

# Remembering Steve Gerow

July 8, 1956 - May 10, 2017



If you would like to contribute to this book, please see the final page for submission guidelines.

We join the Monterey Bay Area birding community in tribute to our close friend Steve Gerow. We knew Steve for the last eleven years and over time he became one of our closest friends. We shared so many moments and birding adventures with him be it the scores of Friday bird walks, birding San Juan Road and Fremont Peak, or our memorable trip to the Eastern Sierras. A couple of months before he passed, Steve joined us for Todd Newbury's UCSC Arboretum walk. Santa Cruz's own "Ardent Birder" introduced Steve to the group as **"Santa Cruz County's best birder"**. Steve in his unassuming and humble manner was a bit embarrassed. But it was true. Steve was without peer. His encyclopedic knowledge of natural history (mostly self taught), willingness to mentor and share that knowledge with others, and to make all our lives richer will be missed. Friday mornings will never be the same. Most of all we will miss his friendship, his sense of humor and wit, and his humility. He was a treasure.



Fittingly just moments before Steve peacefully left us, a pair of Red-tailed Hawks flew low over his house and loudly called. We would like to think that Steve heard that last one bird call.

Perhaps they were saying, "Come join us brother."

The memory of that tribute flyover will stay with us forever. It was an honor to share Steve's last moments. Steve's spirit lives on and he now soars with eagles.

