

## DAVID S. MAEHR, SEPTEMBER 18, 1955 – JUNE 20, 2008

David Steffen Maehr, renowned wildlife ecologist and conservation biologist, died on Friday June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2008, in a tragic single-engine plane accident southwest of Lake Placid, Florida. Maehr, 52, was known internationally as a world expert on large carnivores, most notably black bear and Florida panther, and for the reintroduction of the elk population in eastern Kentucky. Dave was Professor of Conservation Biology in the Department of Forestry at the University of Kentucky, Lexington, and was a visiting scientist at Archbold Biological Station in Lake Placid, Florida.

Dave was the quintessential field biologist; outdoorsman, highly observant, an incredible naturalist, wonderful at handling animals, and talented artist and photographer. He was a pioneer in tracking large carnivores with radio and satellite telemetry and, most recently, cell phone technology to record their locations and movements across the landscape. In over 100 technical publications he documented the movements, predator/prey relations, social interactions, reproduction, food habits, impacts of management, and conservation needs of panthers in south-west Florida, black bears in Florida and Kentucky, and other carnivores throughout North America. Recent research in the mountainous region of eastern Kentucky dealt with reintroduced elk and their interactions with birds, white-tailed deer, and coyotes. Maehrs' work helped establish the threatened status of wildlife worldwide. In addition to his abilities as a scientist, Dave was a talented interpreter, sharing his infectious enthusiasm for all of nature with wonderful articles for popular magazines, attractive artwork, as well as engaging press and TV interviews. He was almost unrivalled in his ability to engender love and respect for the natural world, and to elevate public awareness of the crisis in conservation of large animals.

Dave was born in 1955 in Fairbanks, Alaska and was a naturalist from the outset. After graduating from high school in Cincinnati, Ohio, Dave attended Ohio State University receiving his B.S. degree in Wildlife Management in 1977. He was awarded his Masters Degree in Wildlife Ecology in 1980 from the University of Florida and went on to become a well-known Biological Scientist (1980-1985) and Biological Administrator (1985 – 1994) in the Florida Game & Fresh Water Fish Commission (now the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission). He designed and conducted statewide research on the black bear, the endangered Florida panther, and white-tailed deer, to provide information for conservation and management. Dave's 14-years with the Commission resulted in many refereed publications, including the award-winning book: *The Florida Panther: Life & Death of a Vanishing Carnivore*. Dave stepped back into academia and completed his Ph.D. in Wildlife Ecology and Conservation at the University of Florida, Gainesville in 1996 while working for Wilkinson and Associates, an environmental consulting firm in Naples. In 1997 Dave was appointed as Assistant Professor at the University of Kentucky, Lexington, promoted to Associate Professor in 2002, and Professor in 2007. From 1981 onwards Dave conducted research as a visiting scientist at Archbold Biological Station in Lake Placid, Florida, collaborating with many Archbold scientists, especially Jim Layne, the former Executive Director. His recent bear work at the Station involved tracking 58 individual black bears, revealing fascinating insights into the habitats, movements, and conservation needs of the Highlands-Glades

County black bear population. Dave was on sabbatical at Archbold from the University of Kentucky during 2007-2008 and was recently appointed as Research Associate, the Station's highest accolade for visiting scientists.

Dave was indebted to the local ranchers and citrus growers of Highlands County for their support, enthusiasm, and encouragement of his Florida bear research. He saw "ranches here in south central Florida as the last defenses against human sprawl, forest fragmentation, and habitat losses". Ray Royce (Highlands County Citrus Growers Association) shared that "Dave was very respected by the ranchers in our area, and they appreciated the work he was undertaking and his sensitivity to their concerns". Among those most involved were the Lightsey family, the Hendries, but none more than the Smoak family. The tragedy of Dave's death is doubly-poignant as Mason Smoak, pilot of the small engine plane, was also killed on this ill-fated flight. Mason, a leading member of the Highlands County citrus and cattle ranching Smoak family, was Dave's great comrade and fellow bear enthusiast. With a love of the land, and commitment to research, Mason Smoak epitomized everything that Dave respected. Dave looked to Mason and the other ranchers "because of the stewardship of a minority of people who have a wealth of land and a bigness of heart". He left an inspirational plea for those of us in Highlands County in a beautiful essay written this spring "People in the towns of Lake Placid, Sebring, and Avon Park need to voice the obvious truth: that functional green space in Florida not only promotes human welfare directly, but that it maintains habitat for bears. The ability of a forest to support a bear population is the best evidence that it also provides priceless amenities for people. Such places create clean air, clean water, beautiful scenery, singing birds, a buffer against too many neighbors, and a calm that has been lost with the frenzy of tires and shoes on pavement. They are also a hedge against the sprawl that destroys the reasons people moved here in the first place."

Dave fostered a new and upcoming generation of wildlife and conservation biologists with their feet firmly in the field, their heads in the data, and a great sense of purpose and urgency to their work. His graduate students (two dozen, 9 current) have become influential scientists at universities and agencies across the United States. Dave was a demanding mentor, instilling into students the ethics of hard work, but combining this rigor with the persona of kindly father-figure. He was in constant demand as a public speaker, giving wonderful talks, beautifully illustrated with his own spectacular photographs and charming wildlife drawings. Dave inspired countless students and others to devote their lives to the study of nature. Outgoing, athletic, adventurous, and multi-talented, whether in public or in private, he was always the very best of company.

Dave Maehr is survived by his wife, Diane Maehr, two grown children (son Clifton Maehr and daughter Erin Maehr), parents Robert B. and Carol Maehr, 2 brothers, Robert Brandt and Ted H. Maehr, and one sister, Jennifer C. Maehr. He was so proud of his family; they shared his aspirations, helped with his fieldwork, and were the cornerstone of his life. Dave's influence will continue indefinitely.

Hilary M. Swain and James N. Layne, Archbold Biological Station, 6/24/2008.