

JOHN LAWTON

CIEEM Medal 2017

for

Outstanding, highly influential and life-long contribution to ecology and environmental management

The prestigious CIEEM Medal is awarded in 2017 to Professor Sir John Hartley Lawton CBE FRS in recognition of his outstanding, highly influential and life-long contribution to ecology and environmental management. Throughout his long and prestigious career, John Lawton has made an extraordinary contribution to ecology and environmental management.

Research, Practice and Innovation

John Lawton attended the University of Durham where, in the Department of Zoology, he gained a first-class Bachelor of Science degree and then completed a PhD. Following his doctorate, he was Demonstrator in Ecology in the Department of Zoology at the University of Oxford from 1968 before moving to the University of York in 1971 where he was awarded a Personal Chair in 1985.

In 1989, John founded and was the first Director of the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) Centre for Population Biology at Imperial College London. At Imperial, he promoted the Ecotron Controlled Environment Facility which produced extremely innovative experiments linking biodiversity, climate change, population dynamics and ecosystem processes. John is regarded by many as a pioneer for his work with large, controlled environment facilities that address key environmental issues in ways that are often impossible in field experiments.

His research interests have focused on the population dynamics and biodiversity of birds and insects, with a recent emphasis on the impacts of global environmental change on wild plants and animals. John has published over 320 scientific papers, articles and book chapters, including 17 in the prestigious international journal *Nature* and seven in the equally prestigious international journal *Science*. He has written or edited six books. He has supervised 48 successful PhD students.

During his illustrious career, John has been awarded many honours. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1989 and was knighted by the Queen in 2005. He has received no less than six honorary degrees. Prestigious awards and prizes include: the Marsh Ecology Award in 1996 from the Marsh Christian Trust and the British Ecological Society to recognise an outstanding current research record which is having a very significant impact on the development of the science of ecology and its application; the Frink Medal in 1998 from the Zoological Society of London for significant and original contributions by a professional zoologist to the development of zoology; the international Japan Prize in 2004 “for observational, experimental and theoretical achievements for the scientific understanding and conservation of biodiversity”; the Ramon Margalef Prize in Ecology in 2006, which is awarded annually to recognize an exceptional scientific career or discovery in the field of ecology or other environmental science; and the RSPB Medal in 2011 for his contributions to wild bird protection and countryside conservation. He was elected as a Foreign Member of both the US National Academy of Sciences and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2008.

Organisational Development and Capacity-Building

John Lawton is outstanding in his ability to lead, develop and build capacity in organisations that range from national to grass-roots bodies. This desire to be involved at all levels is exceptional.

He founded the Centre for Population Biology at Imperial College London and was Chief Executive of the Natural Environment Research Council from 1999 to 2005. Currently he is President of the Institution of Environmental Sciences and has made major contributions to many national and local environmental NGOs including the RSPB (past Chairman, current Vice-President), the British Trust for Ornithology (past Vice-President), the British Ecological Society (past President), the World Wide Fund for Nature-UK (Life Fellow), the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust (current President) and the York Ornithological Club (current President).

He has been awarded many honorary positions including being Visiting Professor or Fellow at the Natural History Museum London, the Institute for Ecosystem Studies in New York, the University of York, and Imperial College London.

Influencing Policy

John Lawton was the Chief Executive of the Natural Environment Research Council from 1999 to 2005 whose mission is to gather and apply knowledge, create understanding and predict the behaviour of the natural environment and its resources. He was appointed as the Chairman of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution from 2005 until it was wound up in 2011 by the Coalition Government. The Commission has been credited with very significant developments in environmental policy and legislation in the UK.

John led the panel of eminent experts who generated the official review of England’s protected areas which was published in 2010 as *Making Space for Nature*. John redrafted the report in his own words using plain English to ensure that the final report was accessible to all. Launching the report in September 2010, he said: “There is compelling evidence that England’s collection of wildlife sites are generally too small and too isolated, leading to declines in many of England’s characteristic species. With climate change, the situation is likely to get worse. This is bad news for wildlife but also bad news for us, because the damage to nature also means our natural environment is less able to provide the many services upon which we depend. We need more space for nature.” This review has been very influential in government thinking with the establishment of Nature Improvement Areas and Local Nature Partnerships in England. The powerful concepts in this report are applied to England but can be transferred to any geographical area. This exceptional report sets out the future direction for nature conservation in the UK in the same way as earlier highly influential reports: *Conservation of Nature in England and Wales* (Command 7122, 1947), *A Nature Conservation Review* (1977) and *Nature Conservation in Great Britain* (1984).

Extending Public Understanding

The Lawton report *Making Space for Nature* summarises the essence of what needs to be done to enhance the resilience and coherence of ecological networks in four words: More, Bigger, Better and Joined. This mantra has caught the imagination of the public whose whole-hearted support for protecting wildlife is crucial if our current biodiversity legislation and policy framework are to be maintained, let alone augmented, in the face of the challenges that will surely come.

John has contributed as scientific advisor and commentator on the BBC documentary series *State of the Planet* in 2000, and as scientific advisor and presenter on the BBC QED series episode in 1985 entitled *The 300-Million Years War* which highlighted the “never-ending battle between two of nature’s superpowers: the insects and the plants”.

He is an outstanding public speaker with a wonderful sense of humour who is in great demand by the environmental sector. At CIEEM’s annual conference in 2015, John gave a superb talk about rewilding where he used a trip to the large exclusion zone around the site of the Chernobyl nuclear reactor disaster to provide ecological arguments about allowing natural recolonization and regeneration to take place.

John has a real ability to talk clearly and directly about complex environmental issues. An active CIEEM Patron, his superb presentation at our 25th Anniversary celebrations in 2016 addressed the challenges and opportunities in a post-Brexit world and the role of the profession in shaping that future.

Stephanie Wray CEcol CEnv FCIEEM, President