were the two field trips. At the time, I had never caught so many snakes in my life as I did on those two field trips, and nowhere near that much diversity. Among other things, I found my first salamanders! I also met Joe's wife, Suzanne, for the first time and I remember being captivated by their photo session with a cottonmouth that someone had caught nearby in Oklahoma. This was the first of many photo shoots I'd see this duo perform. Eventually, the fun had to end and we took our final. Before I left I had Joe sign my book. It has been and will continue to be one of my most coveted possessions. I didn't see Joe again until 2003. I was volunteering at the Sunset Zoological Park in Manhattan, Kansas while I was in college and I had been assigned the duty of finding speakers for "Reptile Day". I immediately thought of Joe and I sent him and Suzanne an e-mail inviting them to the zoo to speak. Much to my excitement, they accepted and Joe entertained the audience with a talk on his field work on St. Vincent Island in the

Florida panhandle. This was truly fascinating stuff because I had never been herping in Florida. One slide showed an Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake as long as Joe was tall. And he told us of the infestation of Pigmy Rattlesnakes on the island. This was, of course, a very GOOD thing. And, who couldn't be excited by the alligator pictures he showed us. He had primed my passion for getting into the field the way that only Joe could. And it was just before he left the zoo that he invited me to Florida to help him and Suzanne on their project. This was EPIC!!! I credit Joe for saving my life with that invitation. At the time, I had pretty much nothing going for me, but now the one thing I did have was a burning desire to get to Florida!

The trip was in June of 2003. My friend, John Stoklosa, and I loaded up his car and drove all the way there. Of course, I think the journey is almost as much fun as the destination. It was my first time through Illinois, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Alabama. Once we got there, the real fun began. We had cover boards and sheets of tin set all over the place and we left no palm frond unturned. We caught all kinds of great stuff. John and Steve Wahle tricked me into chugging Jack Daniels straight from the bottle. I puked all over some books I was supposed to have signed by Joe. Ahhhhh.... the good old days. The next morning resulted in a bit of a scorning but Joe was happy we were awake and ready to herp! We caught our first Pigmy Rattlesnake late one afternoon and we experienced frog choruses unlike anything I had ever heard. Instead of road cruising we had to walk because there were simply too many of the things on the road and in the ditches. We caught a monstrous cottonmouth...still the largest I've seen. And when it was all over, Joe invited us back for a winter trip. Those trips were a winter tradition every year. I missed my first trip in years last year. Just Wednesday, a mere four

days ago, Joe called me up and asked me when I'm coming down this year. It's hard to believe. He sounded SO happy and SO healthy, the same Joe I've always known. I was even on speakerphone with Suzanne and her mother, Juanita. It brought back great memories of past trips. It's so hard to believe that today he is gone. But I feel so grateful that I was able to have one last talk, and I'm glad that he sounded just the same.

I'd like to share more of the good times. On subsequent trips, we had many great experiences. Joe was there helping us lift the board when we found my first EVER Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake! Talk about a moment in any herper's life that will always be with them! It was sharing the space under the board with a Pigmy Rattlesnake. What a sight! Joe also had a fun game set up. Our initiation to St. Vincent Island was "The Running of the Gators." We had to try to run and touch an alligator on the tail before it dove into the water. He knew we didn't stand a chance. Those gators would take off before you could get anywhere near them. But one day I found a decent-sized animal in a shallow, isolated pool of water. Obviously, I had to try. I waded into the knee-deep water and stood at the tip of the gator's tail. The animal did not move. So I straddled it and walked forward until my feet were just behind the hind legs. I had no idea what I was doing. Things weren't really supposed to get this far. But, I had friends watching and I couldn't back down now. I saw the gator start to move and I dove straight down onto it. I had my hands part of the way around its neck and I was pretty much sitting on its back, but due to my buoyancy, the gator was able to start crawling along with me on its back. I was a bit freaked out as I had no training with this type of thing, but I planted my feet and lifted with my hands. At this time, the alligator let out a deep, intimidating bellow. But somehow I dragged it over to the shore for a show-and-tell because

it just happened to be girl scout day. Joe came and demonstrated that it is easy to hold its jaws shut. This will always be one of my fondest memories and Joe was right in the thick of it and responsible for giving me the opportunity. We went out to celebrate with all-you-can-eat crab legs that night and nobody could have smacked the smile off my face if they tried!

