

Founder of Wildlife Vets International dies after a short illness

The work of a respected wildlife veterinary leader has ended too soon, but leaves a legacy. <https://doi.org/10.12968/coan.2020.106>

Olivia Walter, Executive Director, Wildlife Vets International. info@wildlifevetsinternational.org

We at Wildlife Vets International are devastated to lose Dr John Lewis, a mentor and an inspiration for so many zoo and wildlife vets and biologists for the last 35 years. Through his passion for the conservation of big cats, he became a world leader in his field. His skill and dedication with field work, including his expertise in field anaesthesia, were second to none. He inspired many and his passing is an immeasurable loss to wildlife veterinary medicine.

John qualified as a vet from the University of Cambridge in 1978 and studied for a PhD in oncology. He worked at the Zoological Society of London as a pathologist and clinician, before joining the International Zoo Veterinary Group in 1985, a practice dedicated to zoo, aquatic and exotic animal medicine. He went on to become a partner in 1988.

Known for his passion for big cats, Dr Lewis founded Wildlife Vets International with Andrew Greenwood, a fellow wildlife vet. Wildlife Vets International is a British charity that supports vets and conservationists in using veterinary science to protect endangered species. Not only did he provide this organisation with direction and advice, John participated in numerous conservation projects. Most notably were projects with tigers, throughout their range, and the reintroduction of the Amur leopard to the Russian Far East.

Despite the big cat focus, John was considered an expert in primates, elephants, marine mammals, and zoo and wild animal anaesthesia. John was also veterinary adviser for the Amur leopard and tiger on the European



Image courtesy of John Goodrich

John Lewis at his best: pioneering health checks for wild Amur tigers in the Russian Far East.

Association of Zoos and Aquaria Ex-Situ Programme, as well as being a member of the International Union for Conservation of Nature Species Survival Commission Cat Specialist Group.

Dr Sue Thornton, Senior Partner at International Zoo Veterinary Group, said that the messages of support from vets, biologists and zookeepers they have received have been consistent in their praise for John's willingness to pass on his knowledge and expertise to all who worked with him, or attended conferences or

If you would like to donate in memory of John to continue his conservation work, please go to www.justgiving.com/fundraising/JohnLewisvet

To leave condolence messages please email o.walter@wildlifevetsinternational.org or go to www.tolbc.com/DrJohnLewis

workshops with him. She recalled how within the International Zoo Veterinary Group he was always willing to discuss a case with a colleague and was equally willing to admit when he did not know the answer. His anecdotes and admissions of failure, she said, were often delivered with great humility and humour. The International Zoo Veterinary Group and all the animals he has cared for have each benefited from John's knowledge and veterinary skills.

His passing is a huge loss to the whole zoo and wildlife conservation industry. He has, however, left a legacy in the charity sector of his organisation Wildlife Vets International, as well as his more recent project to develop a website (wildtigerhealthcentre.org) to support rangers, conservation vets and biologists in the care of wild tigers.

For further information on Wildlife Vets International or any aspect of John's work, please contact Olivia Walter, executive director of Wildlife Vets International by phone: 07508 801099, or by email: o.walter@wildlifevetsinternational.org