

Nick Mills, who has died aged 54, was a country vet with a practice which took him across the world as an anaesthetist for wild animals, an insurance adviser to the racing industry and a "sex therapist" to thoroughbreds at stud.

Among the famous racehorses he examined before they were purchased or put out to stud were Epsom Derby winners such as Galileo and Benny the Dip. When the 2002 Kentucky Derby winner War Emblem showed a lack of interest in the opposite sex, Nick made several journeys to Japan (where the horse was standing) and drew on his research with the Cambridge University veterinary school. This included using chemical stimulants; placing a blanket soaked in mares' urine on stallions; and even introducing reluctant thoroughbreds to a harem of carthorses in the hope that they might be stimulated by "rough trade". Nick's efforts with War Emblem led to productive coverings. During the past year he had been working on a CD, to be called *Sexy Horse Noises*.

There were inevitable misfortunes. When the outstanding Dubai Millennium (winner of the Dubai World Cup in 2000) contracted grass sickness at Newmarket, Nick had to tell the owner, Sheikh Mohammed, that there was no hope of the horse's recovering.

With his facility for lateral thinking, Nick designed a skateboard for an arthritic tortoise (earning a Blue Peter award). He also mended a giraffe's broken leg in Moscow Zoo, helped to remove a bad-tempered elephant's infected tusk at Kiev Zoo and examined for insurance purposes two circus elephants called Romeo and Juliet on Rhode Island. He also implanted tracking devices in grass snakes for Canterbury University; and invented a luminous fish attractor, as well as a spray mist for cleaning and warming wounds which he patented and developed commercially.

Nicholas John Mills was born on March 30 1954, the son of the owner of a hydraulic engineering company who died in a shooting accident shortly after his son's birth. Imbued with a love of nature from early holidays in mid-Wales, Nick became head boy and captain of rugby and tennis at Loughborough Grammar School before winning a place to read Veterinary Sciences at Jesus College, Cambridge.

After a gap year as a fishing ghillie at an estate on Scotland's west coast, he won a half-Blue for pole vaulting and led the university expedition which investigated influenza in the seabirds of the Lofoten islands. As a Wyndham Deedes scholar he did research during his vacation into cows' lactation in Israel.

When Nick arrived at his first practice at Maidstone, Kent, exuding a combination of charm, passion and obvious ability, the senior partner told him they would soon wipe the smile off his face.

But Nick quickly settled into the traditional vet's round of treating dogs, cats, sheep and horses, which he was to continue throughout his life. One of his more unusual commissions at this time was a request to look at the life prisoners' budgerigars at the local jail. Unfortunately, their renewed vigour led them to get into the air ducts, while the governor phoned to say that the yeast in their nutrient supplement was being used to brew alcohol.

After four years at Maidstone Nick went on a safari, helping a friend doing research on the protection of rhinos for Save the Rhino in Zambia, then returned home to join a practice at Rye, East Sussex, setting up a new branch at Hawkhurst.

He proceeded to build up his work with thoroughbreds, which took him to Ireland, Normandy, Turkey, Florida, Hong Kong and New Zealand.

He was once summoned across the street from where he was spaying a cat to attend a bank security guard who had been shot. As he knelt down in his green surgeon's robe to assure the wounded man that he would be all right, the victim retorted: "That's what you said about my cat last week, and it died."

Nick was the first veterinary trustee of Flora and Fauna International and of the Wildlife Vets International.

He was also a trustee of the Durrell Institute of Conservation Ecology and of the project to preserve Christopher Lloyd's garden at Great Dixter, East Sussex. He helped Linda McCartney to set up her food empire, and was a beaver adviser on Richard Attenborough's film Grey Owl.

Nick died while watching rugby on television on 8<sup>th</sup> November 2008. He is survived by his wife, Victoria Williams, for 30 years curator of the Hastings Museum, and their son, Tom, and daughter, Polly.