Stuart was born on March 8, 1940 and grew up in Modesto, California. As a young boy he was fascinated by natural history, picking up all sorts of experiences and critters in the Sierra Nevada where he spent his summers. In a 2012 interview, he traced his interest in entomology back to at least the fourth grade, when he stole a couple of live silkworms his teacher had brought into class. He was caught, and as punishment he had to feed the larvae mulberry leaves for the rest of the year. Around the sixth grade he graduated to raising termites in an aquarium in his bedroom. In Stuart’s words, “My parents got moderately corked at that.” When visiting friends as a 20-year old, he would bring along his collection of live reptiles and amphibians in his VW bug for safe keeping.

Stuart had a very long-standing relationship with the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco. As a youngster, he frequently went there, sometimes skipping school to do so. Edward Ross and C. Don MacNeill were particularly generous with their time, teaching him the tools and trade of entomology and museum work.

After high school, he attended college for a year but then joined the U.S. Air Force and was stationed in San Antonio, Texas. There he had a stint with the Witte Memorial Museum, where he started an insect collection. He was later posted to Japan, where he picked up a deep appreciation for Japanese culture and art. After his discharge, he found employment in a series of institutions, including the 1967 Montreal Expo, the Children’s Museum of Hartford, Connecticut where he started another insect collection, and the Greenville Piedmont Tricentennial Park, South Carolina, and in