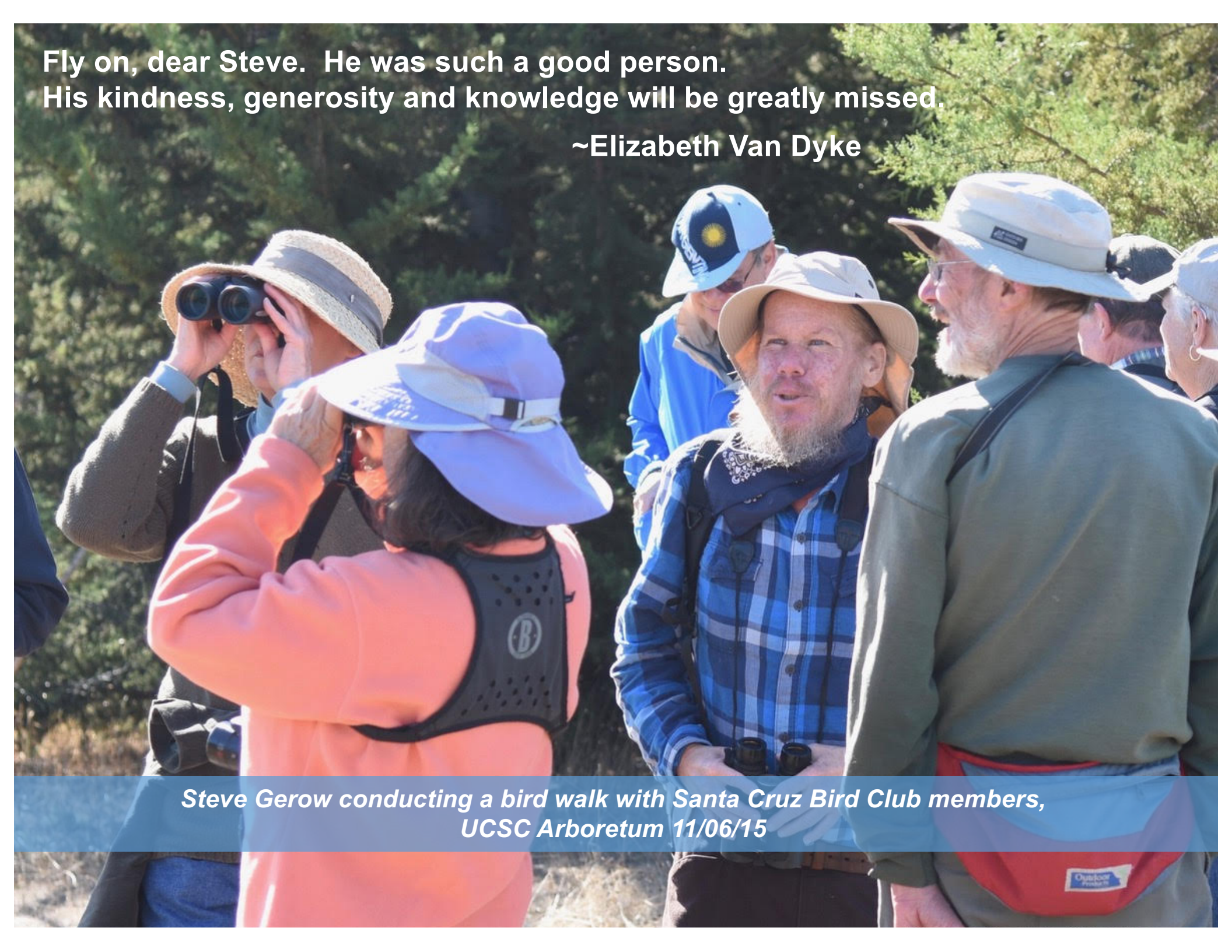
With enduring  
gratitude and  
love,

Rich Griffith  
&  
Margaret Perham



Fly on, dear Steve. He was such a good person.  
His kindness, generosity and knowledge will be greatly missed.

~Elizabeth Van Dyke

A group of people, including Steve Gerow, are participating in a bird walk. Steve Gerow is in the center, wearing a blue and white plaid shirt and a blue bandana, holding binoculars. He is surrounded by other participants, some wearing hats and carrying backpacks. The background shows a dense forest of trees.

*Steve Gerow conducting a bird walk with Santa Cruz Bird Club members,  
UCSC Arboretum 11/06/15*



I joined the club in early 2004 and from the start Steve was a patient mentor and friend. I could not be the birder I am today without his help. There are so many wonderful memories that it would be impossible to cover them all, but I would like to share a few.

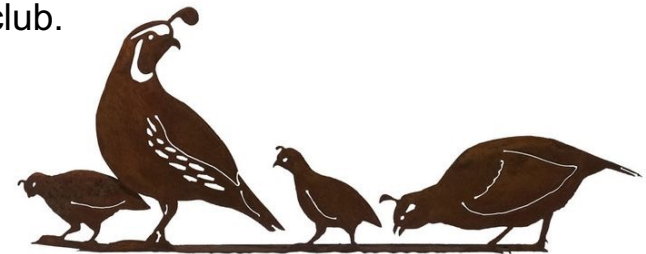
Very early in my birding career Steve found a Chestnut-Sided Warbler at Bethany Curve. Without a clue as to what I was doing I went over there and searched fruitlessly for it for a while. Then Steve turned up, heard it, found it and pointed it out to me. That was a pattern that repeated over the years, and it has become part of the joy of birding for me to try to carry on this tradition. A few days ago this was brought home to me when I went to the wharf and found a Fork-Tailed Storm Petrel. A few minutes later Nickie Zavinsky arrived and I was able to show the bird to her. I remarked to her that this was something I really enjoyed about birding. It was only later that I recalled that my earliest experiences of this kind of sharing were with Steve.

A couple of years later I was birding again at Bethany Curve. I found a Wood PeeWee there that was making an odd call, so I walked over to Steve's house and knocked on his door. He said he was busy so I went back on my own, but a few minutes later he appeared at my elbow and we watched and listened to the bird. He went on to explain in patient detail why it was a Western Wood PeeWee and not what I had hoped (Eastern). Despite having disturbed him for a mistaken ID he was cheerful and gracious, we can all aspire to be as generous and polite to our fellow birders.

I too was Field Trip coordinator for a number of years. It was after a family holiday to the East Coast where I tagged along on a local bird walk that the germ of the idea of a weekly walk was born. Their weekly walks were usually in the same place and very disorganized, but I suggested the idea to Steve and he brought it to life. I think that the Friday morning walks will be remembered by everyone who attended as a highlight for the club.

The depth and breadth of his knowledge are irreplaceable. His warmth, inclusiveness and friendly trips are going to be missed by all of us.

~Phil Brown





As many local birders experienced firsthand, Steve was an amazingly knowledgeable and talented birder, with a truly awesome ear and memory. I was with him the first time he visited SE Arizona and was in awe when I realized that before going, he had memorized the songs and calls of every bird that we were likely to encounter and that he could instantly identify them, even at a distance, though most were lifers for him.



