

## Executive Summary 2021

Miranda Stevenson, Chair of Trustees, summarises a challenging year:

The vision of Wildlife Vets International is a world where wildlife survives and flourishes, and our mission is to support vets and conservationists in using veterinary science to protect endangered species. We do this by equipping those on the conservation frontline with the necessary veterinary science and skills to have a real impact on the species with which they are working. Despite the ongoing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have continued to do all we can to raise awareness of the need to put world-class veterinary science right at the heart of conservation.

As the world has slowly opened up again this year, it has inevitably taken time for our veterinary partners to be able to get back out on the ground. However, against the backdrop of the global pandemic, appreciation of our role and the work we do has only grown. A light has unquestionably been shone on the ever-expanding interface between wildlife, humans and livestock, and the associated risks of emerging disease exploiting increasing opportunities to jump the barriers between species, ourselves included. This is very much the arena in which WVI operates, as we support our conservation partners in the vital task of identifying, treating and mitigating disease threats in the endangered species with which they work.

Our work with sea turtle rehabilitation centres in Athens and Barcelona continues to go from strength to strength. Vet nurse Matthew Rendle has built a strong and trusting partnership with ARCHELON, the Sea Turtle Protection Society of Greece, which enables him to give invaluable guidance remotely, while vet Tania Monreal, who is based nearby, supports marine rescue centre Fundaç  n CRAM in Spain with monthly visits. Matt and Tania visited ARCHELON in person in August and were able to advise on a range of clinical cases. Notably, they were able to remove a fishing hook from one turtle, Valentine, which had become embedded in the animal's oesophagus, with the attached line going all the way through her intestines and literally out the other end, putting her life seriously at risk. Following surgery, Valentine went on to make a full recovery and was subsequently released back into the Mediterranean. As a juvenile female, the hope is that she will play her role in securing the future of her species for many years to come. Her release exemplifies the value of rehabilitation as a tool for conservation of endangered species.

Since we began our partnership with ARCHELON, Matt and Tania have been able to embed new practices around greater use of pain relief, more informed choice of antibiotics, better wound management and improved anaesthetic techniques. The ARCHELON team are now able to take their own blood samples for analysis on site, and a local radiologist has been so inspired that he is providing very good quality imaging of the turtles free of charge. In addition, Matt has addressed a number of husbandry issues, including increased exposure to UV light, better temperature control and the provision of enrichment for all the turtles that are well enough to benefit from it. The work of our Turtle Team continues to expand, with Matt currently in the process of developing a new relationship with a turtle rescue team in Ghana. We are immensely grateful to Animal Friends Pet Insurance for their decision to fund our turtle work this year, and for the next twelve months.

Our connection with Ghana comes primarily through West African Primate Conservation Action (WAPCA) and the provision of veterinary support to their project to release captive white-naped mangabeys (*Cercocebus lunulatus*) – an Endangered primate – back into the wild. This is a ground-breaking initiative, which will create a blue-print for similar primate reintroductions in Ghana, if not Africa, as well as making sure that WAPCA's rehabilitation centres have a pathway in place which will enable them to release suitable individuals and free up space for new arrivals, most often from the illegal pet trade.

WVI Veterinary Advisor, Jane Hopper, has completed the vital Disease Risk Assessment for the project, while vet nurse Matthew Rendle has been back out to Ghana to assess the facilities and meet with the relevant zoo and government authorities. Matt was able to take a portable medical bag with him, containing equipment for carrying out basic health checks, performing anaesthesia and collecting samples which was particularly appreciated. The kit was funded through a raffle for a portrait of a mangabey kindly painted and donated by one of our supporters.

This is a complex project but the pieces of the puzzle are falling into place, and we are anticipating the release of the first group of mangabeys into community managed forest in 2023. Sincere thanks are due to the Primate Society of Great Britain who awarded us a Captive Care Grant to support our work.

Meanwhile, vet Jessica Bodgener was finally able to get back out to Nepal towards the end of the year, to resume the work she was doing when she had to leave in a hurry back at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. She has been testing existing serum samples from tigers and leopards to determine whether they have been exposed to canine distemper virus – a serious and growing problem for large carnivores around the globe. This is the first phase of a much bigger project to investigate the health of conflict leopards in Nepal, where confrontation with humans often has tragic consequences. In the longer term, Jess will be working to determine what role disease or injury plays in the animals' behaviour, and what measures could be taken to prevent repeat offending.

Back in Africa, we were able to fund the capture and collaring West African lions in Benin. work by, and We hope this will be the beginning of a partnership between Prof. Hans Bauer of WildCru and WVI Veterinary Partner Richard Harvey focusing on disease surveillance in this Critically Endangered subspecies of lion. There are only ~400 left of the West African clade of the 'Northern Lion' – a subspecies more closely related to the extinct Barbary lion and Asiatic lion than the 'Southern lion'.

