

"I look forward to cycling and cold weather"

Dr Marc-Alain Widdowson started as ITM's new director.

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Dit is de omschrijving

New ITM Director Marc-Alain Widdowson swapped Nairobi for Antwerp. He shares his first thoughts about joining the Institute and moving to a moderate sea climate with P³.

Born in France, and raised between the United Kingdom and France, Marc-Alain Widdowson was instilled with an international outlook very early on. Widdowson later studied anthropology and veterinary medicine at the University of Cambridge. He also completed an MSc Communicable Disease Epidemiology at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. His career took him around the world, starting as a wildlife epidemiologist for the UK Department for International Development in Zimbabwe. "That involved fun things, like darting buffaloes from helicopters," Widdowson says smilingly.

A next adventure saw him chasing and capturing vampire bats in Bolivia. His career took a more mainstream public health turn when he moved to Utrecht, where he worked for RIVM, the Dutch National Institute for Public Health as a European Program for Intervention Epidemiology Training Fellow. After two years in the Netherlands, Widdowson crossed the Atlantic to join the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) where he has worked for the past 18 years. "In Atlanta, I studied enteric viruses, influenza and Ebola. Four years ago, I moved to Nairobi to lead a group working on a wide range of projects in research and capacity building."

The experience as Director of the Division of Global Health Protection at CDC-Kenya turned out to be a stepping-stone for Widdowson's new role as ITM Director. "I have grown into my managerial role, in ways that I didn't even expect. While working at ITM will be different in many ways, the scope and breadth of scientific programme management is similar, though much bigger," Widdowson explains. "Leading an organisation like ITM is simply an exciting opportunity. It has a truly international environment and a tremendous reputation. As I have shared the news of my move to ITM, people I have known for years have told me enthusiastically about the courses they followed in Antwerp, or their collaborations with ITM researchers. That says a lot about the positive contribution the Institute makes through teaching, research and capacity building throughout the world."

Going forward, Widdowson sees both continuity and change, strengthening the Institute's core activities and responding to health trends. "We don't want to stray from what we are good at. We will keep strengthening the work that has built ITM's strong reputation over the years and especially look to expand partnerships. At the same time, we need to monitor health trends and adapt to emerging issues. We have seen tremendous progress in global public health, like in childhood mortality for example, but it's not only good news. Think of the emergence of antibiotic resistance, or the spread of vectors capable of spreading disease."

Moving from Nairobi to Antwerp also implies a significant change in daily routines. "I look forward to doing lots of cycling and to the cold weather. I miss the changing of the seasons and getting on my bike to go to the shops, which I couldn't really do - either in Nairobi or Atlanta. Mountain biking is a passion of mine, so I will look for Belgium's hilly parts in my time off. My family and I are eager to explore the country and life in Europe. My wife and two youngest daughters will move to Antwerp with me, while my eldest daughter will start university in the UK."

P³ article



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