



## Eulogy to Stephen Schneider

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We were greatly saddened to learn that our revered colleague Stephen Schneider passed away this morning.

We are posting a personal account by Ben Santer of Steve's amazing accomplishments and contributions. Ben's account provides a glimpse into what made Steve so special, and why he will be so deeply missed:

Today the world lost a great man. Professor Stephen Schneider – a climate scientist at Stanford University – passed away while on travel in the United Kingdom.

Stephen Schneider did more than any other individual on the planet to help us realize that human actions have led to global-scale changes in Earth's climate. Steve was instrumental in focusing scientific, political, and public attention on one of the major challenges facing humanity – the problem of human-caused climate change.

Some climate scientists have exceptional talents in pure research. They love to figure out the inner workings of the climate system. Others have strengths in communicating complex scientific issues to non-specialists. It is rare to find scientists who combine these talents.

Steve Schneider was just such a man.

Steve had the rare gift of being able to explain the complexities of climate science in plain English. He could always find the right story, the right metaphor, the right way of distilling difficult ideas and concepts down to their essence. Through his books, his extensive public speaking, and his many interactions with the media, Steve did for climate science what Carl Sagan did for astronomy.

But Steve was not only the world's pre-eminent popularizer of climate science. He also made remarkable contributions to our scientific understanding of the nature and causes of climate change. He performed pioneering research on the effects of aerosol particles on climate. This work eventually led to investigation of how planetary cooling might be caused by the aerosol particles arising from large-scale fires generated by a nuclear war. This clear scientific warning of the possible climatic consequences of nuclear war may have nudged our species onto a different – and hopefully more sustainable – pathway.

Steve was also a pioneer in the development and application of the numerical models we now use to study climate change. He and his collaborators employed both simple and complex computer models in early studies

of the role of clouds in climate change, and in research on the climatic effects of massive volcanic eruptions. He was one of the first scientists to address what we now call the “signal detection problem” – the problem of determining where we might expect to see the first clear evidence of a human effect on global climate.

After spending many years at the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Steve moved to Stanford in 1996. At Stanford, Steve and his wife Terry Root led ground-breaking research on the impacts of human-caused climate change on the distribution and abundance of plant and animal species. More recently, Steve kept intellectual company with some of the world’s leading experts on the economics of climate change, and attempted to estimate the cost of stabilizing our planet’s climate. Until his untimely death, he continued to produce cutting-edge scientific research on such diverse topics as abrupt climate change, policy options for mitigating and adapting to climate change, and whether we can usefully identify levels of planetary temperature increase beyond which we risk “dangerous anthropogenic interference” with the climate system.

Steve Schneider helped the world understand that the burning of fossil fuels had altered the chemistry of Earth’s atmosphere, and that this change in atmospheric composition had led to a discernible human influence on our planet’s climate. He worked tirelessly to bring this message to the attention of fellow scientists, policymakers, and the general public. His voice was clear and consistent, despite serious illness, and despite encountering vocal opposition by powerful forces – individuals who seek to make policy on the basis of wishful thinking and disinformation rather than sound science.

Steve Schneider epitomized scientific courage. He was fearless. The pathway he chose – to be a scientific leader, to be a leader in science communication, and to fully embrace the interdisciplinary nature of the climate change problem – was not an easy pathway. Yet without the courage of leaders like Stephen Schneider, the world would not be on the threshold of agreeing to radically change the way we use energy. We would not be on the verge of a global treaty to limit the emissions of greenhouse gases.

It was a rare privilege to call Steve Schneider my colleague and friend. It was a privilege to listen to Steve jamming on his beloved 12-string guitar; to sing Bob Dylan songs with him. It was a privilege to share laughter, and good food, and a good glass of red wine. It was a privilege to hear his love of science, and his deep passion for it.

We honor the memory of Steve Schneider by continuing to fight for the things he fought for – by continuing to seek clear understanding of the causes and impacts of climate change. We honor Steve by recognizing that communication is a vital part of our job. We honor Steve by taking the time to explain our research findings in plain English. By telling others what we do, why we do it, and why they should care about it. We honor Steve by raising our voices, and by speaking out when powerful “forces of unreason” seek to misrepresent our science. We honor Steve Schneider by caring about the strange and beautiful planet on which we live, by protecting its climate, and by ensuring that our policymakers do not fall asleep at the wheel.

Ben Santer