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*Forum (Response)*

## Response to In Memoriam Keith Hobson

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This is a thorough and fitting recognition of Keith Hobson's untimely passing, which has shocked many of his friends and colleagues. The authors paint an accurate picture of Keith's enormous contributions to ecology and science in general, well beyond his major contributions to ornithology. I would add my feeling that by extending his work beyond the sometimes constraining bounds of ornithology, he contributed in important ways to raising the profile of Canada's science overseas, and science in Canada, to a degree that may not always be sufficiently appreciated though his Fellowship of the Royal Society of Canada is due recognition of that.

I first met Keith in Saskatoon, in his graduate student days (late 1980s) where I had moved from Ottawa to manage the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) research station on campus. I had made space available for graduate students in the CWS office building as part of encouraging links between CWS researchers and those in the university. One of the first examples of the benefits of this policy was Keith's collaboration with Bob Clarke in raising gull chicks on known diets to follow the incorporation of nutrients into their various tissues. This was carried out in a basement lab with effects on air quality that were remarked upon by staff. I also had a role in the examination of his thesis, and was happy to steer some federal "Green Plan" dollars to support the Delta Marsh Observatory.

During Keith's fieldwork in Lancaster Sound, he worked quite closely with fisheries researchers from Manitoba, and after graduating it was at the Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) lab in Winnipeg that he was hired. Shortly afterwards, a research scientist position on forest birds became available in CWS' Prairie & Northern Region and I encouraged Keith to apply for it; he could do so as an "internal" federal government candidate because of his position in DFO. I thought his stable-isotope work would prove extremely valuable for CWS and was anxious to hire him for that reason, but that was not the job description; fortunately, he had sufficient knowledge of forest birds to qualify him for that position. So, he joined CWS (then still a stand-alone branch of Environment Canada, before EC's acquisition of two more Cs and before the separation of research into the Science & Technology branch) as a Research Scientist on forest birds, but his real attraction for me was his stable-isotope expertise and it

was understood between us that he would have government time to pursue it. The presence of Len Wassenaar's lab in the hydrology institute on the Saskatoon campus meant that CWS could not acquire the money to equip a new lab for him, and Keith did have a life-long frustration that he didn't have a lab to call his own despite his international prominence in the field.

I was in the field with Keith only once, visiting a fulmar colony on Devon Island in Lancaster Sound to collect some fulmar chicks. We used Ian Sterling's cabin for observing polar bears as our base, at the top of a cliff where the fulmars nested. A member of the fisheries crew volunteered to abseil down the cliff with a bag to collect the chicks. The cliff was vertical and about 600 ft high; my vertigo kept me well away from the top but Keith stood right on the edge to communicate with the climber, who unfortunately got into difficulties and signaled that he could not return. We had to go back to the ship to call for help; by now, the fog had come down so we had a long walk down the slope, Keith firing his shotgun repeatedly to scare away any polar bears and to alert the ship waiting for us. Fortunately, there was a coastguard vessel nearby, which steamed around to the bottom of the cliff and carried out a dramatic rescue with a helicopter disappearing steadily into the fog up the cliff, eventually reappearing with the stranded climber (but without any fulmar chicks).

One of Keith's personal qualities that deserves more than passing mention is his (sometimes wicked) sense of humor, and particularly his genius for accurate mimicry. He "did" a faultless Spencer Sealy, and I suspect he had an equally brilliant version of me but sadly I never saw it.

I thank the editors for allowing me to fulfil a promise I failed to make to Keith. About 16 years ago Keith saw my obituary for Raymond O'Connor in *Auk*, and said he hoped I would write his when the time came. I responded glibly that I was sure that shoe would be on the other foot, but sadly things have turned out otherwise.

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