



## Thomas "Tom" Donnally Atkeson

August 22, 1948 - March 20, 2019

On Wednesday March 20th, Thomas Donnally Atkeson passed away at home at the age of 70. He was born on August 22, 1948 in Decatur, Alabama to Thomas Zephaniah and Margaret Steagall Atkeson. In 1971 he married Beverly Matthews and they raised two daughters, Ellen and Susan.

Tom received his Ph.D. in Wildlife Biology from the University of Georgia in 1983, after receiving his Bachelor's degree at Auburn University in 1971. Tom dedicated much of his professional career to assessing, understanding and providing scientific evidence to guide policies in managing mercury in the environment. In 1984, he began work at the Florida Department of Health as an Environmental Epidemiologist and, because of widespread concerns about toxic metals in Florida's lakes and rivers, he was instrumental in developing a monitoring plan to quantify the extent of the problem. His work was part of the catalyst that led to the Florida State Health Officer issuing advisories to limit the consumption of several fish species due to high levels of mercury, especially in the Florida Everglades. In 1992, Tom accepted a position as statewide Mercury Coordinator in the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. His primary responsibility was to develop a comprehensive program of scientific research to examine local and global aspects of mercury pollution. As Coordinator Tom organized and oversaw a multi-agency research effort - the South Florida Mercury Science Program - a broad partnership of federal, state, and local government agencies, academic and

private research institutions, and the electric power industry, which greatly advanced the understanding of the Everglades mercury problem. In this role, he helped plan and coordinate several large scale research projects, managed budgets well over a million dollars, made presentations at the state, federal and international level, and authored and co-authored reports, papers and book chapters. In his work at the Department of Health and later at the Department of Environmental Protection, Tom developed programs to unravel the complex nature of mercury pollution. He gained an international reputation for the scientific evidence he gathered on mercury as a pollutant and his work directly influenced the development and implementation of policies to limit mercury emissions in the state of Florida to protect the health of Floridians.

Tom was a man of many interests and a true scholar. A respected scientist who was named Air Conservationist of the Year (2002) by the Florida Wildlife Federation, he also reveled in his abilities as a carpenter, a mechanic, and a general handyman as well as an occasional archaeologist and anthropologist. He was a woodsman, a lover of nature and an insatiable reader with a breadth of knowledge on many topics. Known for his optimism, positive energy and enthusiasm, he loved to share interesting and witty stories with all who would listen. But most of all, he was a family man. He was happy and relaxed in the bosom of his family, devoted to Beverly and their two girls.

Tom is preceded in death by his parents, Thomas and Margaret and survived by his wife Beverly Atkeson, his children Ellen Atkeson ( Jeff Killingsworth) of Atlanta, Georgia and Susan Atkeson Rust (Ryan) of Naples, Florida, his sister Mary Atkeson Gibson (Tom) of Port St Joe, Florida, and nieces Margaret Gibson (Michael Gegenheimer)and Elizabeth Gibson. The family would especially like to thank Brenda Johnson, Stephanie Burch, Catherine Wright, and Big Bend Hospice for the compassionate care they provided.

A memorial service and celebration of his life is planned for Saturday, March

30th from 4:00 to 7:00 pm at the Jubilee Cottage, Goodwood Museum and Gardens, 1600 Miccosukee Road, Tallahassee, Florida. Susie Mozolic of Bevis Funeral Home is assisting the family with their arrangements. ([www.bevisfh.com](http://www.bevisfh.com) 850-385-2193)

# Tribute Wall



“ *Arrive in Style was purchased for the family of Thomas "Tom" Donnally Atkeson.*



---

March 27, 2019 at 10:39 AM



“ *I was blessed to know Tom and Bev some years ago while they were in the Athens area. Tom's sense of humor, politeness, knowledge and just being a pleasant person always made it a pleasure to be around him. He had a brilliant mind and I am glad he was able to put it to use during his life. My prayers are with you Bev, and your family.*

*Nedra Johnson, Bishop GA*

---

**Nedra Johnson** - March 26, 2019 at 11:12 AM

LM

“ I had the good fortune of serving as Tom's advisor for his Ph.D. program at The University of Georgia. He was probably the best teaching assistant I had in my 30 years tenure as a professor. Tom was truly a scholar! He was also a real Southern Gentleman. In my opinion, this is one of the greatest statements of praise that can be offered to any man. There are very few left. Tom was and always be a friend. His sense of humor still brings laughter around campfires and other gatherings of his former student colleagues. On a rabbit hunt only a few weeks ago, the story of Tom replacing Joe Hamilton's prize first wild turkey gobbler in the University cooler with a vulture, brought the usual hilarity--even though we had heard it a hundred times before. As long his friends and their friends live, so will Tom and the memories of him. Beverly, among Tom's friends, you are considered an angel, faithfully serving him during his final years. Thanks.

Larry Marchinton

---

Larry Marchinton - March 24, 2019 at 12:36 PM

GG

“ I had the honor of working with Dr. Tom for several years at the Department of Environmental Protection. He was the agency's Mercury Coordinator and did a great job developing and managing many contracts for the program. He was a brilliant man and treated all with kindness and respect. My thoughts and prayers are with his family and friends.

Gwenn D. Godfrey

---

Gwenn D. Godfrey - March 22, 2019 at 08:21 PM