

# OBITUARY

## Steen Christensen

Steen was one of Denmark's cutting-edge birders. Not given to convention in any way, when I met him in the late 60's he was a birding hippy; and he died one. He trained as a bricklayer, but after a few months refused to work (he was disillusioned with the standards!) and was granted state benefit. He never worked again, and devoted his life to birds (Plate 1). The famous 'bird-huse' in Copenhagen was Steen's first home, along with several other young Danish birders, including Niels Krabbe, Uffe Gjør Sørensen, Hans Meltofte and Klaus Malling Olsen. Although he led a penniless, frugal, existence, through marriage and relationships he fathered four children.

Steen was one of the first Danes to produce high class ID papers, which were regularly published in *Feltornitologen*. Being extremely critical, he was often feared and could be very brusque when dealing with birders who did not have the same high identification standards. But to the few he allowed into his circle, he was an inspiring 'guru' for a whole generation in the 70's and 80's.

His achievements were many: the first Cyprus checklists; the first comprehensive counts of spring raptor migration in Israel (in 1976–77), published in *Sandgrouse*; the first raptor migration counts in Lebanon; the first papers on the identification of the buzzards culminating in *Flight Identification of European Raptors* in 1974 (which went into 8 languages). Latterly his books included *Birds of the Middle East and North Africa* (1988) and *Birds of the Middle East* (1996).



**Plate 1.** Steen Christensen (right) with Per Schlutter, Israel 1976. © RF Porter

We used to exchange letters regularly—he didn't use email—his carefully crafted handwriting giving daily accounts of what he'd been seeing in his beloved Skagen, Denmark's migration Mecca, where he died, age 65, in November 2008. He lived for birds, his family and his guitar.

*Richard Porter*