



## ADVENTURES IN ANTHROPOLOGY

### ROBERT MARTIN

---

Robert (“Bob”) Martin was born in London, England in 1942. He is a biological anthropologist who began with a zoology degree (1964) and followed with a doctorate in animal behaviour (1967), both at the University of Oxford. His first academic appointment was at the Anthropology Department of University College London in 1969. During 17 years spent in London, he also held posts as Senior Research Fellow at the Zoological Society of London (1974–1978), as Visiting Professor at Yale University and as Visiting Professor at the Musée de l’Homme, Paris. From 1986 to 2001, he served as Director of the Anthropological Institute in Zurich, Switzerland. He then held posts at the Field Museum in Chicago, initially as Provost (2001–2006) and then as A. Watson Armour III Curator of Biological Anthropology (2006–2013). Since becoming Emeritus Curator at the end of 2013, he has continued to teach at the University of Chicago, where he holds adjunct appointments. – Address: Science and Education, The Field Museum, 1400 South Lake Shore Drive, Chicago, IL 60605, USA.

E-mail: [rdmartin@fieldmuseum.org](mailto:rdmartin@fieldmuseum.org), web: [robertdmartin.wix.com/how-we-do-it](http://robertdmartin.wix.com/how-we-do-it)

As so often happens in life, while making arrangements for my Fellowship at Wiko I was torn between two competing strong desires. On the one hand, I really wanted to benefit to the full from the superb academic environment provided at Wiko. On the other, as a university professor who truly enjoys teaching, I was very reluctant to skip a year in teaching my undergraduate course *Reproductive Biology of Primates* at the University of Chicago. In the end, thanks to the understanding and flexibility shown by Wiko, a compromise was reached that enabled me to have the best of both worlds – six months of autumn and

winter at Wiko followed by three months of springtime in Chicago. But everything comes at a cost, and in this case it took the form of great sadness when the time came for me to leave Berlin in the middle of March 2015 rather than in July. By that stage, I had made many new friends at Wiko and had become adjusted (addicted?) to a uniquely enjoyable lifestyle. So I would strongly advise any future Fellow to aim to spend the entire academic year at Wiko if at all possible. Writing this report in early July, as the academic year 2014/15 draws to a close, I am now filled with acute regret that I cannot share the farewell events with my new friends.

Over the course of my 44-year academic career up to retirement in 2013 – the initial 32 years in university environments and the final twelve in a natural history museum – I should in principle have been eligible for six separate periods of extended sabbatical leave. But for various reasons, I never had a single proper sabbatical, although I did have two short periods free of routine duties: a three-month spell at the Musée de l’Homme in Paris and a one-month sojourn at the University of Cambridge. So my Fellowship at Wiko was, in effect, a *post hoc* sabbatical, the first real period of intensive academic rejuvenation in my entire career. And it was such a rewarding experience that I now particularly rue the fact that it took me so long to get my act together. Yet it was certainly not too late to do so. Despite my formal “retirement”, I aim to keep active in academic circles for many years to come, and my Fellowship at Wiko was an excellent launching pad from which to embark, in a refreshed and ambitious spirit, on this new phase in my life.

The primary benefit of my Fellowship was the enormous freedom provided to pursue my research interests without constraint and at my own pace. And this independent activity was greatly facilitated by the outstandingly good support system provided at Wiko. This took care of all of my basic needs, ranging from computer equipment through library resources and on to administrative backup across the board. All of my requests were fulfilled with incredible efficiency, exceeding anything that I had ever experienced before.

