

## Obituary for John Russell Twiss, Jr.

(1938-2009)



It is with great sadness that *Aquatic Mammals* has learned of the passing of a prominent marine mammal conservationist, John Russell Twiss, Jr. Many in the marine mammal field will remember his key role as the Executive Director of the Marine Mammal

Commission during the 1970s and 1980s, a period when the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 was established and revised. Mr. Twiss was very skilled at conveying the importance of marine mammal conservation to members of the U.S. Congress, which greatly influenced the success of legislation to protect marine mammals. For further details about the role of the Marine Mammal Commission, see the "Historical Perspectives" piece by Robert (Bob) Hofman, Ph.D., in *Aquatic Mammals* 2009, 35(1), 94-124, DOI 10.1578/AM.35.1.2009.

John Russell Twiss, Jr., 71, died July 23 in The Plains, Virginia, after a long battle with Parkinson's disease. He is survived by his wife Mary of The Plains and three children, John of Houston, Texas, Alison of New York, New York, and Emily of Boston, Massachusetts. He is also survived by a brother and sister.

Mr. Twiss was born in New York City. He graduated from Phillips Exeter and Yale University. His lifelong commitment to ocean and marine conservation began early in his career when he joined the National Science Foundation, where he managed scientific research in the Antarctic. He then joined the NSF's Office of Ocean Exploration, where he led research-based expeditions. In 1974, Mr. Twiss became the first Executive Director of the Marine Mammal Commission, a new and independent government agency dedicated to the protection of marine mammals. He served in this role, shaping all aspects of the Commission, for 26 years until he retired in 2000. His dedication to the survival of marine mammals and healthy oceans

helped save species such as the Hawaiian monk seal, the West Indian manatee, the North Atlantic right whale and the California sea otter.

Mr. Twiss was a strong proponent of stewardship of the land through youth education. He served on the board of the Student Conservation Association from 1986 through 2009 as a board member, chairman, and chairman emeritus. During his tenure on the board, he offered outstanding leadership while drawing on his commitment to preserving our environment and building the next generation of conservation leaders. He oversaw unprecedented growth in land protection programs and inspired thousands of young people to service. He was instrumental in the development of the Island School and Cape Eleuthera Institute, serving as a board member for both for 11 years. Mr. Twiss served on numerous other boards, including those of the Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Fellowship at Harvard University, the Ocean Conservancy, and the Marine Conservation Biology Institute.

Mr. Twiss received the Founders Award in 2000 from the Student Conservation Association and the John Phillips Award in 2002 from his alma mater Phillips Exeter for his service to his country, extraordinary leadership, and invaluable contributions to ocean and environmental conservation. The Board on Geographic Names designated an Antarctic mountain as Mount Twiss, and the Society for Marine Mammalogy established the John R. Twiss, Jr. Award for Innovative Research.

Mr. Twiss was a member of The Army Navy Club, The Metropolitan Club, the Squadron A Association, and the Scraggy Neck Rescue Team.

A memorial service was held August 13th at St. John's Church, Washington, DC. Contributions in Mr. Twiss's memory may be made to the Student Conservation Association, Vicki Cota/JRT, P.O. Box 550, Charlestown, NH 03603-0550, USA.