

Welcome everybody – if I could please have your attention.

I'm Richard Pearson and I'd like to very warmly welcome you all to this event in memory of Ben Collen.

There has been an astounding outpouring of grief since Ben's death. I'm sure you will have seen the countless tributes and comments that have been made online – in emails, on Twitter, on webpages – from friends and colleagues all over the world. They all relate similar sentiments: Ben was a brilliant scientist, a passionate conservationist, a generous and caring mentor, an entertaining office-mate, and a wonderful friend. The online tributes are fantastic, but we wanted to create this opportunity for those at UCL and in the London area to gather in person to remember Ben.

It's a reflection of the high esteem in which we all hold Ben that so many have gathered here today. We are joined by friends and colleagues from UCL's Centre for Biodiversity and Environment Research; from the broader Department of Genetics, Evolution and Environment; from across the Division of Biosciences; and from UCL's senior management; as well as by our close colleagues at the Institute of Zoology and several other institutions. We've also received sincere apologies from a number of people who would have loved to join us but are unfortunately unable, including some of Ben's students who are off doing exciting and important work in far off places – exactly as you would expect from Ben's students.

I'd like to especially welcome several members of Ben's family: Ben's wife Alanna is here, his mum Christine Fulcher, his sister and niece Jessica and Lucy Adcock, and Alanna's parents Martin and Elizabeth Maltby. We are very glad you are here with us today, and hope you will value having the opportunity to chat with many of Ben's colleagues to get a sense of just how respected and admired he was in his work environment.

I will hand over to the Dean in a few moments to say a few words, and then we'll hear from some of Ben's close colleagues and students, including Ellie Dyer who will present a gift to the family on behalf of all of us.

Before that, I'd just like to note – if you haven't already seen on your way in – that the UCL flag is flying at half-mast over the main quad today as a mark of respect for Ben. You can see that by heading just outside here and looking up above the main building.

So, I now invite the Dean of the Faculty of Life Sciences Professor Geraint Rees to speak on behalf of UCL.

Thank you.

Professor Richard Pearson