

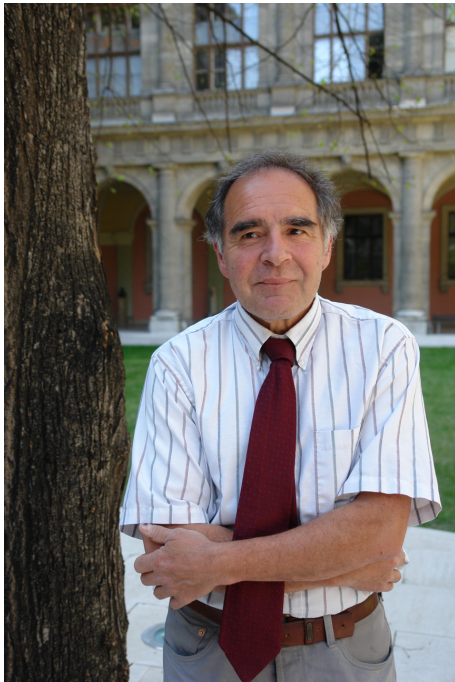


OBITUARY

John Dittami (1949–2014)

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John Dittami, 65, Konrad Lorenz chair for ethology holder at the University of Vienna, quietly passed away in September 2014 in the presence of his loving family after losing his courageous battle against cancer. John was born in Medford, Massachusetts/USA as the sixth child of Rose and Francis Dittami. A graduate of Marian High School and Tufts University, he obtained his PhD with research at the Max Planck Institute for Behavioural Physiology in Seewiesen, Germany. This also included a 2-year study of birds in the Lake Nakaru Wildlife Preserve in Kenya, and a year-long study of bird migration in Spitzbergen, Norway.

With Konrad Lorenz, he came in contact via a typical 'Dittamian' project; during a summer holiday as a medical student at Tufts, John and a friend flew into Frankfurt, with the goal to walk (!) from there to the Biological Station in Naples, some 1 200 km to the south. The friends quickly got as far as Austria, where

they hit the northern Alps. But instead of trekking along the south-leading Kremstal, they took a wrong turn into the Almtal. There they ran into late Konrad Lorenz, who since 1973 used to spend his summers with a flock of Greylag geese and a few collaborators at the romantic little Research Station named after him. This quickly turned John from a medial physiologist into a comparative biologist, from this time on focusing at physiological processes in birds.

John Dittami was a passionate ornithologist, behavioural endocrinologist and chrono-biologist. In 1988, he was appointed Professor of Ethology at the University of Vienna, with a responsibility for the management of the Konrad Lorenz Research Station in Grünau. His research included a variety of topics studied in birds and mammals, spanning the range from starlings and ground squirrels to barbary macaques and humans and even ventured into human sleep research. To a much greater extent than his list of publications would suggest he thereby pushed the development of behavioural biology in Austria via his typically diverse and restless activities, notably by merging classical ethology with pragmatic physiological approaches and by building many bridges to other disciplines, such as human and veterinary medicine.

John was a truly inspiring and challenging partner and friend. He was particularly successful at attracting gifted students to the field via his enormous scope, enthusiasm, drive and his notoriously creative thinking. He also was a demanding hiking and canoeing guide and an entertaining guitar player and singer at many a party. One central motto of his life was, as he once put it: 'being tired is not an evolutionary strategy'. The great theme in his life, besides family, friends and biology, was running. Concomitantly, he finished his last Marathons in Boston and Vienna, 2 years ago, both in less than four hours. We will always miss him. His scientific and human genius will forever remain motivating and inspiring.

See also <https://mediportal.univie.ac.at/uniview/uni-intern/detailansicht/artikel/in-memoriam-john-dittami-1949-2014/>