

Dr. Asit Das (1966–2025): An Indian Animal Nutritionist with Distinguished Contributions to Zoo and Wildlife Nutrition

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Dr. Asit Das, an eminent scientist known for his pioneering work in zoo animal nutrition, passed away on 29 July 2025 at the age of 59. At the time of his demise, he was serving as Principal Scientist at ICAR–Indian Veterinary Research Institute, Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh. Born on 01 Jan 1966 at Agartala, Tripura, Dr Das obtained his Bachelor of Veterinary Science and Animal Husbandry from Orissa University of Agriculture and Technology, Bhubaneswar, Odisha in 1990, followed by both MSc and PhD from ICAR–National Dairy Research Institute (NDRI), Karnal, Haryana in 1992 and 1997, respectively. He was appointed as Scientist through the Agricultural Research Service of Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) on 13 November 1995 at ICAR Research Complex for North-East Hill Region. Subsequently, Dr Das rose to the ranks of Senior Scientist in 2004 and later Principal Scientist in 2010.

The conventional research in animal nutrition in India and elsewhere focuses largely on productivity enhancement of food-producing animals like domestic ruminants (cattle, buffalo, sheep and goats), monogastrics (pigs, poultry and fish) as well as companion animals (dogs and cats). Contrary to this, Dr Das opted a niche area of research exploring nutritional aspects of captive animals maintained at zoological gardens, national parks, sanctuaries etc. focusing extensively on wildlife feeding and nutrition. He has been credited for systematically initiating studies on understanding digestive physiology, nutritional requirements and associated clinical chemistry for the first time for a range of Indian wild animals. Such works were carried out when Dr Das was associated with Wildlife Section of ICAR–IVRI through both independent projects as well as dissertation works of research scholars. Some of the significant contributions of Dr Das's illustrious career spanning over 20 years include: standardisation of diets of 50 endangered species including establishing nutrient (energy, protein and minerals) requirements of captive Asian elephants, rhinoceros, spotted deer, blackbuck and pheasants. These preliminary data laid the scientific basis for publishing ICAR feeding standards for zoo animals entitled “Nutrient Requirements of Captive Wild Animals” in 2024. Until then, there was no recommended guidelines exclusively for wild animals and subsequently, these first-of-its-kind of feeding standards have been currently widely followed by most zoos in India, helping to scientifically formulate balanced diets for optimum health, welfare and longevity of wild animals. Additionally, since nutritionally balanced diet becomes imperative for *ex-situ* conservation of wild animals, the outcomes of Dr Das's research bear far-reaching implications in wildlife conservation programmes as well (Das, A. *Indian J. Anim. Nutr.*, 2018; **35**, 242–250). Furthermore, the Central Zoo Authority (CZA) has adopted one of the technologies developed by Dr Das's group entitled “Standards, Guidelines and Protocol on Disease Diagnosis and Cure of Wild Animals in Indian Zoos” which is uploaded in CZA website (cza.nic.in) and are being followed by all Indian zoos. Besides, Dr Das served as the member of Health Evaluation Committee of several zoos. In addition to having four ICAR recognised technologies and 128 research papers, Dr Das has guided 12 Master's and 5 doctoral students, published 4 books and 7 technical manuals. Importantly, Dr Das's research team delineated the root cause of continued mortality of vultures, which was attributed to the illegal veterinary use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug diclofenac with nimesulide being the additional potential threat (Saini, M. *et al.*, *Environ. Poll.*, 2012; **160**, 11–16; Cuthbert, R.J. *et al.*, *Oryx*, 2016; **50**, 104–112; perhaps one of his most cited papers).

Dr Das was actively engaged in the professional animal nutrition societies namely, Animal Nutrition Society of India (ANSI) and Animal Nutrition Association (ANA). As a Chief Editor of ANSI's Indian Journal of Animal Nutrition, he enhanced the quality rating of the journal in terms of National Academy of Agricultural Sciences score, which increased from 5.02 to 5.66 during his tenure. Apart from this, he's in the reviewer panel of many prestigious journals such as European Journal of Wildlife Research, Zoo Biology, Journal of Animal Nutrition and Animal Physiology, Mammal Study, Tropical Animal Health and Production as well as Journal of Veterinary Medical Sciences.

For a brief period of 3 years (2018-2021), Dr Das was also posted at ICAR–NDRI, Karnal, where he worked on potential of seaweeds to augment productivity and health attributes whilst beneficially reducing greenhouse gas methane emission in dairy buffaloes. Later, while working as Incharge of Clinical Laboratory of Animal Nutrition Division at ICAR–IVRI, Dr Das developed a seaweed-enriched biscuit to improve antioxidants and immunity for dogs. He was a recipient of many awards, accolades and recognitions from national and international organisations; some of the most notable ones are Dr. K. Pradhan Young Scientist Award of ANSI, Fellow of ANA and Certificate of Appreciation from Royal Society for Protection of Birds, UK.

On a personal front, Dr Das remained a bachelor and was a spiritually devout person, who used to enjoy solitude while travelling to various shrines, possessing deep knowledge on the rich Indian culture and traditional values. Owing to his unique ability to pay attention keenly to specific details in the experiments, scientific brilliance along

with the sharp wit/sense of humour and *joie de vivre* that he carried in his personality, Dr Das had a huge fan following among student and research communities.

With his untimely demise, **Dr Das leaves an indelible mark as a leading researcher in streamlining wildlife and zoo animal nutrition, whose influence on the field will endure for decades to come and continue to inspire future generations.** Dr Das will be tremendously missed by all those who knew him—his colleagues, collaborators, students and mentees—and mourn with a sense of deep loss for Indian Veterinary fraternity in general and Animal Nutrition fraternity in particular.
