

In memory of Philip Heidemann

1964 - 2008

A plane crash took the life of Philip M. Heidemann on March 13, 2008, in rural western Martin County not far from Lake Okeechobee. Phil was conducting an aerial survey of wading birds with colleagues Gareth Akerman and Damion Marx of Florida Atlantic University. All four men aboard the Cessna 172S, including the pilot Jeff Rozelle of Kemper Aviation, were killed instantly.

Phil was an M.S. candidate in Biological Sciences at Florida Atlantic University. For his thesis, Phil was developing a landscape suitability index for wood stork and white ibis in southwestern Florida. His study examines the declines in wading bird populations resulting from human alterations in hydroperiods. The findings will help to guide restoration of Greater Everglades ecosystems. Phil's degree was conferred to him posthumously in May 2008, and after the ceremony his family scattered his ashes over the Everglades.

Phil found his way into ecology relatively late in life after a successful career in business. He earned his Bachelor's degree in economics from Grinnell College in Iowa and worked in finance and insurance. He climbed the ranks quickly, but gradually came to realize that he was in the wrong field. He decided to follow his interests toward a career in the biological sciences and returned to school at Florida Atlantic University in 2004. Phil loved the work and would often wake before dawn and go to the lab to try out an idea for his model. He seemed to have found his passion in life. He talked of getting his Ph.D. and becoming a professor.

An avid outdoorsman and environmentalist, Phil was admired by family and friends as someone who followed his instincts and succeeded at everything he put his mind to. He was a warm, giving, witty, and curious man. He is remembered particularly fondly by the young people in his life—step children and nieces—who were impacted by his wisdom, guidance, and strength.

Phil will be greatly missed by his long-time love Pia Christensen, his step children Kenny, Corey and Kalee, his father Paul, his brother Pat and wife Liz, his sisters Phyllis and Pam, brother-in-law Tod, and many nieces and great nieces, cousins, aunts and uncles.

