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UCT mourns death of renowned ornithologist, Professor Phil Hockey

The University of Cape Town is mourning the death by cancer today of Professor Philip Hockey, the Director of the Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology at UCT and a leading authority on ornithology – the study of birds.

Most of Professor Hockey's research focused on coastal and estuarine bird ecology. He led research expeditions to Chile, the Canary Island, Mauritius, the Seychelles, Kenya, Madagascar, the Arabian Gulf and Namibia.

UCT Vice-Chancellor Dr Max Price said in a tribute to Professor Hockey earlier this month: "To the thousands of students who have passed through his classes, Professor Hockey was guru, kind father-figure, field supervisor and teacher. He was a much-loved member of UCT." Dr Price added: "The Fitztitute (as many of its friends call it) is one of UCT's two Department of Science & Technology/National Research Foundation Centres of Excellence, and Professor Hockey, as its Director, was one of those who made it a powerhouse of important science and one of the top three in the world."

Dr Rob Little, the manager of the Centre of Excellence at the Percy FitzPatrick Institute, said: "Professor Hockey's impact and leadership in ornithology has been exemplary, and is appreciated by a wide range of the ornithological sector. He will be remembered for his vast contribution to the avian literature, both scientific and popular. He touched the hearts and lives of many people, from deeply insightful discussions about birds to warm interactions on life itself," said Dr Little.

Professor Hockey's research included the ecology of bird movement and migration, as well as avian life history evolution, with the aim of analysing and predicting avian responses to climate change, as well as promoting appropriate conservation strategies.

While he was highly respected by his academic colleagues for his research, Professor Hockey also frequently presented public lectures as well as keynote addresses at conferences. He was often interviewed on radio and television. He was a co-author of the best-selling regional field guide, *Sasol Birds of Southern Africa*, and editor-in-chief, along with Richard Dean and Peter Ryan, of the seventh edition of *Roberts – Birds of Southern Africa*.

Professor Hockey was born in England in 1956 and obtained his BSc honours degree in Ecological Science at Edinburgh University in 1977. He moved to South Africa and joined the Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology in 1979. He obtained his PhD from UCT in 1983 for a study of the ecology of the African Black Oystercatcher.

He was appointed the institute's director in July 2008 and was a member of advisory services of 17 learned societies, councils and steering committees. During his time at the institute, 33 MSc students and 18 PhD students under his supervision were awarded their degrees, while their research has been widely disseminated.

In 2008, Professor Hockey was awarded the Stevenson-Hamilton Medal of the Zoological Society of Southern Africa for contributions to the public awareness of science. He was also earlier named the Marine and Coastal Communicator of the Year by the South African Network for Coastal and Oceanic Research.

UCT extend condolences to Professor Hockey's wife, Samantha.

Details of the memorial service are not yet available.

ENDS

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