

Pressemitteilung

Leibniz-Institut für Zoo- und Wildtierforschung (IZW) im Forschungsverbund Berlin e.V. Jan Zwilling

24.04.2025

<http://idw-online.de/de/news851131>

Personalia
Biologie, Politik, Tier / Land / Forst, Umwelt / Ökologie
überregional



**Leibniz-Institut für Zoo-
und Wildtierforschung**
IM FORSCHUNGSVERBUND BERLIN E.V.

Founding Director of the Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research, Prof Reinhold R Hofmann, has passed away

According to his family, the veterinarian scientist Prof Dr Reinhold R Hofmann passed away on 30 March 2025 at the age of 92. Hofmann worked at Justus Liebig University Giessen (JLU), in Kenya, the USA and finally back at JLU. In 1992, Hofmann was appointed as founding director of the Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research (Leibniz-IZW) in Berlin and the first professor for Interdisciplinary Zoo and Wildlife Science in Germany at the Freie Universität Berlin. He headed the Leibniz-IZW until his retirement at the end of 1999.

Reinhold Hofmann was born on 24 April 1932 in Ilmenau (Thuringia) and, after fleeing the Soviet occupation zone, studied veterinary medicine at Justus Liebig University Giessen (JLU), where he subsequently worked as a research assistant at the Institute of Veterinary Anatomy and obtained his doctorate in 1962. In the same year, Hofmann was appointed as a lecturer at the Royal College Nairobi in Kenya, where, as a member of an international research team, he founded and built up the new Kenyan Veterinary Faculty at the University of Nairobi. After taking the advanced degree of "Habilitation" in 1966, he was appointed Professor and Head of the Institute of Veterinary Anatomy at this faculty in 1967. Following his formative time in Kenya, he held a visiting professorship at Harvard University in the USA from 1969 to 1971 with a scholarship from the Rockefeller Foundation. The focus of his scientific work there was the elucidation of the ultrastructure of the digestive tract of several African mammalian herbivore species. Hofmann used the newly developed electron microscope for his research, which was used for the first time for such questions. Accepting an appointment as Professor of Veterinary Anatomy, he returned to the JLU in Giessen and its Institute of Veterinary Anatomy, Histology and Embryology at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, where he served as dean for many years.

Hofmann was appointed founding director of the Leibniz-IZW on 1 January 1992. He led the institute through the founding process before taking up his post as director of the new institute on 17 November 1992, which he headed until his retirement on 31 December 1999. As founding director, he gave the new institute its name and established the abbreviation "IZW", which is now recognised worldwide. Hofmann mastered the challenge of bringing together the staff of the Leibniz-IZW's predecessor institute with new colleagues and initiating the development of a shared vision for the new institute. Together with his staff, he developed a new holistic research approach for the young field of wildlife research and thus provided decisive international impetus for this increasingly important field of research. An important milestone for the institute was the first evaluation by the German Science and Humanities Council (Wissenschaftsrat) in 1998, in which it was confirmed that Hofmann's approach of a "holistic perspective" for wildlife research was the right one, as it represented the perspectives of both veterinary medicine and biology and combined them in a meaningful way.

Reinhold Hofmann, known to his friends and colleagues as "Reino", will always be remembered as an active and passionate scientist. Ever since his dissertation, Hofmann had a special relationship with Africa –its wildlife and its people. As part of his doctorate and "Habilitation", he worked particularly intensively on East African ruminants such as the African buffalo, impala and gerenuk, as well as species native to Europe such as roe deer, red deer and moose. With countless publications, he gained a reputation as a scholar for anatomical, morphological-functional and finally also physiological-ecological research. The now globally accepted scientific categorisation of mammalian herbivore feeding

types goes back to Hofmann.

Hofmann lectured in more than 30 countries, supervised almost 60 PhD students in Nairobi, Giessen and Berlin – including the first female doctoral student in veterinary anatomy in Nairobi and later Nobel Peace Prize winner Prof Wangari Maathai – and remained an active part of the scientific community during his retirement with several visiting professorships in Thailand and China. Hofmann was particularly interested in advancing the academic careers of young scientists and enabled them to spend time in important centres of wildlife research such as the USA, the United Kingdom and South Africa through generous funding programmes. In 2019, the German Veterinary Medical Society (Deutsche Veterinärmedizinische Gesellschaft) awarded Hofmann the prestigious Martin Lerche Science Prize for his scientific lifetime achievements and his outstanding commitment to the field of topography and morphology of the stomach of domestic and wild ruminant species. With this research, he laid the foundations for a better understanding of the evolutionary adaptations of the digestive tract of ruminants, taking into account the eco-physiological context. In addition to his scientific work, Reinhold Hofmann was a talented draughtsman and photographer and published the impressive book (in German) on ‘Wildlife in pictures of comparative anatomy’.

The Leibniz-IZW extends its deepest sympathies to Reinhold Hofmann's family. We will honour the memory of ‘Reino’ as a person and his work as founding director of the institute.

wissenschaftliche Ansprechpartner:

Prof Dr Jörns Fickel
Director and Head of the Department of Evolutionary Genetics
Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research (Leibniz-IZW)
Alfred-Kowalke-Str. 17, 10315 Berlin, Deutschland
phone: +49(0)30 5168100
email: fickel@izw-berlin.de