

## TRIBUTE

### Thomas John Foose (1945–2006)

*Nico van Strien*

International Rhino Foundation

Tom Foose, lately program director for the International Rhino Foundation, unexpectedly passed away on 17 May 2006 at his home in Waynesboro, Pennsylvania, USA.

Tom was one of my closest friends. For many years we had almost daily we spoke over the phone and exchanged many emails on the rhino programs that we were both involved with. We met in person several times a year either in Asia or in the US. Our lives became more and more entwined through our common interests and Tom became part of my family. His untimely death is a tremendous loss for me as for everyone who knew and worked with him. He was a remarkable person, with quite a few special traits in his character, methods and likings, but he was a true and warm friend, though always cautious with his emotions and forever somewhat distant.

Tom was born on 7 March 1945 in Waynesboro. He received a BA in Biology from Princeton University in 1969. From 1970 till 1980 he held several positions at Cornell University and the University of Chicago and at the Philadelphia and Oklahoma City zoos.

His close association with rhinos and rhino con-



*The late Dr Thomas John Foose*

servation started with a PhD study at the University of Chicago on feeding strategies for ruminant as opposed to non-ruminant ungulates. His intention was to do the

the research in Kaziranga National Park in Assam, India, but he had to leave Assam after a few months because of security risks in the area. He completed his studies at zoos and in 1982 he obtained his doctorate.

From 1981 to 1990 he served as the conservation director for the American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA), and along with Dr Ulie Seal, developed the concept for the species survival plan (SSP) program for endangered species. Such programmes now are the cornerstone for managing captive species for all regional zoo associations.

From 1990 to 1992, Tom served as Executive Officer of the IUCN/SSC Conservation Breeding Specialist Group. He shaped its programmes and focus to include using computer simulation modelling to examine the risks of species extinction, as well as global risk assessments of broad taxonomic groups including making recommendations for species management and research.

In 1991, Tom was one of the founders of the International Rhino Foundation (IRF), initially called the International Black Rhino Foundation. The foundation embodies his lifelong passion for rhino conservation, both in zoos and in nature. Tom was the IRF program director from 1993 and the driving force behind its conservation programmes that now span all rhino species and most range states, focusing on long-term support for the most endangered rhino types and areas.

Tom was a program officer of the IUCN/SSC Asian Rhino Specialist Group for as far as memory goes back and had several other functions in executive, scientific and curatorial capacities. He was involved in designing and implementing many programmes, projects, strategies and action plans, including the IUCN/SSC Global Captive Action Plan and Global Animal Survival Plans for all species of rhino. There are too many to list them all.

After having moved for his jobs to several places in the US, Tom returned to his home town to take care of his ailing mother. He managed to combine his many duties with loving care for her until her death. Later, Tom took up part-time teaching at a local high school for several years. He enjoyed the contact with young people and found that it gave extra meaning to his life. He was sad that he had to give up the teaching because

of the demands his other positions made on his time.

Tom was always trying new avenues for raising funds for his programmes and never tired of getting another meeting or workshop together. He was a prolific writer and a master in formulating concise and precise summaries and points of agreements. A wordsmith of repute, he would always come up with the right word.

Throughout his work with many organizations and groups on conservation and management issues, Tom touched people around the world and inspired them to set aside their personal, national and institutional agendas to focus on preventing species extinctions. Over the past 10 years, his primary focus was leading the development and implementation of global and national conservation strategies and action plans for rhinos in Asia and Africa.

Most recently, Tom initiated the Sumatran Rhino Captive Global Management and Propagation Board; he was closely involved with designing the Vision 2020 Program for Indian Rhino in Assam and the Rhino Century Program to restore the populations of Javan and Sumatran rhino in Indonesia to viable levels. Tom was involved in designing the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria Rhino Campaign. He initiated the North American Save the Rhinos Campaign, whose goal was to double the number of rhinos in critically endangered populations in select protected habitats in the wild within 10 years.

He dedicated his life to bridging gaps among people with diverse interests and perspectives, as well as using science to foster national and global collaboration for threatened species management. We will miss Tom's many unforgettable characteristics: his sporty safari attire, his mischievous smile and the twinkle in his eye whenever a rhino came into view. We will miss his dry sense of humour, and his love for Coca Cola, durians, rendang and coconut ice cream. Memories abound and the many anecdotes about Tom will continue to enlighten our lives.

Tom is survived by his children Rebecca Foose Nesmith, Thomas John Foose III and their mother, Virginia Foose; children Susan Foose and Michael Foose and their mother, Ellen Foose; and one grandson, Daniel Nesmith.