

BIO: Peter Kaestner (“case-ner”)

Peter is a retired U.S. diplomat and birder who has spent a lifetime sharing his passion. On February 9, 2024, he achieved his ultimate goal when he saw his 10,000th species of bird (on the IOC taxonomy), an Orange-tufted Spiderhunter in Mindanao, the Philippines. On October 21, 2025, he reached 10,000 on eBird, and on November 11, 2025, he recorded his 10,000th species on the new AviList harmonized world bird list.



Always a birder, Peter took his first international birding trip at age ten, when he visited the Bahamas with his brother and mentor Hank. As of July 2026, he has birded in 199 eBird countries and territories. He is recognized by the *Guinness Book of Records* for having the world’s biggest life lists eBird (10036) and AviList (10,023) and as the first person to see a representative of every bird family – a feat that he accomplished in October, 1986. The highlight of Peter’s birding career came in 1989. Just 50 kilometers east of the Colombian capital, he discovered a bird new to science, the Cundinamarca Antpitta (*Grallaria kaestneri*).

Peter graduated from Friends School Baltimore, where he received the William S. Pike science award and all-state honors in lacrosse. He studied Biology at Cornell University, graduating in 1976. Peter served in the Peace Corps in Zaire (Democratic Republic of Congo) as a secondary-school science teacher in 1976-1978 and joined the U.S. Department of State in June, 1980.

During his 36-year career as a U.S. diplomat, he helped negotiate the UN Desertification Convention and a protocol amending the 1916 Migratory Bird Convention with Canada. He represented the United States at Conferences of the Parties of the Ramsar Convention and CITES. Peter has lived in 12 different countries: India, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, USA, Colombia, Malaysia, Namibia, Guatemala, Brazil, Egypt, Afghanistan, and Germany. Peter retired in 2016 from the State Department at the rank of Minister-Counselor.

Peter loves sharing his passion for birds by writing articles, leading bird walks and tours, supporting local conservation efforts, and giving illustrated lectures on birds around the world. After a peace treaty between the FARC guerilla group and the Colombian Government, Peter helped it bring economic development to rural areas by promoting bird tourism. He also worked with the American Bird Conservancy and a Colombian NGO (Fundación Camaná) to preserve critical habitat of the Cundinamarca Antpitta in the east Andes.

From 2019 to 2025, Peter was a part-time tour leader for Rockjumper Birding Tours, in 2021 he became a VIP for Swarovski Optik, in 2023 he was appointed ambassador of the American Bird Conservancy, and in 2024 he received the American Birding Association’s Roger Tory Peterson Lifetime Achievement Award.

Peter is married to Kimberly Vreeland Kaestner, and has two grown daughters, Laurel and Katie.