



## Donors

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IN MEMORIAM

Kent Christopher

Dubois, Idaho  
April 11, 2008

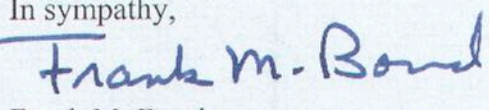
Kent Christopher is one of those few men known throughout the world as a talented and innovative falconer. He is among those falconers who similarly dedicated themselves to conservation. Today, I am sorry that I cannot join you for this celebration of his life. It is appropriate that we memorialize Kent at these Dubois Grouse Days, for which he will always be remembered for his contributions to sage grouse conservation.

Kent was an intense man, self-evident by simply peering into his eyes. With that intensity, coupled with skill and knowledge, he flew wonderful gyrfalcons and hybrids in magnificent style on sage grouse. They were high flying birds and more often than not deadly over a point after a great flush. He could put all of the elements together to achieve results in classic style. He wrote articles about his falconry, but we await his real work with the publication of his book on high flying gyrfalcons, co-authored by our friend, Vic Hardaswick.

Kent was at the initial meeting to form the North American Grouse Partnership at Tom Cade's home. He was the first NAAGP Newsletter editor and the moving force behind the Idaho Chapter. He supported and wrote about the North American model of wildlife conservation and management.

Kent Christopher was one of the falconers who became an essential leader for grouse and habitat conservation. That will be his legacy.

On behalf of the 69 Member Organizations from 48 nations, representing more than 30,000 falconers worldwide, we join you in spirit to remember Kent Christopher's life. We send our heartfelt condolences to his wife and children. On a personal basis, I mourn the loss of a special friend.

In sympathy,  
  
Frank M. Bond  
President

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*Spike Lightning on a female Sage Grouse*

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Kent once took a television news reporter out to see grouse hawking. During the outdoors report interview, he told the reporter, "I'd like to see a bird up two to three thousand feet in the sky come down in a real nice stoop where she is folded up like a bullet, going 200 miles an hour perhaps, and knock down a grouse, in full flight 100 feet over the landscape. That's what I'm looking for!" The reporter's voice came back on and said, "That's what happens when everything goes right, but watch what happens today!"

Like all of us, the flights do not always go as we hope, but we keep striving for the great ones. Kent was no different. He was always after the flight of a lifetime.

Kent had a great passion for hawking sage grouse. Charles Browning called him Captain Grouse, which made Kent blush and giggle. I think he liked it.

Kent's goal was to see, as often as possible, a gyrfalcon come cutting across the sky at 1,000 feet or more, then drop into a flock of sage grouse flying high over a valley. Many flights ended the way he tried to orchestrate them, and he got to see what he called the poetic dance—where the art in falconry shows itself and everything comes together.

He also loved to watch young setter pups trip through the sage and develop into big-running grouse dogs. He loved the way a young dog was so excited about life. He worked with other pointing breeds, but he always had a special place in his heart for well-bred field-stock English setters.

Kent was a young puppy at heart, too. Many of us have fond memories of him. He had many friends and a family who loved him dearly. A few of them are going to share the life and times of Kent Christopher with you here, as seen through their eyes and felt with their hearts.

— Hubert Quade

Kent and I were friends for more than 30 years. We first met around 1975 when he used to show up occasionally at our Peregrine Fund facility in Fort Collins, Colorado. I remember giving him one of the first four hybrid gyr-peregrines we produced—a bird I named Crazy Legs because one leg was blue and the other yellow. Kent hunted decks successfully with the bird, despite the fact that one of its wings was about an inch shorter than the other and half of its tail feathers were shorter than the other half.

Later, beginning in the 1980s, we often hawked sage grouse together with Hubert Quade, Vic Hardaswick, Steve Baptiste, Keith Carpenter, and occasionally other falconers in the Upper Snake River region, in places like Birch Creek, Crooked Creek, Medicine Lodge, and the Liddy Flats— but Crooked Creek and environs was our favorite.

