

A Short Biography

Geography has shaped who I am. I grew up on the shores of Pensacola Bay on land that the Duncans homesteaded in the 1880s when they came down from Kentucky. The land that remained in the family – where my parents now live – happens to be one of the best spots for birding in the US. My parents became enchanted with birds just before I was born. They frequently took me and my brother on bird-finding expeditions in the Florida Panhandle, coastal Alabama, and “Out West” in the family station wagon. Thus, it’s no surprise my brother and I became biologists. I became a dedicated birder at the age of nine, though functionally I’d been birding since I was *in utero*. At home I spent much of my time on or in the water, snorkeling, fishing, canoeing, sailing, and beach combing.

I attended Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, FL. After my first year, I represented the Boy Scouts of America in the 1988-1989 US scientific expedition to Antarctica. When this program was running, the BSA and National Science Foundation would sponsor an eagle scout every third year to work as an assistant to scientists at McMurdo Station and nearby field camps. Living on “the ice” for three months was like visiting another planet – survival training and gear, flying in helicopters, endless ice, and a sun that never set. It was quite overwhelming for a Florida-boy who had never seen snow before! Most importantly, I met scientists for the first time, and was inspired by their dedication, enthusiasm, and the fun they had doing research. When I returned to college, I declared biology as my major.

At Eckerd I fell in with other biology students (including my future wife, Ginger) who loved field biology. I was privileged to work as an assistant for Drs. Peter and Annie Meylan on their sea turtle tagging project in Panama for two summers. My senior thesis work with Dr. Bill Szelistowski in the Costa Rican mangrove swamps was where I completed a full research project for the first time.

After graduating, Ginger and I worked on our Masters of Science degrees at the University of Florida under the guidance of Dr. Colin Chapman in the Zoology Department. Colin and his wife, Dr. Lauren Chapman, had a thriving research program in the Kibale Forest of Uganda. Ginger and I spent a year at Kibale gathering data for our degrees and managing their project. My interests were in restoration ecology, a relatively new discipline at the time. Colin and I studied how fruit-eating birds and bats disperse seeds from the forest into nearby abandoned croplands.

After earning our master’s degrees, Ginger started medical school at UF, while I began work on my PhD with Colin Chapman. Again, my focus was on tropical forest restoration, but this time examining how the creation of exotic pine plantations could be a bridge ecosystem for restoring natural forests on weed-infested abandoned agricultural lands.

In 2002 Ginger and I moved to Birmingham, AL where I took a position as an assistant professor at Birmingham-Southern College. BSC is primarily a teaching-college, but working with my students I’ve studied several rare and endangered ecosystems and species. Increasingly, I spend my time on science outreach to the public through talks, workshops, and writings.