Florida trips with Joe eventually incorporated many of my good friends. Ginny Weatherman, Ross McNearney, and Chad Whitney, to name a few, but I met some good new friends as well. I remember Joe driving up to the gate on St. George Island with Curtis Schmidt and Travis Taggart in his car. I hadn't met them before and I remember being greatly intimidated because they were so much older and wiser and their reputations preceded them. John, Curtis, and Travis could pretty much get me to do anything they said at this point. This began a great deal of shenanigans. I specifically remember climbing out to the end of a very unstable palm tree overhanging the water on a cold day. And John proceeded to shake it violently. Somehow I came away unscathed. But there were subsequent "grub wars" and endless banter that made for some great camaraderie by the time it was all said and done. Then there was Alex Pyron. This kid was quite simply a genius. He was younger than all of us and a gigantic brat. I think he finished his PhD by the time he could legally drink alcohol....or close to it anyway. Alex and I stayed behind one day to capture "Lucky" the alligator. This animal was well-known to locals and one of them had tried to catch it but failed. So it was spotted with a rope around its snout one day and the state preserve called Joe to have him and his posse try to rescue the animal. After a while it was clear that we would have some trouble, so everyone but Alex and I returned to St. George Island where we stayed. We discovered this tiny little six-foot wooden dingy

that barely supported the weight of one person. I paddled out with my hands, crept up on the gator's blind side, grabbed the rope, and held on. Much like a scene out of the book "The Old Man and the Sea," the alligator pulled me around the pond. Eventually I used the loose part of the rope to secure the jaws and I hopped out of the boat and swam the gator over the shore where Alex was waiting with a knife and he graciously helped me remove the rope from Lucky. It was around this time that the sun had set and Joe and Suzanne were becoming worried. I tried to make a call to Joe but the reception was bad and the call was dropped. This made them even more worried because nobody could tell what was going on. I remember Joe was driving 30 minutes back to the preserve and he wasn't happy that we had stayed out so late! But we presented him with the rope and all was well. We went home and fought over Suzanne's delicious oyster dressing. One thing was for sure, we ate like kings out there on the island. We would feast on piles of shrimp that made lobster look small. We played dominoes. We watched KU basketball. Life was good. Scratch that... excellent! The next morning Joe was already scheduled to give a talk to the Friends of the St. Joseph Bay Buffer Preserve. Joe told the story of Lucky the alligator and scared the coordinator to death. He told her to reach into the snake bag (knowing that she was terrified of snakes) and inside was the rope... proof that Lucky was free!

Perhaps, the best and most admirable area of Joe's life was his marriage to Suzanne. I was always jealous of the setting they had created for each other. Joe was able to travel, write, and lecture, and he could bring Suzanne with him every step of the way as a top-notch photographer. She photographed nearly everything we caught and I believe she has one of the largest (if not, the largest) collections of photographs



of North American herp species in the world. I wouldn't have guessed that Joe would be such a romantic role model. He was always a gentleman and they always worked so well together.

Joe also treated Suzanne's mom very well. He was just an all-around great guy. He could always make you smile, laugh, or get excited about the future. He was the brains behind the Kansas Herpetological Society, perhaps the number one regional herp society in the nation. He had the ability to excite a passion among people in that state that will never be rivaled. In fact, KHS field trips bring in many people from other states, as the reputation for a good time and great herping became more and more well-known. The state of Kansas really lost a champion for wildlife.

He also pushed the careers of many great herpetologists in the right direction. Joe gave all of us a chance when it's quite possible no one else would have. Joe picked people out of a crowd by the sparkle in their eyes, not by their academic credentials. Though, he would sometimes remind us that "herpetology is an academic pursuit". However, it's the personal side of Joe that I will always cherish most. He was someone I called on father's day, and someone who ended conversations with "love you, guy" or "love you, babe". He was also someone I could call when I screwed up and needed to figure out the best way out of my stupid situation. Although I've made some great friends in herpetology and I've been a part of another especially meaningful group of misfit biologists, Joe was the first to believe in me, and, to some degree, I feel as though I owe almost everything to him. Joe was Loyal. He'd give you a "walk on water" recommendation. He'd do just about anything he could for you, and what has surprised me most today after seeing all the feedback, is that he was able to be so much to so many people. I don't know where someone can

find the time. But he always did.

