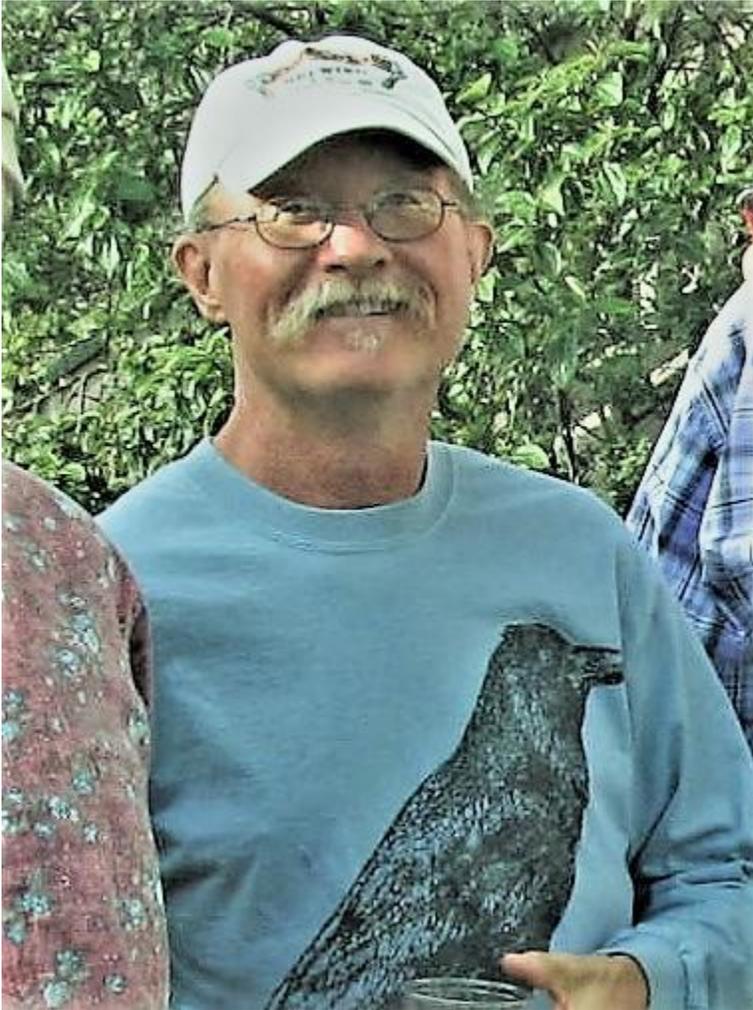


Fern Duvall dies at 68 after decades of protecting native species

From his widely known work of protecting native Hawaiian birds to chasing down reported snakes in Maui neighborhoods, Fern Duvall II did it all when it came to defending nature.



The 68-year-old former state aviculturist and wildlife biologist also had an innate connection with nature and was able to identify rare native Hawaiian species and even co-discovered two species of *Cyanea*, plants new to science. The *Cyanea duvalliorum*, endemic to East Maui, is named in his honor.

Over the weekend, trees were planted on Maui in memory of Duvall, who died unexpectedly on Wednesday from cardiac issues, his family said Monday. Services are pending.

“It just started happening,” Duvall’s friend and fellow conservationist Teya Penniman said of the tree planting. “His energy is taking root in many of the places he loved and protected.”

Penniman’s husband, Jay, project manager of the Maui Nui Seabird Recovery Project, has worked with Duvall for 20 years.

“I will miss his companionship, friendship and his knowledge so much,” he said.

The two worked on various projects over two decades, including helping to find and protect a colony of ‘ua’u, or Hawaiian petrel, on Lanai, along with searching for an elusive “big cat” reported by residents in Olinda and Makawao.

Jay Penniman and Duvall actually spent time together two days before he died, going to Hawea Point in West Maui to see how to manage the area there.

From a young age, Duvall had a keen sense for nature, “not just birds (but) the whole ecosystem,” Jay Penniman said.

“He knew his plants as well as anybody in the state and his insects. He was definitely gifted with a connection to the natural world.”

Duvall, of Makawao, retired from the state Department of Land and Natural Resources Division of Forestry & Wildlife after last year following 38 years with the agency, most recently as the Maui Nui program manager for DOFAW’s Native Ecosystem Protection and Management Program.

He was recently given the 2022 Maui Nui MVP award for Hawaii Invasive Species Awareness Week.

Originally from Michigan, Duvall earned graduate degrees in Germany studying biology and first came to Hawaii as a contractor with DOFAW in 1984. He first worked with the critically endangered ‘alala, perfecting incubation techniques necessary for hatching and raising the chicks in captivity, helping save the unique crow species from the brink of extinction.

In 1988, as the state’s aviculturist, he helped develop a captive rearing facility at Olinda for all rare and endangered Hawaiian birds, including the nene.

In 1996 he became a state wildlife biologist, focusing mainly on species at Kanaha Pond Wildlife Sanctuary.

Some may remember Duvall hunting down a rash of snake reports in 1997, as they could endanger native birds. In fact, Duvall once caught a 3-foot ball python that was trapped in the garage of a Makawao home in 1997.

In 2015, he became manager for the state’s natural area reserves on Maui, helping manage and protect birds, plants, insects and snails in habitats from coral reefs to anchialine pools to dry and wet forests.



He served on the Brown Tree Snake Task Force for many years, and went beyond his official job and served on the boards of the Maui Invasive Species Committee, Friends of Haleakala as well as frequently advising the Maui Forest Bird Recovery Project, Maui Nui Seabird Recovery Project, Maui Native Plant Society, American Bird Conservancy and Hawaii Audubon Society.

“He really loved life,” said his wife, Mary Santa Maria, who held back tears during a phone interview on Monday.

“He loved being here and he loved everything about being here,” she added, noting that Duvall also took classes on Hawaiian language.

The two would go out walking together, whether in the Makawao Forest Reserve, Kealia or even the Kula Park, where his now adult children planted trees when they were young. Their walks were “fascinating,” Santa Maria said, recalling how “he would see things I would never see.”

“He might not notice something in the human-created world, (but) he would never miss anything in nature,” she said. “I just think he was unusual in that way.”

Some of Duvall’s sisters from Michigan came to Maui to support and console Santa Maria.

They recalled fun times with their brother, who was born with heart issues that never stopped him from hiking, obtaining a pilot’s license — as “he wanted to see what the birds saw” — and even climbing Mount Kilimanjaro in his 20s.

Even at 8 years old, their brother was already was a scientist, picking up dead birds, drawing them and sticking them in a freezer so he could study it later.

“It was incredible what he did,” said sister Cheryl Duvall.

She remembers her brother drawing the bird’s muscles, then removing parts of the bird to reveal the bone structure, which he would also draw.

As a youngster, he would also “go out in the wild” and grab eggs from birds’ nests and raise them at their home. Cheryl Duvall said her brother had an affinity for crows and raised them at their Michigan home.

Her brother’s love for birds at times irked the neighbors; at one point he put up a 50-foot pole with gourds for the birds, prompting neighbor complaints.

Another sister, Abbie Magnell, said on Monday that her brother was also a great artist and that he led frequent hikes with his siblings.

When they became adults, he would sketch native Hawaiian birds and plants for his Christmas cards.

While all six of his siblings ventured into other careers such as engineering and nursing, Fern Duvall stayed with nature throughout his life.

Cheryl Duvall recalled wondering what her brother, with his degree in ornithology, would do for a living. But when he ended up in Hawaii “trying to save the Hawaiian crows, it was like he was made to do this job.”

“It was God’s plan,” sister Collette Hodges added.