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► **To cite this version:**

Christiane Denys, Laurent Granjon. François Catzeflis (1953–2021). *Mammalia*, 2022, 86 (6), pp.541-542. 10.1515/mammalia-2022-0091 . hal-04007209

**HAL Id: hal-04007209**

**<https://hal.inrae.fr/hal-04007209>**

Submitted on 23 Nov 2023

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## Obituary

Christiane Denys\* and Laurent Granjon\*

# François Catzeflis (1953–2021)

<https://doi.org/10.1515/mammalia-2022-0091>



Photo of François Catzeflis in Montagne de la Trinité, French Guiana, October 23, 2009. Photo courtesy of ©Margot Delaval; reproduced also with kind permission of his wife Chantal Benassy.

François Catzeflis left us in Montpellier on November 25, 2021 after a long battle against cancer. He was married and had three children and one grandchild. François was an Associate Editor of *Mammalia* since 1999, and in that position particularly responsible for manuscripts on South American mammals.

Born in Belgium on August 3, 1953 he was the first of four children of an agricultural engineer. François spent his first 10 years in Africa, where his father worked. After

having moved to Switzerland, he obtained his scientific high school diploma in Sion in 1974.

He was introduced to ornithology during a holiday at the Zwin Reserve, Belgium. After high school, he joined an ornithological group and began to be concerned with the protection of nature and the environment.

François obtained his PhD on the systematics of European Soricidae under the supervision of Professor Peter Vogel from the University of Lausanne in 1984. A post-doctoral stage at Yale University and the Peabody Museum, New Haven, Connecticut, USA allowed him to learn the molecular technique of DNA/DNA hybridisation under the direction of Professor Charles G. Sibley. He came back to France in 1987 to join François Bonhomme's research team working on the evolutionary biology of mice at the Institut des Sciences de l'Evolution of Montpellier (ISEM), directed by Professor Louis Thaler. There he was encouraged by Professor Jean-Jacques Jaeger to create a research group on the molecular phylogeny of rodents, and was finally recruited by CNRS in 1988. By that time, he polished the techniques and methods of DNA/DNA hybridisation and published many key papers on African rodent phylogeny based on this technique. He was also at the outset, or involved in, many other issues dealing with mammalian, and especially rodent, evolution based on a variety of molecular markers. However, the laboratory work did not fully satisfy François, and when in 1994 the opportunity came up to participate in fieldwork in French Guiana he seized it and fell in love with the tropical forest and its magnificent biodiversity. Since that time, he managed to go into the field for at least one month per year until 2017, in French Guiana but also in Surinam and Venezuela. On these occasions, he devoted all his time to fieldwork and declared himself “unavailable” to *Mammalia*. In this context, he collected and studied many rodents, marsupials (especially opossums) and bats from the Amazonian Forest and published many scientific articles as well as a book entitled *Guide des marsupiaux et rongeurs de Guyane* in collaboration with the Institut Pasteur de Guyane (2014). He also conducted a survey on the “Manicou” (*Didelphis marsupialis*) in Martinique, with regular visits to the island between 2005 and 2015.

In parallel with all his activities, François Catzeflis developed one of the first banks of mammal tissues in ethanol. He was always keen to keep the link between

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the tissues and the voucher specimens, and deposited officially in the MNHN Zoologie Mammifères & Oiseaux collection in Paris many specimens of mammals from French Guiana and other parts of South America.

As early as in 2000, he became an environmental activist of *Greenpeace* and as such was always motivated to participate in forest and ocean protection and defence as well as anti-GMO campaigns. In French Guiana he stood up against illegal gold washing, and locally in his village near Montpellier he participated in citizen actions for the environment and organised ornithological excursions.

François Catzeflis has been a pioneer in molecular systematic studies in Europe and was a great naturalist. He contributed to the improvement of knowledge of the evolutionary biology of rodents and mammals in general as well as biodiversity of South American forests. His contributions in these fields will stay permanently as

significant ones. As an editor of *Mammalia*, he was a very dedicated, constant and friendly collaborator.

François was a passionate researcher and nature lover. The mind-opening discussions we have had with him on topics as varied as molecular versus morphology conflicts in rodent phylogeny, the use of genetic information in integrative taxonomy, the ecology of South American forest small mammals, collection management, African deforestation or on how to get involved to guarantee a better future for the younger generation were always instructive and exciting. We will remember François for a long time.

**Author contributions:** All the authors have accepted responsibility for the entire content of this submitted manuscript and approved submission.

**Research funding:** None declared.

**Conflict of interest statement:** The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding this article.