Death is a permanence that I can barely comprehend. I've been lucky not to lose too many people in my life, but the initial feeling when losing Joe and my dad were about the same. It just feels like someone has knocked the wind out of you and you can't get it back. The worst part is that this will haunt me for a long time to come. I've got so many photos from KHS meetings, field trips, Florida trips; so many books that he has signed and given me, including a first edition of his Kansas field guide; and even in daily tasks, like when I'll have to update my CV to remove him as a reference. There will be so many reminders. But there are so many good memories that I will always have. One silver lining to this awful, gray cloud is that it really seems to be bringing people together. I hope that continues because this field tends to spread us out, geographically speaking, so it's hard to always stay connected. I know this will bring many of us together, and, above anything else, I hope everyone can turn his or her attention to Suzanne. Joe was always sending out e-mail reminders (to virtually every herpetologist on the planet) to visit people like Henry Fitch and other living legends (at the time, at least). I hope that in the years to come people will call or visit Suzanne and share their stories with her because we are lucky enough to have her around.

#### *Some more great memories*

Alex Pyron taught Joe the phrase "givin' mad props to my super-fly homies", which Joe repeated often with a big, exuberant grin on his face for the duration of one of our Florida trips.

Joe's brother, Jerry, is simply a hilarious human being. He instilled in all of us a spirit of friendly competition. It was never serious, but at the same time it was VERY serious. I've certainly retained that jokingly competitive and arrogant attitude in the field. Maybe

too much! It was good to see Joe and his brother herping side-by-side. Joe often told the story of the HUGE eastern diamond-back they found together.

One time, Alex was driving the heavy-duty golf cart around St. Vincent with Jerry and I on board. I remember something about a pine branch and then I remember Alex nearly drove us all into a deep ditch. It wasn't funny at the time. But it's one of those things that is probably ok to laugh at now.

And then there's the time Joe had to take me to get a Florida driver's license. My Kansas license had expired while we were in Florida, and a couple days later Alex and I were caught trespassing at a place we thought we had permission to be on because we had hunted it the day before with everyone and the "owner" gave us permission to be there. The cops decided to act like cops. So they made Alex drive my car back to the house on the island. I don't think Alex really knew how to drive yet so I was pretty worried. But he did well and we both lived to tell about it. I remember after obtaining the license we were all in the car joking about the old, nearly blind woman in line in front of us that was coached through the vision test by the DMV employee. Scary. And I remember sharing with the group (Joe, Suzanne, Alex, John?) how awesome it was that it expired in 2012! So far away (at the time)! Kinda funny. Where did the time go?

I'm sure anyone who was on one of those trips remembers Joe waking us up in the morning. He walked about the house quite

loudly. And you could hear his commanding voice through the door. If we were good and made it out of the house in time, we could stop at the "Burger Whop" (=Burger King) in Apalachicola on the way to the boat ramp. One time there was even a green tree frog calling from inside the Burger Whop.

Joe loved oysters.

Joe could auction stuff off like nobody's business. The KHS auctions were always a good time. Joe would often be joined on-stage by Walt Meshaka or Dan Fogell and the result was often hilarious.

Joe was LITERALLY cited by the police for "operating a zoo without a license" during his youth. He didn't keep much when I knew him. But he would tell us about all of the animals he had. I recall that he owned most of the 23 crocodylian species.

On one trip to Cherokee County, Kansas, when I was still in high school, I nearly caused Joe's early demise when I mistakenly yelled "coal skink!!!" after finding what was actually a ground skink. I'm pretty sure Joe came RUNNING through the creek bed and was quite disappointed when he saw what it was. Oops. :)

And on many a cold, dreary early winter day in Kansas, Joe would tell Chad and I (and anyone else involved)... "FLORIDA LOOMS." This was like someone giving heroin to an addict that had been going through withdrawals for days. It made us happy. It gave us hope that soon things would be better. I will miss those trips and my friend Joe dearly.

## SNAKE HUNTER EXTRAORDINAIRE! Amanda Klammer, Wichita, Kansas

Joe was a master at finding snakes. I had no idea how good he was until he showed me how it was done on St. Vincent Island off the panhandle of Florida. I was on a school trip with some of my fellow classmates and we had yet to find a pygmy rattlesnake, a species I had never seen in the wild before. We were spread out over an area full of palm trees, some of which were dead and in the process of decaying. Joe stopped and stood for a while to observe our field technique. I watched his face twist into a curious grin. He could tell we were still rookies when it came to feeling out a snake's presence, a skill he had developed over many years. He took me over to a de-

caying tree trunk and said, "this is where you'll find those pygmy rattlers." I stood and watched in amazement as Joe peeled back the decaying tree trunk and peered inside. "We've got one!" He placed his snake hook inside the tree and out flopped a mature pygmy rattlesnake. There it was, staring back at us within a matter of seconds. I was fascinated with what had just happened. It was that simple for Joe. I feel lucky to have spent the time I did with him in the field. His patience with us combined with his extraordinary level of expertise helped me to develop a greater appreciation for nature in general.



