



UCL colleagues, students and friends; friends and collaborators of Ben; Members of Ben's family.

On behalf of UCL I am very pleased to welcome you all to this very special event to mark the life and career of Dr Ben Collen.

Many of us in the College have been devastated to lose such a close and well-loved colleague, and I know this has been especially hard for his own research group - his staff and students. We arranged this event to celebrate the work that Ben did, and as a way to show our appreciation for all that he did in research and teaching here at UCL. We wish to formally mark the very important part that he played in the life of the college.

Ben joined UCL as a lecturer in 2013. He was one of the founder members of the Centre for Biodiversity and Environment Research, and played a key role in setting the tone and direction for the way that centre has grown and developed in its first 5 years. Ben came here with a strong track record of having developed new statistical tools and techniques, databases and indicators that provided new and high quality information on the way that biodiversity is changing across the world, and the influence that people have on wild species. The statistical measures of biodiversity that Ben first developed while he was based at the Institute of Zoology remain some of the best available for scientists, conservation managers, and politicians. His great credibility as a scientist and his consummate skills as a communicator were influential in ensuring that these tools were rapidly adopted and used in international conventions as well as by national policy-makers and the conservation NGOs.

Ben applied for the academic post here at UCL because he had decided that he wanted to pursue his work in an academic setting. He loved the applied aspects of his work, and he wanted to continue to influence major conservation decisions. But he was also at heart an academic. He loved the natural world and relished the prospect of learning more about it, he enjoyed the challenge of new problems and especially he loved to solve them. He wanted his research to go wherever observations and data took it, and he had become impatient with needing to focus on certain kinds of projects that were popular or fundable while he had much more interesting ideas he wanted to pursue. He embarked on his research career at UCL with his characteristic energy, whole-heartedness, good humour and intellectual curiosity.

Of course with all that going on he quickly built a large and energetic research group, including many different field and computational projects. The work of his group is a testament to his broad interests in wildlife, conservation technology, computation and travel to distant and exotic places. It is great to see so many of his students and collaborators past and present here today. Ben raised substantial research funding to support his own ideas and those projects are now up and running.



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Ben also revolutionised undergraduate field ecology teaching, especially his efforts to reinvigorate the field centre at Blakeney Point in Norfolk, and several groups of first year undergraduates will attest to the remarkable experiences they had there as they embarked on their undergraduate degrees.

In short, Ben did everything that UCL expects of an academic, and much more besides. He was promoted to Reader in 2015 and we were all looking forward to the next steps in his career when it was so cruelly cut short.

Ben was everyone's friend, mentor, supporter and advisor. His effortless charm, great common sense and delightful sense of humour meant he was a natural go-to person on almost any issue. He is sorely missed. While all his colleagues and friends are still feeling bereft at his passing, I sense a steely determination not to let the great work that he did, nor his lasting influence on so many young researchers, be forgotten. I know that many of you here will carry Ben's work and his wonderful ways of working and interacting with people into your own careers. We at UCL will certainly do everything we can to preserve the spirit and style that marked him out as one of the very best of us.

Professor Geraint Rees FMedSci  
Dean of the UCL Faculty of Life Sciences