It was great to be in the field with Kent, because he was always easy-going and relaxed, had well-behaved dogs (mostly English setters), and highflying falcons. He never got angry or upset with his animals or his human companions. He had a reverential approach to hunting and to life in general. He never flew his falcon more than once a day. If the hunt was successful, he liked to sit down on the ground beside his falcon with his dog on a leash and watch her eat a full meal. After she finished eating, he would take a single tail feather from the remains of the grouse and stick it in the ground as a totem to mark the location of a good hunt and to honor a worthy quarry.

We thought we were in falconers' paradise back in the 1980s, when we were hawking in this country and could see winter flocks of up to several thousand grouse flying from one valley to another. Of course, old-timers like Chuck Wilson and Franklin Sullivan told us that in earlier years they had seen flocks of tens of thousands, and in spring Franklin and his brother used to walk from their ranch house about four miles up the Warm Springs Creek





**Vic Hardaswick and Kent doing what Kent loved**

valley to Grouse Canyon, which at that time had displaying grouse continually in sight on their leks. That would be something to see! But in the 1980s, there were still plenty of grouse to enable falconers to get all their hawks flown in an afternoon.

Then we began to see changes, especially after 1990. Where we had seen thousands of grouse a few years earlier, we only saw hundreds; where there had been hundreds, we saw tens. The large winter flocks disappeared; where grouse had been common in October, they did not show up until late November in diminished numbers. At first, we thought we were just experiencing a cyclic decline, but then we discovered otherwise.

So we began going to meetings to find out what was happening and what could be done to restore grouse populations. Around 1995, Kent and I produced our own statement of findings and recommendations for the recovery of sage grouse with a strong emphasis on actions needed to preserve and restore grouse habitats. We submitted it to several state and federal agencies. Instead of actions on the ground, we got caught up in an endless round of meetings and planning sessions. Over the past 14 years, the wheel got reinvented again and again, and the number of sage grouse recovery and management plans proliferated faster than the sage grouse did; but effective actions on the ground remained minimal.

Still, Kent always kept his eyes open to the possibilities of things that could be done to improve conditions for grouse. He was a founding director of the North American Grouse Partnership (NAGP) and served for several years as an outstanding editor of that organization's annual publication, which quickly directed national attention to the goals of the Partnership. He was an active and guiding member of the Upper Snake River Grouse Working Group in Idaho, he started the Dubois Grouse Days festival, he became a member of one of the BLM's Resource Advisory Councils to look out for the welfare of grouse, he helped to develop the concept of a Nature Conservancy preserve for sage grouse and other wildlife



**Kent's Buddy on point in Sage Grouse country**

in the Crooked Creek valley and influenced decisions to make it happen, and he obtained a grant for the NAGP to distribute native plant seeds to farmers and ranchers to restore damaged habitats.

Most recently, Kent was especially happy to see a mutually acceptable resolution worked out by both land-owners and conservationists of the problems that would have been created for grouse by construction of an above-ground powerline in an area where numbers of grouse still winter. Burial of the line underground was the solution, achieved by cooperative funding from both private and public sources. Hubert Quade and Kent first brought this problem to public attention; the resulting action was both expeditious and effective. It stands as a model for future negotiations where commercial interests and conservation are potentially in conflict.

In April, 2008, when I drove along Idaho Route 22 to attend a memorial service for Kent in Dubois, I passed by all the familiar grouse country I mentioned, and I was reminded of another of his longstanding concerns—one that many of us share—the de-watering of the lower Birch Creek drainage created by a privately owned diversion dam for hydroelectric power and recently for irrigation, a double whack at grouse habitat. What a lasting tribute to the memory of Kent's influence on our thinking and our behavior as responsible citizens it would be for the community of the Upper Snake River Plain to find a way to restore the natural flow of water in Birch Creek and again provide habitat for grouse to move their broods along the creek and up to their summering grounds in the mountains. It is something to strive to accomplish in memory of Kent and all he stood for.

