

CARING FOR CONSERVATION



Scott Mills is an American wildlife biologist making his mark on the science world through his studies on the effects of climate change on animals. Scott is living up to his dream of conserving wildlife while also selflessly making sure his children are able to experience what they can. Science reporters have been making an effort to talk to him about his breakthroughs in science and luckily, daughter Linnea Mills was able to find a time and chat with him about his own amazing experiences and what he is doing for science.

LINNEA MILLS, PIMLICO STATE HIGH SCHOOL

At a young age most people are unsure of what they want to do with their life. This is not the case for Scott Mills, who knew exactly what he wanted to do from a very young age. Scott grew up in Raleigh, North Carolina. There he found himself as he says “infected by the love of nature.” This drew him to the field of biology – more specifically conserving and researching the environment. Scott Mills now is making a huge impact on the science world by his studies on how snowshoe hares in the northern hemisphere are affected by climate change. He has worked very hard to get where he is today and there’s no doubt it has paid off greatly in his career. He is a strong role model for all young scientists and his two children.

His road to success all started when he gained his undergraduate degree at North Carolina State University in the field of zoology, and his graduate degree in science and wildlife ecology at Utah State University – which put him right on track for his future career in the science field.

“Infected by the love of nature”

After seven years of post high school studies and a six-month internship in Washington D.C., Scott was ready to start his PhD. “The internship convinced me to get my PhD so I could effectively connect science to real change for conservation,” Scott told me. He became the student of Michael Soule; who Scott says is arguably the most famous conservation scientist alive. Scott then researched the effects of logging in the forests of Oregon, USA, earning him a PhD and job opportunities in the science world.

Scott applied for and received job offers from all over the globe – from the University of Wyoming to the University of Queensland in Australia, although there was one offer he couldn’t resist. It was the University of Montana. Scott told me he was instantly in love with the town of Missoula-which makes sense as it is the ideal place for a wildlife biologist; scenic mountains, beautiful forests, and vibrant wildlife. Scott took the job at UM in 1995 as a professor in the wildlife biology program.

Teaching was not all he did. Scott was not only teaching undergraduate and graduate classes but also doing research on animals all over the world. He studied animals such as giant fruit bats in the Philippines with 8-foot wingspans and snow leopards in the Himalayas. “My job

satisfied my sense of adventure, that's for sure," he laughed. Scott's work has taken him all over but the most life-changing adventure to him was the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan – where he has done work for about ten years and he took his family to live in 2008 for six months. There Scott helped develop the first university in Bhutan to study wildlife conservation, the UWICE.

Scott worked at the University of Montana until 2013 when he was offered a job at the North Carolina State University. "My wife Lisa and I both grew up in North Carolina and had become a bit home sick for it there," Scott says, "we decided it was important for our kids to be closer to their relatives, too." So, the Mills family drove 2400 miles (3862 km) to North Carolina and started a new life there. Scott was able to continue his scientific research there and was in charge of a group focusing on global change and sustainability. He was also able to spend time with his parents and reconnect with his five siblings. He loved the job, but his love for the "Montana life" was something he and his family couldn't get out of their head. After three years in North Carolina they decided to go back to Montana.

He came back to the University of Montana not only able to continue his research, but

have a leadership position and guide research in the whole university. This was a big career step and created great opportunities for real, positive change in the world from his research. He is still able to research in different countries as well as still play a bigger role for science in Montana.

Scott's current research project is becoming a global interest for science; more specifically climate change. He is studying how twenty species of birds and mammals all over the northern hemisphere use camouflage to change colors from white in winter to brown in summer. "Climate change is causing the winters to be shorter," he tells me, "and this is causing the white animals to be mismatched on brown ground." Scott is studying the effects of this and how people can help animals adapt survive climate change.

Scott has had many accomplishments over the years. He is most proud of being a mentor for about thirty grad students from eight countries and giving many undergraduates field experience. Not to mention he has also written many scientific papers and he has written a textbook that is used in about 150 classrooms around the world. Award winning author Sneed B. Collard wrote a book titled "Hopping Ahead of Climate Change" which is all about Scott's groundbreaking work.

Recently, Scott and his team wrote a paper for *Science Magazine* and they have had lots of media coverage on it.

Although his work is definitely something to be proud of, Scott tells me his biggest pride is not his work, but his family. He enjoys the time he gets to be with family and catch up. Scott is someone who can get along with anyone and he has a great sense of humor. His students, friends and family all see him as an inspiration.