Images by Amanda Klammer



## REMEMBERING MY FRIED JOE "PAPA SMURF"

Dexter Mardis, Wichita, Kansas

I knew Joe Collins for less than two years, but in that time he became a tremendous force in my life. He was a friend, a guide, an inexhaustible resource and a grandfather to me. In fact, with all due respect, I gave him the nickname "Papa Smurf", as he always seemed to be the glue that held the group together...whichever group that would be at any particular time. He was a natural at taking charge and leading by both example and instruction, much like the leader of the cartoon of my childhood. Throughout his life, Joe accumulated an incredibly impressive list of accomplishments and experiences, and for someone with as much assumed grandeur as he garnered, Joe was incredibly humble and attentive to even the least skilled or enthusiastic naturalist. There is not much that I can say that won't be an echo of what many have already said, or what will be said. So, I will just leave a simple message to Joe and perhaps a short story that will shed illumination upon an aspect of him perhaps not many saw.

First, the message: Papa Smurf, you were an uncannily loving and personable individual who took time for everyone, big or small, and made them feel as if they were the only thing that mattered on the planet. You made herpetology, and all of biology, a social strong point where individuals across the ages and leagues could unite under one cause, one banner. It is doubtless the effect you had upon thousands of lives, human and inhuman and no one will be forgetting it anytime soon. Your quick wit, integrity, generosity and diction were all strengths rivaled by few and surpassed by none; and scarce are those who wielded them as more effective and precise weapons against human injustice against Nature than you. Thank

you for everything that you've done for me, for Kansas and her wildlife and for Mother Earth as a whole. Your legacy will not go stale on our watch, nor shall it be forgotten. Requeiscat en pace. Smurf Son.

Now, doubtless that we need a perk-me-up, I share one of my last and favorite memories of Joe with you. Braden Aylesworth and I were staying with Joe, Suzanne and "Mom" (Suzanne's mother Juanita) in their vacation home on St George Island, FL this past January after the rest of our contingent from Friends University departed. I had arisen early to make coffee, as Mom and I had a running joke about who would wake up the earliest in order to "turn on the perk," as she put it. Despite my best efforts (5:15am), I was defeated. Being awake, I stayed up and decided to get some reading done on my book. Around 7:30 or so, I hear the elevator activate on the floor below me and start ascending to the topmost floor where the kitchen and living room were. I looked up just as the door opened and out popped Joe, clad in naught but a blue flannel bath robe and bare feet. Upon seeing me, he threw wide his arms and yelled, "Tuh DUH!" As I laughed to myself, he busied himself about the kitchen, collecting the nectar of the gods, coffee, and a small glass of orange juice, humming all the while. He returned to the elevator, laden with said beverages, and descended to the second floor where the bedrooms and bathrooms were. Needing a shower myself, I beat him downstairs and surprised him at the elevator, mimicking him by throwing wide my arms and belting out a "Tuh Duh!" to match his own. Joe feigned being startled and laughed with me. That morning set the tone for an amazing week that I will never forget.



## JOE COLLINS TAUGHT US ALL ABOUT LIFE

Roy Wenzl

*The Wichita Eagle*, 5 February 2012

Some of us, if we are lucky, get to spend time in the company of a person who somehow makes himself more alive than other people. In appreciating some of nature's most delicate creatures, in teaching others to appreciate them, Joe Collins became relentlessly happy.

His death takes from us a first-rate scientist, and one of the leading herpetologists in North America. Because of him and his photographer wife Suzanne, generations to come will know what Joe discovered about snakes, frogs, toads, salamanders, turtles and other small and cold-blooded creatures of Kansas.

He worked mostly in Kansas, but spent several weeks every year studying snakes, including venomous snakes, in Florida. It was on one of those trips this week that he died, at 72, of a heart attack. He died a warrior's death, one friend said, died on the job he loved.