— Tom Cade



**Jewel, pointing Sage Grouse**

The unreal phone call from Hubert Quade notifying me of Kent's fatal skiing accident sent me into a reeling recollection of our times together as friends. Like an endless video playing over and over in my mind, I was tortured by the memories of a unique mind and our love for each other as friends. We were both grouse biologists when we met in 1979. I had relocated my family from Wyoming to Idaho in 1980. He moved his young family from Colorado to Idaho and, because of circumstances, they moved in with us while looking for a place to purchase

or rent. We were both struggling with the demands of being research biologists, starting our families, and pursuing our passion for falconry. His second son was born soon after he had bought a home and moved out of our place.

My wife, Barbara, worked at the hospital where his son was born, and she reminded me of Kent's round, freckled face as he looked through the viewing window of the hospital's nursery, watching his son in a bassinet. That face, that tooth-filled smile, those squinting eyes surrounded by an uncountable number of freckles, is the haunting and inescapable memory that plagues me. I cannot relate all the times we spent together as chosen brothers. We spent hundreds of days in the field flying our hawks. We worked together as concerned falconers and grouse biologist helping to start the North American Grouse Partnership. We floated the Henry's Fork of the Snake River, teaching his boys to flyfish. We spent uncountable idle hours together just enjoying the comfort of each other's company. Over and over that pumpkin-faced smile and gentle nature of a man, too soon lost, plays in my mind's eye.

I loved that man. My fond memories continue. I was lucky to know him.

—Ed Pitcher

For the past seven hawking seasons, my wife Anna and I had the great opportunity to spend time in the field with Kent Christopher. Our hawking experiences with Kent led to a great friendship, and we are thankful to have known him. I was with Kent numerous times when he was tame hacking and hawking with his latest gyrfalcon, Donny, who was named after Don Hunter, was a Vic Hardaswick imprint with a flying weight of 41 ounces. Tame hack was a focused endeavor for Kent, which he used to get his hawks fit, confident on the wing, and to make certain that they were ready to kill in the early fall.

I saw Donny take his second sage grouse, and it is a flight I think about often. It was in early September, not long after the end of the bird's tame hack. We were hawking early one afternoon in Kent's cherished Idaho desert. The setter provided a solid point, and Kent cast off Donny. He mounted quickly, with a rapid, strong wingbeat. Before

we knew it, Donny was up at least 800 feet, had reached his pitch, and was in the cone. Four hens flushed, and Donny went into a near vertical stoop, right in front of us. By the time the grouse were 200 yards out, Donny leveled briefly then bound to an adult hen. He landed in the sage with his quarry about 300 yards away. This was a wonderful flight from a young hawk and a very experienced imprint gyr man.

I liked Kent's falconry lifestyle. At the entrance to his family room was a framed print of Joseph Wolf's famous white gyr painting. On one of the walls was a beautiful, old, framed photograph of a friend's passage tundra peregrine. The falcon was on a winter pheasant in the snow. Kent liked to use traditional equipment. He had a leather Mollen-style hawking bag and a cuffed glove with a tassel. He didn't use braided jesses or leashes, but finely crafted leather furniture, tough enough for big gyrs. There were always beautifully made new jesses, greased up and ready to go, hanging on the wall above his scale. Also on Kent's wall was a lovely commemorative plaque marking his time spent hawking red grouse in Scotland. The plaque was wood with a brass plate and had a pair of grouse feet attached.

Kent had many other interests in addition to falconry. When the powder snow became deep at Grand Targhee Resort in Idaho, Kent would hang up his hawking glove and start skiing with his wife, Georgia. I think he skied as hard as he hawked. Kent was also very excited about the new Harley Davidson motorcycle he purchased in late winter. He hadn't ridden a motorcycle in years, and we were concerned about a guy in his fifties riding a big Harley on icy winter roads.

On the day before Easter, I received telephone calls from Hub Quade and Ed Pitcher telling me of Kent's accident on the ski slopes. What really gets to me now is that my appreciation for Kent continues to grow. I talked to Georgia Christopher recently. On the day of the summer solstice, she hiked to the area of Kent's accident. Even though she had skied there before, she was stunned by how steep the terrain was. But of course it was steep. It was Kent, going for it all the way.

— Blair Anderson