My research at Wiko was focussed on my current primary interest in the evolution of human reproduction. This is directly connected with a successful book for a general readership that I published two years ago, in June 2013, under the title *How We Do It: The Evolution and Future of Human Reproduction*. My aim at Wiko was to conduct in-depth research on a series of specific topics relating to human reproduction, with the ultimate goal of producing a more academic book with in-text references and illustrations. Thanks to the very congenial working environment, I was able to make excellent progress on the

background research that I had planned. Unexpectedly, however, an opportunity arose for me to publish a German-language version of my book, on the understanding that I would produce a draft translation myself. Despite all of the other activities in which I was engaged at Wiko, I managed to complete the translation during the period of my Fellowship, and the German translation (following skilled editing) will be published by Librum Publishers & Editors (Switzerland) later this year under the title *Alles begann mit Sex*. After lecturing and conducting administration in German at the University of Zurich for 15 years, I had thought that my knowledge of the language was pretty advanced. However, meeting the challenge of translating an entire book from English into German (rather than the other way around, where I already have considerable experience) impelled me to an even higher level. Wiko provided an ideal working environment for me to complete this challenging task.

In direct connection with publication of the English version of my book, in spring 2013 I accepted an invitation from *Psychology Today* to write a regular monthly blog, which has now been running for a little more than two years. I continued producing contributions for the blog while at Wiko, posting six new items during my Fellowship dealing with a variety of topics. In fact, I was able to strengthen this activity considerably and significantly raised the level of interest, accumulating a total of over 33,000 “hits” during the six-month period. Information on these new blog postings was circulated to all other Fellows, leading to numerous fruitful discussions. In fact, one of the great strengths of Wiko is that it encourages the spontaneous organization of discussion groups, and during my Fellowship I participated in regular rewarding meetings that addressed social media.

Immediately prior to taking up my Fellowship at Wiko, I had just completed work with Global Science Productions on a documentary film linked to my book, produced by Elliott Haimoff. This film, entitled *The Nature of Sex*, is now under contract with a major distributor in the USA, seeking nationwide TV outlets in the USA. I received advance copies of the documentary film soon after I arrived at Wiko. These allowed me to make a well-attended public presentation at the Natural History Museum in Berlin and subsequently to organize two showings at Wiko at the request of other Fellows.

I knew before arriving in Berlin that the broad-based selection of Fellows would guarantee a strong interdisciplinary flavour, which I found extremely appealing. In the event, that interdisciplinary framework proved to be even more stimulating than I had expected. Attendance at the weekly colloquia (one of the few explicit requirements for Fellows at Wiko) proved to be both stimulating and enlightening, despite my initial unfamiliarity

with the subject matter in most cases. Discussions over lunches and dinners considerably reinforced cross-disciplinary interactions, usually setting out from a discussion of recent colloquia. A further strong point of the selection of Fellows was the inclusion of many younger individuals, who made valuable contributions while benefiting from incidental mentoring by more established academics such as me.

Naturally, I was particularly drawn to discussions with other biologists among the Fellows, although such interactions also covered an unusually wide spectrum. I had many long and fruitful discussions, but I feel compelled to highlight the interactions that I had with two other Fellows in particular. The first was Onur Güntürkün, who gave a brilliant Ernst Mayr Lecture overviewing his research while I was in Berlin. Because of our shared interests in the evolution of the brain, we were naturally drawn to discuss this and other topics. Indeed, we spent several wonderful evenings together deep in discussion. It is no exaggeration to say that Onur's profound investigations of brain evolution in birds have radically reoriented my own thoughts about brain evolution in mammals (especially primates). The other Fellow with whom I interacted especially frequently was Jannie Hofmeyr. His colloquium exploring parallels between the functional network of DNA and language was a prime example of the superb presentations given by Fellows at Wiko, epitomizing his broad-based approach to biology. I found our numerous discussions hugely enriching, but in fact I now have a special reason to be grateful both to Jannie and to Wiko. During one of our discussions, Jannie mentioned his connection with the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS) in South Africa and encouraged me to apply for a Fellowship there. In the meantime, I have been formally accepted as a Fellow at STIAS for the last three months of 2016. Following the truly wonderful experience that I had at Wiko, I can hardly wait to benefit from a similar programme at Stellenbosch in 2016!