In his books he was straightforward, factual. In person he made generations of scientists laugh. He divided biologists into "the dry ones," who studied mammals, and "the wet ones" like himself, who studied frogs, salamanders and so on. He would point to painted turtles sitting side-by-side on a wet log, and say "they are sunning themselves like students on spring break." He called crows "reptiles gone bad," because scientists say that crows and other birds descended from reptiles.

He was bitten by venomous snakes twice in Florida years ago, and quoted with pride what the emergency room staff told him. "They said I was the only sober snake-bite victim they'd ever seen."

"It is okay to name your pet snake," he told a child one day, with mock seriousness. "But never name your hamster, or your guinea pig,

or even your dog, because in a long winter, you might need to feed mammal to reptile."

From their home in Lawrence, Joe and Suzanne Collins traveled for decades, tramping through wetlands, creeks, cow pastures and groves of trees. Joe turned over the rocks and logs, and Suzanne took the color photographs, recording for all time the lives and habits of cold-blooded animals.

This was the serious work of science. They published dozens of books containing her photographs, his descriptive text. They spoke to young people about how endangered these little beings are, and how we endanger them to our own peril. But Joe respected the practicality of Kansans, and how most of them are good stewards of the land. So he told the children of farmers and the children of agri-business managers that it is bad stewardship to soak our farmland with herbicides, and then claim that this practice should never be questioned. Endanger the frog and the polliwog, he said, and the laws of nature will endanger all of us.

Happiness, Joe once said, is "an infection that I caught it as a child." He became fascinated with snakes as a boy. He got paid for this as a zoologist. When you explore creatures and habitats up close, he said, you become more alert, more aware...more alive. Groves of trees come alive as you see them, how they teem with life, including the intricate little creatures who set up shop under the beds of leaves, or the old logs, or the stray piece of flat tin from a barn roof long abandoned.

He said that as you become more aware of land and grass and wetlands, as you realize with joy what might live under all those flat yellow rocks strewn around the Flint Hills, you become less dull, more entranced with the song of life all around us.

## REMEMBERING DR. JOE COLLINS

Tim Croft

*The Star*, Port St. Joseph, Florida, 18 January 2012

“Cheers.”

That was the last words I heard from Dr. Joe Collins, his familiar greeting or signature sign-off.

He had stopped by while his lovely wife, Suzanne, and mother-in-law, simply “Mom,” were shopping for groceries and other supplies.

Dr. Collins wasn’t big on shopping, so he would sidle over to the newspaper office and set a spell. It was one of the signature joys of every winter.

When he walked through that door, with that smile lighting the room, the gleam of eye that seemed a portal to his soul, somehow things were simply better.

And whether I was on deadline or not I would sit down with Dr. Collins – could never bring me to any other greeting but Dr. Collins – and we would chat.

About most anything, be it the events of the past year, our families, and, of course, about his creatures, his critters, his herps, which always brought the light to his face, talking about his critters.

One would never know it by talking to Dr. Collins, but he was one of the most renowned experts in the field of herpetology – the study of all things ick, snakes, lizards, frogs – not only in the country, but the world.

He was simply, a Shaman of snakes, a Pied Piper, an inspiration as many on message boards Monday attested.

He was at the top of the mountain, a lengthy list of publications and discoveries bearing his name, including a Pocket Guide to the Snakes of St. Vincent Island, one of his recent work products, and a slew of academic papers and textbooks, he was the man, the Snake Man.

Without pretention; he wore an easy grace and ready wit like a suit of clothes. There

was a certain charisma, though he would surely dismiss such characterization.

But just ask his merry band of herpsters. They are the walking, living testament to this man.

Each year, when Dr. Collins, his wife and “Mom” traveled from Kansas – where he was professor emeritus at the University of Kansas and founded the Center for North American Herpetology – to survey the world of herps in Northwest Florida, that band would descend on the area.

Students, fellow professors, friends, family, they were all welcomed within the orbit of Dr. Collins as he set off to count the snakes, lizards, frogs and things that crawl in the night and the recesses of the landscape.

From St. Vincent to Little St. George to St. George Island to Ochlocknee State Park, Crooked River, St. Marks, the St. Joseph Bay Buffer Preserve, Dr. Collins and his band would hike, look under the plywood and sheet metal he had carefully laid about as shelter for his creatures, and assess the biodiversity of the area.

Those critters, he would say, were a barometer for the health of the land. And all signs pointed to good health.

The ripple of his influence was stunning.

Frog researchers from Florida State University, a child prodigy from Mexico Beach, researchers and herpetologists from around the country, some of them partners with Dr. Collins on academic papers or books, others simply lured into the planetary force that was Joe Collins.

