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AWARDS

Ralph W. Schreiber Conservation Award 2014, to Stephen Kress

Published April 1, 2015

The R. W. Schreiber Conservation Award honors extraordinary scientific contributions to the conservation, restoration, or preservation of birds and/or their habitats by an individual or small team.

The award's 2014 recipient is a conservation legend. Dr. Stephen Kress of the National Audubon Society is internationally known as the founder of "Project Puffin," his decades-long effort to restore Atlantic Puffins to their original breeding islands in the Gulf of Maine.



The story of Project Puffin and the resulting success is unprecedented. The project required extensive knowledge of the breeding biology and natural history of puffins. The project crew prepared Eastern Egg Rock by creating burrows de novo and removing predators, then transporting the chicks and establishing them in their new burrows, and then raising the birds entirely by hand to independence. Because puffins take four to five years before they return to the colony to breed for the first time, the project personnel worked to create an environment that would "welcome" the puffins back and encourage them to stay without any reassurance about when or whether the birds would return.

Incredibly enough, all of the work paid off, and a successfully self-sustaining breeding colony of Atlantic Puffins was reestablished at Eastern Egg Rock. In 1981, there were four nesting pairs at Eastern Egg Rock, and now more than 120 pairs nest on the island. While waiting for the Egg Rock puffins to return and for the colony to grow, Steve and Project Puffin staff worked to restore seabirds on other islands. They transplanted puffins to Seal Island in Penobscot Bay and created a second self-sustaining colony that grew to 546 pairs in 2011.

In addition to puffins, Steve and his staff began working to restore populations of other seabirds, especially terns and storm-petrels, to Maine. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 96% of the Arctic Terns breeding in the lower 48 states do so on Gulf of Maine islands, and 85% of all Razorbills and 90% of all Atlantic Puffins that breed in the United States do so on Gulf of Maine islands. The techniques developed through Project Puffin have been used on at least 40 seabird species in 12 countries, including the dark-rumped petrels (Ecuador), Short-tailed Albatross (Japan), Gould's Petrel (Australia), and Common Murre (California).

Steve is currently the vice president for bird conservation of the National Audubon Society as well as director of its Maine Coast Seabird Sanctuaries. He has had immeasurable impact on the conservation of numerous seabird species across the globe. His work has greatly supported development of conservation policy, as well as public education, engagement, and outreach.

It is for these reasons and more that the American Ornithologists' Union proudly awarded Dr. Stephen Kress the 2014 Ralph W. Schreiber Conservation Award.

Award Criteria.—The R. W. Schreiber Conservation Award honors extraordinary scientific contributions to the conservation, restoration, or preservation of birds and/or their habitats by an individual or small team. The Award comprises a framed certificate and an honorarium provided by the endowed Ralph W. Schreiber Fund of the AOU.

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