Closer to home, we have supported vet Jane Hopper's contribution to a large scale study into the vaccination of captive painted dogs, using a modified live vaccine to protect them from canine distemper virus, which has decimated whole packs in recent years. The study is an important first step in looking at the viability of vaccinating painted dogs in the wild.

Lockdown restrictions in the early part of the year led to our first ever virtual 'Wildlife Warrior' challenge in February, with supporters pledging to walk, run or cycle 50 or 100 miles. The challenge raised almost £5k, while one dedicated supporter went on to complete

four ultra-marathons, and our veterinary partner, Karen Archer, competed in her first ever half triathlon. Between them they raised an additional £1k. In March, we were delighted to be chosen as the official charity partners for Elearning.vet's first Virtual Veterinary Conference, and were able to reciprocate by providing talks on turtle rehabilitation, painted dog vaccination and the importance of veterinary medicine to conservation. Later in the spring we launched our own online Wildlife lottery, and a new range of sustainable WVI-branded clothing, which is made to order through our website.

As in-person events made a gradual return, June saw vet Jane Hopper speaking at the Big Cat Sanctuary in Kent, as part of their Conservation Conversations initiative. Jane spoke about how captive tigers can help inform the care of those in the wild, and about the ongoing development of the Wild Tiger Health Centre website. The WTHC was created by WVI founder and big cat specialist, the late Dr John Lewis, and is intended as a one-stop hub for all those involved in the protection of wild tigers throughout their range. John was particularly passionate about tigers, and considered the WTHC his legacy to their conservation. The site not only provides up to date, free to access information on their biology, pathology, treatment and handling, but also brings together all those working to save these magnificent animals, facilitating exchange of expertise and experience. John was the on-call vet for the Big Cat Sanctuary for many years and funds raised through the event were divided between the Wild Tiger Health Centre and other WVI projects.

The summer saw the launch of our first 'Stories of Survival' wildlife photography competition, created and run by vet Jessica Bodgener. We were delighted to receive around 300 entries from around the globe, and lucky to have an international panel of renowned judges, including Will Burrard-Lucas and Shannon Wild. Not only was the standard of entries extremely high, but it was also an opportunity to introduce WVI to a new audience, a good proportion of whom have since become regular followers. A huge thank you goes to Jess for the many hours she gave to set up and run the competition, which we hope will become an annual event.

We were also delighted to be able to hand over to its new owner the original painting of "John's Tiger", so kindly donated to us by award-winning wildlife artist, Penny Wheatley, after the death in 2020 of our founder and passionate big cat expert, Dr John Lewis. Sales from the original image of a magnificent Amur tiger and accompanying limited edition prints have now raised more than £3,000.

The year ended, as it has for some time now, with our main fundraising initiative, conducted through The Big Give Christmas Challenge. We used the lead-up to the campaign itself, which traditionally runs in the first week of December, to talk about different aspects of big cat-human conflict, and the importance of investigating and understanding the role of disease in situations which can be challenging, distressing and potentially fatal to people and animals alike.

We were extremely fortunate to receive a record total of £15,000 in match funding; from the Reed Foundation, the Gibbings Family Trust and a private donor, Iain Booth MRCVS, who gifted proceeds from the sale of his veterinary business. This meant that our overall target was £30,000, a 100% increase on the previous year. Thanks to the generosity of our

supporters and the dedication of our small campaign team in the office, we reached our target with hours to spare – another first!

Given the post-pandemic challenges that charities continue to face in terms of fundraising, we were delighted to find we had not only met but significantly exceeded our overall target for the year, raising an additional £17k on top of a projected £33k. This bodes well for the support we will be able to give to both existing and new initiatives in the months and years to come.

None of what we do would be possible without the ongoing and unstinting support of our patrons and trustees, the generosity of our corporate and individual benefactors, the dedication of our project partners around the globe, or the commitment of our inspirational veterinary partners, who never hesitate to share their considerable skills and expertise. We extend our heartfelt thanks to them all.

Conservation is a complex puzzle. As we struggle to combat climate change, prevent further pandemics and protect our planet's incredible – and vital – biodiversity, it has never been more critical to ensure that world-class veterinary science informs our efforts to save threatened species. WVI remains committed to providing that vital piece of the overall puzzle. As the world emerges from the grip of COVID-19 we look forward to the challenges ahead and to deepening our relationships with our current conservation partners, as well as seeking new projects looking for critical veterinary input. Our supporter numbers continue to grow, and we are extremely thankful to all those who have helped us end the year in a secure financial position.

Miranda Stevenson PhD OBE