They were all his family, the sons and daughters of this man who had no children of his own. They were his never ending joy.

He would sit in my office and talk about his book on the snakes of Ohio, about a colleague working with him to identify of a new

species of snake, about the effort he and another colleague half a world away were undertaking to complete a college textbook that was Bible for herpetologists – and he'd be grinning and talking as if he'd won the lottery.

That was Dr. Collins – constantly in motion and having a blast, exuberantly inhaling and exhaling life.

Here was a man of 70-plus years who had the energy of someone a third his age. There were always projects and not sufficient time.

He loved his work, his passion, his creatures and loved passing on that knowledge, whether to a meeting of the Friends of St. Vincent Island or just a curious reporter wishing to tag along on a survey hunt.

The passion was infectious.

And I was privileged to be infected. Years ago, I met and had the chance to spend a morning on Little St. George Island with Dr. Collins.

As anybody who knows me would attest, this was an unlikely pairing. When I see a snake my first instinct is to sprint away; for Dr. Collins and gang it was a call for giddy study.

One time we were traveling by truck along

a road on St. Vincent when a huge Sambar deer dashed out of the woods and across the road, nearly crashing into the hood of the truck. I paused to consider a change of underwear – Dr. Collins just turned, grinned and said, "Cool."

Since that first meeting we became friends, he invited me into the circle. He made me feel like one of the herpsters.

He became a confidant. He turned me on to the depth and breadth of the natural beauty of this paradise we call home – there was a reason he kept coming back for surveys long after his contract with the federal government expired – and taught me about the importance of a task done right, whether counting snakes or writing newspaper articles.

I was scheduled to join him on a survey of St. Vincent this past Monday.

But on Saturday, on St. George Island, doing what he loved, counting herps, Dr. Collins suffered a massive heart attack and died.

This area has lost a passionate advocate for the natural beauty and teeming life that defines this paradise and I have lost a dear friend.

Cheers, Dr. Collins. Rest in peace.

JOE COLLINS, A MAN WHO OPENED HIS OUTDOORS WORLD TO MANY,  
WILL BE MISSED

Michael Pearce, *The Wichita Eagle*, 5 February 2012

The first time I went afield with legendary herpetologist Joe Collins, the setting did little for my apprehension.

Even at mid-day, the canopy of dense oaks and elms let no sunlight reach the forest floor. A fog-like humidity hung heavy in the air.

Rocks from dime to door sized laid scattered about an area clogged with pant-grabbing briars and cluttered with fallen trees. A vertical wall of rimrock was well-pocked with small caves and crevices.

It was the kind of “snaky” place I’d been taught to avoid growing up in a family with ill will toward all that slithers.

It was indeed snaky.

Within minutes, we were into serpents of assorted sizes.

But I had fun long before we exited the woods and walked back into the daylight.

Looking back, there’s some symbolism with that day and Joe’s life.

Collins, of Lawrence and retired from the University of Kansas, died Jan. 14 from a heart attack at the age of 72.

He spent most of his life enlightening people about their dark views of reptiles; animals he knew deserved as much respect as others.

He did more for Kansas reptiles and amphibians than any one person did for birds, fish or mammals.

He wrote dozens of books, including some of the prestigious Peterson Field Guide series, and hundreds of articles. His research was nationally-renowned and he was a consultant for other high-level biologists and other universities. He was in high demand as a speaker and educator.

Not bad for a guy with an associate’s degree from the University of Cincinnati.

Yet there was no ego. Joe seemed more excited to talk with an 8-year-old about her

first garter snake than converse reptilian DNA with an Ivy League peer.

Usually dressed in knock-about clothes and sporting a ponytail of thinning hair, round spectacles, and an easy laugh, Joe was probably the most-liked man of science in the state. Today’s memorial service had to be held in a large KU auditorium.

No doubt many in attendance spent time outdoors with Joe. That’s where he could best make a positive case for the kinds of critters our society has long loathed.

On our first trip in Douglas County, and on the days we later spent on other trips, Joe showed me complete eco-systems[sic] most Kansans don’t know exist, with creatures that were fascinating and amazingly adapted for survival.

He once held a skink that was regenerating a tail possibly bitten off by a predator, therefore saving its life. “How can anyone not think these are fascinating creatures?” he said.

And he proved their appearances could be as amazing as their actions.

