

Dear colleague and WDA member,

Welcome to 2021! I suppose I speak for most when I say this is a year we all welcome with open arms, if for nothing more, to put behind us a 2020 we all wish had been very different. I hope as many of you as possible have entered this New Year in good health and in the company of loved ones, but together with all WDA officers I keep in my mind and thoughts all those who perhaps have faced hardships and losses in this year that ended.

COVID19 has put to the test the way we live, work, travel, and use this planet of ours, and there is little doubt this virus will continue to affect us in this new 2021. However, COVID19 also highlighted the role of One Health, the benefits of good prediction and prevention in infectious diseases, as well as the importance of wildlife health.

As many of you, I am cautious when describing the link “EIDs-wildlife”, often used and misused, but I guess this pandemic highlights well that the drivers leading to biodiversity loss, climate change, wildlife habitat degradation etc.. are also behind pandemic emergence. Acknowledging that wildlife became in 2020 a “hot topic” I would like to thank the work of many of our members, who in all corners of the world keep on the important work of not just promoting wildlife health, but helping explain its relevance to society. A healthier world with healthier humans will also depend on healthier wildlife!

Despite the many challenges of 2020, I am happy to report our association remains strong, and the last 12 months have been populated with many initiatives and a high tempo on scientific production! Despite the postponement of our Cuenca meeting, WDA organised a successful online science week in early September with a high turn-out of members across all regions. Similar initiatives were organized by different sections, and I leave a word of gratitude to section chairs and officers who worked around the clock to keep our “WDA family” together in these hard times.

I would also like to inform all that WDA/EWDA 2021 Conference organisers after long deliberations and weighing many factors have decided to transform our meeting into a digital one. The fact is that even with a vaccine plan rolling out we are sure to continue experiencing large disruptions to normal life way into 2021, and this will surely have a big impact on travelling. Many other large organisations have made this choice already for their 2021 commitments. I know our “Cuenca team” is disappointed not being able to gather the WDA family in Spain, but knowing how much they wanted it, I am certain that this is a decision they did not take lightly and which I fully support. It is also a sad decision for me as President not having the chance to gather WDA together in both years of my term, but I am certain the organizing committee will be able to put up an amazing 2021 conference, even if we must sit behind our PC screens.

As we turn the page to 2021 new challenges await WDA! The *ad hoc* Strategic committee established last year is working hard on discussing the future of our association: mission, goals, values are all topics on the table and their reflections and suggestions will be presented to all later this August, and hopefully help us shape the association we all want for the future. Growing our impact and growing our family are the two major banners guiding this work. While on impact, I will wait for August to share more, when it comes to family there is something we all can do already now!

If you haven't renewed your membership this is the right time to do it; if you know of members with difficulties in renewing their membership talk to your section chairs or WDA officers; if you have colleagues that are interested in wildlife health and curious about WDA, take the time for one more zoom meeting or phone call and bring them on board. But perhaps the most important, if you know of colleagues struggling with social isolation, hardships at work, etc..., take some extra minutes for a chat and a good debate about wildlife. That is exactly what makes WDA so different from most other associations: being a family!

Again I thank you for your continued support to our association and family, and I look forward in seeing you in one of the several initiatives WDA will organize in 2021!

Carlos G. das Neves

WDA President