

Krisztián Gyöngyi—the world steps aside for a man who knows where he is going

Tribute by Frank Weitzer and the Malawi rhino family

email: Frankyweitzer@yahoo.de

At the time of his tragic death on 7 June 2017, Krisztián Gyöngyi was working with a newly introduced population of black rhinos in Akagera National Park, Rwanda, advising African Parks on rhino management and training the park rangers in the art of rhino tracking and monitoring.

Krisz' journey was indeed a very remarkable one. Growing up in a small town in rural Hungary and displaying a deep love for the natural world from an early age, his dream was to work with indigenous wildlife in Africa. It was a long and winding road that took him from travelling the seven seas as a sailor in the merchant navy to working in the hospitality industry in the USA and Ireland to save enough money to study for a bachelor's degree in Wildlife Conservation at the University of Kent. Perseverance, dedication to the cause and an insatiable thirst for knowledge led him from strength to strength.

A turning point in his career is marked by his attendance at the African Wildlife College in Tanzania where wildlife vet and rhino specialist Dr Pete Morkel first introduced him to rhino conservation. The latter provided vital mentorship and remained a great source of inspiration to Krisz throughout his career, besides encouraging him to further pursue his ecological studies. Enrolling at the University of East Anglia to obtain his MSc, his passion in particular of the rhinoceros and appreciation of its plight brought him back to Africa, this time Malawi, together with his partner Orsi. In 2011, Krisz conducted his field research for his dissertation on the browse and habitat preference of the black rhinos, at the Majete Wildlife Reserve. A year later he joined the rhino monitoring team in Liwonde National Park as an ecologist, at a time when rampant poaching not only posed a severe threat to the rhinos but to all other animal species alike.

We are immeasurably indebted to Krisz for his unswerving efforts to protect Malawi's wildlife from harm and the selfless service he rendered to protecting the small black rhino population at Liwonde National Park, teetering on the brink of extinction not so long ago. His research, erudition and vast knowledge of rhinoceros ecology were instrumental in implementing vital management measures in Majete Wildlife Reserve and Liwonde National Park. From Malawi he was assigned to Akagera National Park, Rwanda to assist the African Parks in reintroducing black rhinos there.

Assisted by many notable conservationists and veterinarians in the field, Krisz never ceased to look for ways to overcome the many hurdles and challenges that exist in wildlife and rhino conservation and kept the flag flying when the well-being of his protégées were at stake. Not only will he be remembered for this, but also for his ability to instil new spirit and resolve into his colleagues when the going got tough, as well as boost team morale by his inimitable sense of humour, splendid gift of repartee and high work ethics.

Above all, we will miss Krisz as an exceptional fellow human being who brought joy and inspiration to our lives and who taught us about passion and dedication. Our tribute to his work will be to take up the torch and continue in his vein to look after our rhinos and wildlife with a vengeance. Our hearts go out to his wonderful and ever-supportive wife Orsi and daughter Estella.