

Chairman's Executive Summary 2018

Miranda Stevenson, Chair of Trustees, summarises our achievements in 2018:

I took over from Sharon Miller as Chair of the board of trustees in May this year. I would like to thank Sharon sincerely for all the sterling work she has done for Wildlife Vets International since its inception in 2004. We are very fortunate indeed that she has agreed to stay on as Vice Chair and I am always grateful for her support and knowledge.

As WVI is now well into its second decade, it seemed appropriate to revisit and review our overall strategy. As a result, a considerable amount of time was spent during the year discussing where we have come from and the best way forward to ensure that WVI continues to lead the way in providing world-class veterinary support to conservation initiatives around the globe.

As rates of extinction continue to rise, the veterinary aspect of endangered species protection matters more than ever. At WVI we work tirelessly to raise awareness of the importance of this still too easily overlooked aspect of conservation. The veterinary professionals we work with are leaders in their field, be it avian surgery, big cat anaesthesia, turtle rehabilitation, disease investigation or human-tiger conflict, to name but a few. Their efforts to train and educate staff and volunteers in our partner organizations on the ground in Europe, Asia and Africa, as well as providing both practical clinical assistance and remote advice, are enormously appreciated by our beneficiaries. It is a mark of WVI's effectiveness as a small but professional organization that we can say with confidence that our work is without doubt increasing the chances of survival of many animal species, as well as improving the welfare and treatment of sick and injured individuals. It remains our fundamental belief that building in-country expertise is paramount to the long-term sustainability and success of the inspirational projects we support.

Our work falls essentially under four broad pillars:

- Translocation and Reintroduction of Carnivores
- Wildlife Medicine for Endangered Island Species
- Rehabilitation of Endangered Species
- Disease Surveillance Programmes for Carnivores

In 2018, we focused on the third and fourth pillars, as we built on our avian rehabilitation work in India by extending this to South Africa, continued with our long-standing commitments to support tiger and leopard rehabilitation and reintroduction in Russia, and once again worked with painted wolf conservationists in Zimbabwe.

January saw our highly experienced avian surgical team of Matthew Rendle, Stefan Harsch and Ashley Clayton return to India to continue with the training and support of staff and volunteers at the Jivdaya Charitable Trust. JCT treat and rehabilitate hundreds of birds, many of which are endangered birds of prey, injured during the annual kite-flying festival in Gujarat. The team assisted with

the treatment of 60-90 birds a day during their visit, helped with the development of new protocols and caught up with local education initiatives which are successfully reducing the number of casualties. In addition, they were also able to carry out research into the potential benefits of ventilating birds during anaesthesia to repair fractures and other injuries. On return to the UK, Ashley and Stefan were able to present their research findings to the annual ICARE* conference and the British Veterinary Zoological Society, where Ashley won the award for the best student presentation,

January also saw avian experts Neil Forbes and Karen Homer-Forbes travel to South Africa to hold a series of workshops close to Durban, Pretoria and Capetown, to train vets and conservationists working with highly endangered vulture species. Vultures are under great threat in southern Africa, due largely to accidents involving ever-expanding overland electricity cables, malicious and accidental poisoning, and the continuing demand for their use in 'black magic'. Seven of Africa's eleven species of vulture are listed by the IUCN as endangered or critically endangered, while white headed and hooded vultures could be extinct within as little as seven years. Training was both theoretical and practical, with participants able, for example, to practice treating common fractures under expert individual guidance. Feedback from delegates was excellent and there is much enthusiasm for a repeat programme next year, which would both expand the theoretical and practical topics covered and allow for more vets and conservationists to benefit from the experience.

In August, WVI provided needles and vaccines to our long-standing partners on the ground, Painted Dog Conservation, in order to enable them to run another series of vaccination clinics for local domestic dogs. The animals are vaccinated against both Canine Distemper Virus and Rabies, which is vital to help stop the spread of disease to endangered painted wolves, and has wider public health benefits as well. The clinics are a great opportunity to educate people about the need to protect both their dogs and the painted wolves, and once again proved extremely popular, with nearly 2,000 dogs being vaccinated – up almost 50% in comparison to the last outreach initiative. With such good uptake of the vaccines, the resultant level of immunity among the domestic dog population can make a real difference to the chances of survival of local painted wolf packs.

The painted wolf was also the focus for our BigGive Christmas Challenge fundraiser this year. We were very fortunate that the launch of the annual match funding challenge coincided with the BBC's showing of David Attenborough's Dynasty Series, and in particular the episode on painted wolves. In addition, we were extremely lucky to have the support of photographer and painted wolf conservationist, Nick Dyer, who recently co-authored the stunning book, Painted Wolves; A Wild Dog's Life, with Peter Blinston of Painted Dog Conservation, our partners in Zimbabwe. This fortuitous timing was a considerable help in raising the profile of our campaign – and of the plight of this iconic African hunter - and we quickly exceeded our match-funding target, meaning that we already have resources in place for the next round of vaccination clinics in 2019.

In September, big cat expert Dr John Lewis returned to the Alexeevka

Tiger and Leopard Rehabilitation Centre in the Russian Far East, where he continues to support and guide Russian vet, Misha Gonchuruk. While on the ground, Dr Lewis was able to advise on a number of challenging clinical cases as well as rehabilitation techniques. Towards the end of the year, John was invited to become the veterinary advisor to a new Expert Group set up by Russian NGO ANO Leopard, which is likely to play a vital role in the planned reintroduction of Amur leopards in the Russian Far East, a project which we have worked closely with since the early 2000s.

2018 also saw the completion of the basic web design for an online Wild Tiger Health Centre which we want to see become a one-stop online hub for tiger vets and biologists working in all tiger range states. The site should be live within the next few months and will make global tiger expertise accessible in a peer-reviewed format that until now has simply not existed. It will provide information on, for example, tiger health issues, clinical techniques, rehabilitation and reintroduction, as well as some basic online training. This is a resource which not only has the potential to advance tiger conservation worldwide but also to serve as a model for the provision of veterinary support to other species, given that internet access has become sufficiently global.

Of course, none of this would be possible without the invaluable backing and generosity of our donors and supporters, not to mention the commitment of our patrons and trustees, and indeed the dedication of the veterinary professionals who are at the centre of what we do and enable WVI to make a real difference to the survival of threatened species around the globe. All of us are in agreement that education is key to the success of conservation and WVI remains focused on developing and training local staff and volunteers, working on the ground with our inspirational local partners to help ensure that what they do is effective and sustainable.

We look forward to an exciting year in 2019, which will commence with the preparation of a new strategic plan to be implemented over the coming months.

Miranda Stevenson OBE

* International Conference on Avian Herpetological and Exotic Mammal Medicine