On that first trip he plucked an eight-inch western worm snake from beneath a lifted rock and placed it in my hands. With a coal-black back and pink, bubble-gum-colored belly, it was indeed a thing of beauty.

Eventually I had to concede the multi-colored bands of a milk snake’s bands can rival a rooster pheasant’s brilliant feathering.

But unlike the pheasant, Joe was proud to note that his lovely and lively critters are ones you can hold as well as behold.

To hold a living creature, he once said, was to get a literal feel for what they were like, a way to remove many mysteries and misconceptions.

“All fish and many politicians may be slimy,” he once joked. “Snakes are not.”



And they aren't.

Joe worked well with someone who didn't want to touch a snake. With Joe's calm demeanor and humor, first would come a simple touch, usually a solo hold and then a smile.

It wasn't long after the day of the worm snakes that I was tipping rocks and passing a new appreciation for reptiles to my kids and friends.

Most, too, passed it along.

My son got his grandpa to quit killing snakes

unless venomous and in the yard. His third-grade class kept his great plains rat snake for months, watching it shed a layer of skin or work a dead mouse down a gullet that appeared too narrow for the task.

Sadly, there will never be another like Joe Collins. I just can't see one person coming along with so much passion, personality and knowledge.

But because of him, there are thousands out there promoting his cause. That's a heck of a legacy.

## COLLINS DEATH A LOSS FOR KANSAS Elby Adamson, Clay Center Dispatch 26 January 2012

There may be a lot of people who didn't know Joe Collins or his contributions to our knowledge of Kansas wildlife, but his work impacted the biological sciences world-wide.

Collins died Jan. 14 of a massive coronary while doing herpetology work in Florida.

Former Gov. Bill Graves named Collins the Wildlife Author Laureate of Kansas in 1996. Collins authored more books on Kansas wildlife than any other writer. He produced 24 books and published more than 250 articles and although he specialized in reptiles and amphibians, he promoted the study of wildlife in general.

Collins was also an emeritus herpetologist for the University of Kansas Museum of Natural History, director of the Center for North American Herpetology and a founding member of the Kansas Herpetological Society. The list of his accomplishments and honors could go on and on.

A headline about his death in The Wichita Eagle referred to him as "Legendary Kansas Herpetologist." He was certainly that.

There has been an outpouring of tributes on Facebook and elsewhere honoring him and rightly so. Kansas has lost a natural treasure.

In comments on the Kansas Birding list-serv, outdoor writer Michael Pearce of the Wichita Eagle said Collins death "was a loss for all things wild in Kansas. The main thing about Joe was that he made all things slithery and scaly fun, no matter if you were a wide-eyed eight-year-old kid, a landowner or high-level academic. He was an absolute wealth of information but unlike many, he carried no ego about it.

"For journalists he was one of the most

anticipated interviews and oh, so quotable, with things like:

'...the only hands-on experience bird-watchers get is at the dinner table,' on why herping was better because you could enjoy handling the animals.

'...birds are just herps gone bad,' he said of the evolutionary process.

'...pick me up and I might bite you,' on why a child was bitten while handling a rattlesnake, Steve Irwin style," said Pearce.

Ron Klataske, executive director of Audubon of Kansas, said, "Kansas has lost a towering herpetologist and steadfast conservationist. In the careers of all of us working in conservation in Kansas today, he has essentially always been present speaking for wildlife (including birds) and habitat protection -- at Kansas Nongame Wildlife Advisory Council meetings, at legislative hearings when they involved subjects such as reptiles, in defense of protecting prairie dog colonies for the diversity of wildlife, and in a thousand other forums. He will be missed, and cannot be replaced."

Pearce added, "He, without question, did more for herps than any one person has done for birds, mammals or fish in the state of Kansas...and it was mainly because he made it fun just being Joe."

I am not sure what I can add to these comments except to say Joe Collins was always willing to help me as a teacher to find the materials I needed to help my students and willing to answer questions and provide encouragement to kids wanting to learn more about wildlife. He gave generously of his time and talents. His death is a great loss to our state but we can be thankful for his legacy.