But Steve was also a self-effacing, gentle, thoughtful man who went out of his way to nurture the confidence and to further the education of those less experienced or talented. He was always encouraging and kind when he had to offer a correction to an ID or an ebird report, and he inspired many people by example, me among them, to become better birders, and to be good mentors ourselves. It was always Steve I turned to with a tricky identification or a puzzling behavior; he usually knew the answer but was not too proud to simply say “I don’t know. Let me see what I can find out.” I will be forever grateful for the wisdom and guidance that he passed on to me over the years. We in Santa Cruz were incredibly blessed to have Steve as one of our own and I will miss him with each new birding experience, wishing he were still here with us.

~Sharon Hull



When I think of Steve, I think of his patience, his gentle presence, and his generosity of spirit. His knowledge of birdsong bordered on extrasensory and I was always amazed at how he seemed to have a mental radar of all the birds around us. He introduced me to the vast symphony that exists in the natural world and I will always think of him when I walk through the woods, listening for the various calls he taught me over the years.

~ Gunnar Proppé



Steve Gerow taught me how to be unhurried. He taught me there is always a magical, natural, serene world available to me; no matter the external or internal chatter. He sparked wonder and awe. He surprised me with his grace. He connected me to knowledge. And when I totally freaked out because I was seeing *the most* amazing orange bird in a tree, he didn't make me feel ashamed when he discovered it was actually a Reese's peanut butter cup candy wrapper. He simply smiled and said, "It's OK. Happens to me, too."

Completely Present.

Completely Compassionate.

Completely Unhurried. Completely Steve.  
How glorious he completely happened to us.

Steve, thank you for introducing me to the world of birds. Thank you for the friends I have made and for the memories I cherish and will cherish. I miss you.

~Ally Finkel



Steve was a very kind, gentle and giving person; the world can use many more such people. I'm grateful to have known and spent time with him.

Eileen and I will miss him.

~ Alexander Gaguine





A lot has been said about Steve as a person and as a birding instructor. It wasn't that he just happened to know a lot about birds. He learned about birds by studying and reading, and above all by spending long hours in the field. His skills were extraordinary. I remember hearing years ago that birders from outside the county were skeptical of his reports--until they realized that he was one of the state 's premier birders. He amazed me with his ability to identify chips and the songs a mockingbird was imitating.



I interacted constantly with Steve during the years that I was Bird Club web master. One of his major contributions to the site was the quizzes we posted some years ago. They required a lot of time and work. Steve wrote them as another of his many contributions to the Bird Club. This same dedication led him to become Club President and to lead weekly trips, in spite of his inherent shyness.

~Barry McLaughlin

Steve Gerow was a mentor and friend to me from early in my Santa Cruz birding life. I was fortunate enough to have gone on his first walk as a leader, as well as one of his last, and to discover way back then how much he knew about local natural history: plants, insects, mammals, rodents, birds, whatever we came across. From then on I rarely missed an opportunity to bird with him, and living as he did on the West Side for a long time, I'd run into him with frequency. At first we were both so shy and quiet I could only walk with him for 20 minutes before becoming so uncomfortable I had to leave. But gradually we became friends and I found him in fact easy to talk to, the best person to send my questions of identification or bird behavior. Wally and I did the Moss Landing Christmas count with him many times, always with pleasure, always noting what a wonderful way it was to start a new year. What he meant to the Bird Club is incalculable.

We shall miss him greatly.

