

David Tab Rasmussen, Naturalist at Large

The field of biological anthropology recently lost one of its leading teachers and researchers. David Tab Rasmussen, age 56, died on 7 August 2014 at his home in Edwardsville, Illinois. Tab was a professor of anthropology at Washington University in St. Louis, MO, where he had taught since 1991.

Tab was born on 17 June 1958 in Salt Lake City and his early life was played out in the mountains and arroyos of southern Arizona where he and his siblings lived life on what his brother describes as a “very long leash,” with frequent trips into the countryside and surrounding wilderness. It was in this setting that his interest and love of the outdoors and natural history was kindled and fostered by a landscape that both demanded explanation and deserved respect. An old VW bus was often the get-away vehicle for trips to the Grand Canyon and beyond. Tab completed his BS degree at Colorado College in 1980, and his PhD at Duke University in 1986 under Elwyn Simons. He taught at the University of California-Los Angeles before joining Washington



University where he was promoted to full professor in 2001.

Tab studied primate evolution and was particularly interested in major evolutionary transitions including the origin of primates and the anthropoids. He used fossils to trace the actual course of the early record, and studies of living primates to demonstrate that behavior can provide insights into the evolutionary process itself. He also had research interests in the adaptive radiations of prosimian primates, both living and extinct, and of fossil mammals and birds.

During the course of his career Tab carried out paleontological and archeological research in Egypt, Kenya, Libya, Ethiopia, Namibia, South Africa, Madagascar, Ecuador, Colombia, California, Wyoming, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico. Besides studying living and fossil primates, Tab wrote authoritatively on fossil mammals and birds, as well as early human evolution. Among living primates he specialized in growth, life history, and evolutionary biology of lemurs, lorises, galagos, and tarsiers. His other passion, bird watching, often took him to places where he could bridge the study of both primate and bird populations. He conducted behavioral research in Costa Rica (monkeys, wooly opossums, and birds), Brazil (monkeys and birds), the Solo-

mon Islands (sea eagles), and Ethiopia (birds).

Tab was an exceptional teacher and mentor of graduate students. During his career at Washington University he was twice presented an award for Excellence in Mentoring by the Graduate Student Senate of College of Arts and Sciences, an Outstanding Teaching Award, and a Mortar Board Teaching Award. He taught courses on the history of physical anthropology and human osteology along with primate biology, evolution, functional morphology, paleobiology and phylogeny, and enjoyed co-teaching a course with a cultural anthropologist on human evolution as represented in film and culture. He was the PhD advisor to nine graduate students.

Tab was a wonderful colleague. He was an amazing scholar and a joy to interact with, both professionally and personally. Tab will be greatly missed by his students, his faculty colleagues, all those who knew him in the university community, and his many friends throughout the world. He is survived by his parents, David I. and Deon R. Rasmussen, and three siblings, Jan, Brian Daniel (Eileen Brown), and Lora Rasmussen (Dean Buchser). Donations in his memory can be made to Developmental Training Systems Inc. (Ogden, UT), Arc of Tempe (Tempe, AZ), Primate Conservation, and Primates Peru. The Department of Anthropology at Washington University is hosting a web page in Tab's memory.

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Published online in Wiley Online Library
(wileyonlinelibrary.com).
DOI 10.1002/evan.21426

