**CITATION: JOHN DAWSON SKINNER for D Sc (Honoris Causa)**

No one has done more to focus the attention of the South Africans on zoology , whether it be game farmers, agricultural extension officers, or visitors to the Kruger National Park, or making the international research community aware of South African mammalogy, than has John Dawson Skinner. That vocation has required multiple skills. He is a physiologist: animal physiology was a discipline of his PhD at Cambridge University. His publication list attests to his international expertise on the hormones of puberty, and of reproduction in livestock and game animals. It is therefore fitting that the Faculty of Health Sciences honours.

He was schooled at St. John’s College, and has maintained a lifelong attachment to his school. He took his first degree, in animal science, at the then University of Natal, in 1955. He then accepted a job, the title of which would have not presaged his illustrious later career: “assistant professional officer to the acting officer in charge” of the Mara Research Station. What that job did instil, though, was a lifelong commitment to the livestock industry in South Africa. In the research literature, his interests ranged from studies on the effect of male hormones on growth in piglets to his cardinal contribution to the science behind the successes, and the failures, of farming game as a source of meat for Africa. But, his commitment to the livestock industry has extended far beyond research papers. He has engaged enthusiastically with the agricultural sector: he is as much at home addressing a farmers’ day in Omaruru, Namibia, as he is on the stage at international mammalogy conferences.

After seven years at Mara, Professor Skinner was seconded for postgraduate studies at the University of Pretoria (UP). His first encounter with UP, at which he has spent most of his career was 46 years ago. He pursued his PhD at Cambridge, and was then appointed at the Irene Animal Production Institute, with another inauspicious title: “senior professional officer to the chief professional officer of the Division of Reproductive Physiology”. In 1972, he was appointed Director of the Mammal Research Institute at the UP, a post which he held for 26 years. He made that institute the best-known centre for mammal research in Africa, and one of the best known in the world. For many of the years when he was Director of the Mammal Research Institute, he also headed the Department of Zoology at the UP. Most of the more than 350 original scientific papers, that have made him so well known to mammalogists throughout the world, emanated from his time at the Mammal Research Institute, as did the more than 100 PhD and dissertation Masters students whom he supervised.

There is no better hallmark of a University teacher at a research-based institution than the success of the subsequent careers of his or her students. Nineteen of Skinner’s students, or postgraduate fellows, have become professors at universities and four have become Deans of Science. Famous names amongst those whose prestigious careers were steered by John Skinner include Professor Bob Millar, director of the illustrious UK MRC’s Unit of Reproductive Physiology in Edinburgh;, Professor Albert van Jaarsveld, now President of the National Research Foundation; Professor Graham Kerley, Director of the Centre for African Conservation Ecology at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University; Professor Terry Robinson, biochemist now at the University of Stellenbosch; and Professor Rudi van Aarde, South Africa’s best-known elephant scientist.

His students’ careers have not been confined to academia: Anthony Hall-Martin, formerly Deputy Director of SanParks,;Dr Pat Condy, formerly Director of Conservation of the Johannesburg City Council; and and Malan Lindeque, Director-General of National Parks in Namibia, also were his students.

While at the UP, and, since his retirement from the Directorship of the Mammal Research Institute and appointment as Professor Extraordinaire in the University’s Faculty of Veterinary Sciences at Onderstepoort (from where he has published some 50 other papers), John Skinner has continued his advocacy for zoology.

He has edited South African scientific journals, and written more than 150 popular papers about our mammals. He has been Chairman of the Council of the National Zoological Gardens. He has written or edited several books about South African’s mammals, of which “Mammals of the Southern African Sub-region” is best known. That book had its origin in an erudite, much smaller, volume written by Dr Reay Smithers in Zimbabwe, but John Skinner has been the force behind the later editions. Apart from editing these editions, he has introduced material from more than 4000 additional scientific papers, and raised the finances necessary for the book’s publication. It is on the shelves of zoology libraries throughout the world and many individuals with an interest in African mammalogy own a copy, .

Congruent with his advocacy of zoology, Skinner has carried a massive load in scientific professional activities, both internationally and nationally. Nationally, he has been President of the Royal Society of South Africa, and President of the Zoological Society of South Africa. Internationally, he was for ten years the Chairman of the Hyena Specialist Group of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, and, amongst many other appointments, has been a consultant to: the Australian CSIRO and the Chinese Academy of Science; and a scientific assessor for the: National Science Foundation (USA), National Environmental Research Council (UK), Leverhulme Trust (UK) and Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (Germany). He is a member of the Russian Academy of Science. He also has made an immeasurable contribution to Southern African universities; he has been external examiner at postgraduate and undergraduate level at nine universities in South Africa.

We are not the first to recognize Professor Skinner’s distinction. He is a Life Scientific Fellow of the Zoological Society of London, and a Life Fellow of the Institute of Biology, London. He has been elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of South Africa and a Life Member of the Zoological Society of South Africa and the Wildlife Management Association of South Africa. He has been awarded the Gold Medal of the Zoological Society of South Africa, and the Senior Captain Scott Medal of the Biological Society of South Africa. His contribution to science advocacy was recognized by the Merit Award of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science. As early as 1972, he was voted, by the Junior Chamber of Commerce, as one of the Four Outstanding Young South Africans of the year.

Through his contribution to science in South Africa, to the production of highly competent leaders of science in South Africa and other countries world-wide, and to scholarship, which has been seminal in biology, Professor Skinner clearly warrants receipt of the one award which Professor Skinner has not received: an honorary degree.

It is particularly fitting that our University should be the first to honour him in that way. He has had a long association with Wits. For more than 35 years, he has been external examiner for undergraduate, Honours and research postgraduate students in our University. He was a member of the management committee of our Primate Behaviour Group, and of the Board of Control of the Brain Function Research Group. Our own distinguished ecologist, Professor Norman Owen-Smith, undertook a postdoctoral fellowship with Professor Skinner. For ten years, he has had an ongoing, fruitful research collaboration with Emeritus Professor Graham Mitchell, former Head of our School of Physiology.

John Skinner has been, and still is, a famous name in the world of mammalogy. He has worked tirelessly to promote not just the discipline of zoology but all of professional science in South Africa, with audiences ranging from science councils to game farmers. He has left a cohort of distinguished protégés, in and out of academia. He is a lifelong friend of Wits.