~ Lois Goldfrank





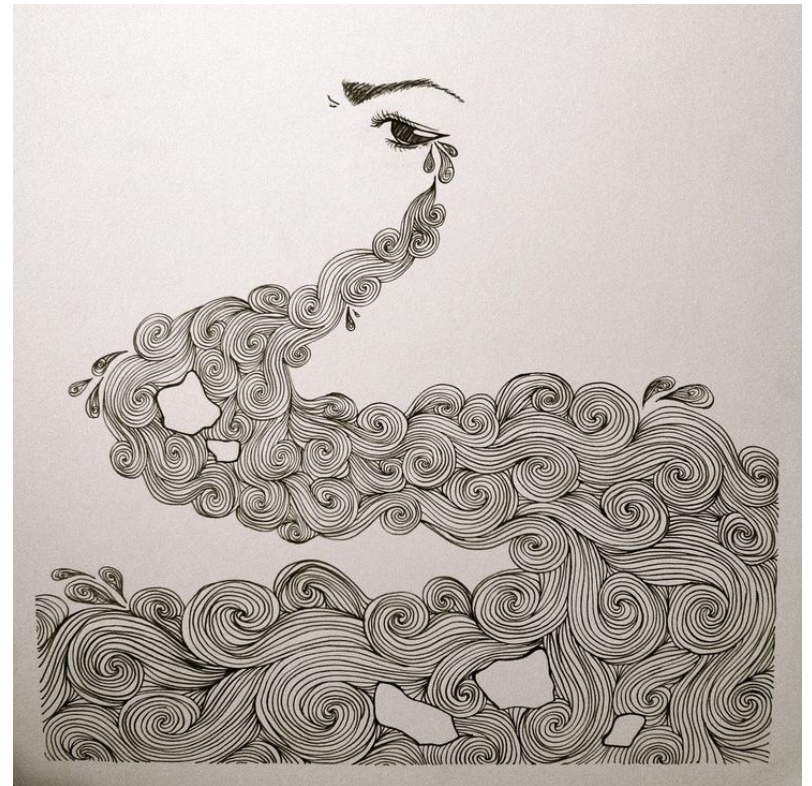
I didn't really know Steve well. I was an awed beginner on many of his famous bird walks. But the breadth of his knowledge about the natural world inspired respect among everyone who joined those walks. And his generosity of spirit and great humility inspired love. I was among the many who loved him!

When I read the date of his death, May 10, I realized that he must have responded to my last e-mail question only 11 days before he died! He wrote, "Hi Barbara, this one took me a while to figure out. But I think it is a just-fledged juvenile European Starling. Steve" Of course I didn't know when I sent him that that he was so close to death. He chose to respond generously to all of us right down to the end.

I also think back to 2014 when Jane Mio, Lisa Sheridan and others were beginning the campaign against recreational boating on the San Lorenzo River. Eager to have a solid list of the different species that occurred on the river, I made a beginner's attempt to compile a list using eBird. I sent it to him to ask his opinion. He wrote back with great kindness, letting me know that he had been planning to create such a list and that he thought he could complete it in a month or so. I didn't know at the time that he had very recently been diagnosed with an advanced case of cancer, although several people in the Bird Club had been noticing that he had been having more difficulty breathing on uphill grades.

In spite of his worries and declining health, he sent me a truly awesome work, carefully drawn from a number of sources and annotated with many of his personal observations over the decades. He divided the list into the four categories of Birds that Breed on the River, Birds that Do Not Breed on the River But Are Present on the River During Breeding Season, Birds that Breed in the More Natural Area Upstream from Highway 1, and Birds that Do Not Breed on the River (Migrants, Winter Residents, etc.) For each species Steve provided information on where the species builds its nest, what months it is present, whether it is common or rare on the river, and lots of other invaluable information that can be found nowhere else, including eBird. This list is available on two local blogs, San Lorenzo River Mysteries and Friends of San Lorenzo River Wildlife. It is the first resource mentioned. I use it all the time myself, and also hand it to city officials who are still struggling to believe that our river is really a wildlife habitat of great diversity and importance. **Thank you, Steve Gerow, for all you did for birds, humans and the planet.**

~ Barbara Riverwoman





There wasn't a better birder/naturalist than Steve Gerow anywhere in my experience. If he didn't know something, he studied until he did. He was the gentlest teacher imaginable, and thus among other things, he taught me that you don't need a PhD or a professorship to embody a humble, questing attitude toward the world. In our last encounters, at the infusion center, he was smiling and graceful. **Our birding community has lost its lodestar, and we'll never be the same.**

~ Wally Goldfrank





Photo credit: David Suddjian





# Santa Cruz Bird Club Memorial E-Book Celebrating the Life of Steve Gerow

**Santa Cruz Bird Club Members** are invited to email submissions to [SCBC4Steve@gmail.com](mailto:SCBC4Steve@gmail.com) and follow the **Submission Guidelines** below. Thank you.

## **Submission Guidelines:**

1. Send your Email to [SCBC4Steve@gmail.com](mailto:SCBC4Steve@gmail.com)
2. Include your Full Name & Phone Number
3. Word count limit: 150-250 max\* \*longer submissions may be considered if space permits.
4. Photos as ATTACHMENTS only.
5. Photo size: 1280 pixel, wide or portrait.
6. Include photo caption in body of email. i.e. Photo #1: *A red-shouldered hawk soars above bird club members.*