## About the Kansas Herpetological Society

The KHS is a non-profit organization established in 1974 and designed to encourage education and dissemination of scientific information through the facilities of the Society; to encourage conservation of wildlife in general and of the herpetofauna of Kansas in particular; and to achieve closer cooperation and understanding between herpetologists, so that they may work together in common cause. All interested persons are invited to become members in the Society. Membership dues per calendar year are \$15.00 (U.S., Regular), \$20.00 (outside North America, Regular), and \$20.00 (Contributing) payable to the KHS. Send all dues to: KHS Secretary, (address inside the front cover)

### *KHS Meetings*

The KHS holds an annual meeting in the fall of each year. The meeting is, minimally, a two day event with lectures and presentations by herpetologists. All interested individuals are invited to make presentations. The annual meeting is also the time of the Saturday night social and fund-raising auction.

### *Field Trips*

The KHS hosts three field trips each year, one each in the spring, summer, and fall. Field trips are an enjoyable educational experience for everyone, and also serve to broaden our collective understanding of the distribution and abundance of the amphibians, reptiles, and turtles in Kansas. All interested persons are invited to attend.

## Editorial Policy

The Journal of Kansas Herpetology, currently issued quarterly (March, June, September, and December), publishes all society business.

### *Submission of Manuscripts*

As space allows, *JKH* publishes all manner of news, notes, and articles. Priority of publishing is given to submissions of Kansas herpetological subjects and by KHS members; however all submissions are welcome. The ultimate decision concerning the publication of a manuscript is at the discretion of the Editor. Manuscripts should be submitted to the Editor in an electronic format whenever possible. Those manuscripts submitted in hard copy may be delayed in date of publication. Manuscripts should be submitted to the Editor no later than the 1st of the month prior to the month of issuance. All manuscripts become the sole possession of the Society, and will not be returned unless arrangements are made with the Editor.

### *Reprints & Artwork*

*JKH* publishes original peer-reviewed submissions under the Articles and Notes sections. Upon review, acceptance, and publication, Portable Document File (PDF) copies are provided gratis to the author on request. Figures and photographs submitted with manuscripts are welcome, but must be sized appropriately by authors for this journal's column sizes (i.e., 19.5 or 39 picas wide). Particular attention should be paid to reduction of text on the figures.

## Societal Awards, Grants, and Recognitions

### *Distinguished Life Members*

Individuals selected as *Distinguished Life Members* are chosen by the KHS Executive Council based on their distinguished published research papers on Kansas herpetology.

### *Bronze Salamander Award*

Established in 1987, this Award is presented to those individuals whose efforts and dedication to the Kansas Herpetological Society go far beyond the normal bounds. The recipients of this Award have given exemplary service to the KHS, and are presented with an elegant bronze sculpture of a Barred Tiger Salamander.

### *The Howard K. Gloyd - Edward H. Taylor Scholarship*

Established in 1993, *The Gloyd-Taylor Scholarship* is presented annually by the Kansas Herpetological Society to an outstanding herpetology student. The scholarship is a minimum of \$300.00 and is awarded on the basis of potential for contributing to the science of herpetology. Students from grade school through university are eligible.

### *The Alan H. Kamb Grant for Research on Kansas Snakes*

KHS members only are eligible to apply for *The Alan H. Kamb Grant for Research on Kansas Snakes*, which was established in 2001. The recipient of the grant will be selected by the KHS Awards Committee. A minimum award of \$300 is given annually.

### *The Henry S. Fitch - Dwight R. Platt Award for Excellence in Field Herpetology*

KHS members only are eligible to apply for *The Henry S. Fitch - Dwight R. Platt Award for Excellence in Field Herpetology*, which was established in 2010. The recipient of the grant will be selected by the KHS Awards Committee. The award will be given annually when sufficient funds have been raised to establish a trust.

### *The George Toland Award for Ecological Research on North American Herpetofauna*

This CNAH Award was established in 2008 in recognition of the scientific career of George Fredrick Toland, whose life-long interest in herpetology was passed on to so many of his students. The recipient of this award will be selected by the KHS Awards Committee. A minimum award of \$200 is given annually at the end of the KHS meeting.

### *The Suzanne L. & Joseph T. Collins Award for Excellence in Kansas Herpetology*

This CNAH Award was established by Westar Energy in 1998 in recognition of the achievements of Suzanne L. Collins and Joseph T. Collins. In even years, the Award is bestowed upon an individual who, in the preceding two calendar years, had published a paper of academic excellence on native species of Kansas amphibians, reptiles, and/or turtles, and in odd years, the Award is given to an individual who, in a juried competition, took the best photograph of a Kansas amphibian, reptile, or turtle. *The Collins Award* is minimally \$1,000.00, and is neither a grant nor a scholarship. No nominations or applications can be made for it.

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