

TRIBUTES

A tribute to Nico van Strien

1 April 1946 - 7 February 2008

Bibhab Kumar Talukdar

email: bibhab@aaranyak.org

Whenever we talk about the conservation of Asian rhinos in South and Southeast Asia, one of the names that comes to mind is Dr Nico van Strien who has been working in the field of Asian rhino conservation since the 1970s. It is painful and heartbreaking to write a tribute in memory of Nico, who died on 7 February 2008 after a prolonged battle with prostate cancer.

Asian rhino conservation has received terrible blows since 2006, beginning with the death of Dr Tom Foose, and then followed by Dr Tirtha Man Maskey along with other conservation colleagues working in Nepal on 23 September 2006. We had not even recovered from the grief and sorrow over those losses when we learned of the death of Nico van Strien. The rhino was well looked after by these senior rhino conservationists for many years, and the sudden vacuum created by the loss of experienced rhino conservationists has provoked a great challenge before us for the conservation of the Asian rhino in its range countries in South and South East Asia.

Nico earned an M.Sc. in 1971 at the Free University of Amsterdam, and a Ph.D. in 1985 in Agricultural Sciences from Wageningen University, Netherlands. His five-year doctoral dissertation work, for which he walked 3,800 km through the Gunung Leuser ecosystem, remains the definitive work on the ecology of Sumatran rhinos. Nico worked in a number of countries during his career, including in Malawi where he was a biology lecturer at Chancellors College. He also provided critical technical advice to a number of groups, including the UNDP-Global Environment Facility, the IUCN Asian Rhino Specialist Group, and the US Fish and



Nico working in Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary, Indonesia.

Wildlife Service. As Chair of the IUCN Asian Rhino Specialist Group for the past several years, his tireless efforts have been instrumental in helping people to work together for rhino conservation throughout South and Southeast Asia.

Nico served as the International Rhino Foundation's (IRF) Asian Rhino Program Coordinator from April 1998 to January 2008, but worked as an advisor for several years before that. He deftly coordinated our work throughout Asia, including Indonesia, India, Vietnam, Malaysia and other countries. Along with IRF's late Program Director and one of his dearest friends, Dr Tom Foose, he was responsible for the success of our rhino conservation programmes in Indonesia, including Rhino Protection Units in Bukit Barisan Selatan, Way Kambas, and Ujung Kulon National Parks, as well as the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary, a captive research and propagation facility in Way Kambas. In fact I had just visited Indonesia in

May 2008 and met conservation officials from both government and non government agencies and all of them uttered one name while we had discussions about Sumatran and Javan rhinos - that of Dr Nico van Strien. In Indonesia people call him Pak Nico (Pak means brother).

I first met Nico in 1999 when the meeting of the Asian Rhino Specialist Group was held at the Kaziranga National Park, Assam, India. I had just started my work on Indian rhinos in 1998 and meeting Nico at Kaziranga further convinced me to work in aid of Indian rhino conservation in Assam. In February 2005, the Kaziranga National Park was celebrating the 100 years of successful conservation and Nico came to Assam again at the invitation of the Kaziranga authorities to participate in the centenary celebrations. During that time the preliminary concept of the Indian Rhino Vision 2020 was developed and in November 2005, Nico and Tom Foose, visited Assam to attend the first meeting of the Rhino Task Force constituted by the Government of Assam to make the Vision a reality.

In April 2007 I heard that he was suffering from cancer but while corresponding with him through e-mail, I found him to be solid and mentally sound to fight the illness. The last time I met Nico was at the Rhino May Day Programme on 31 May 2007 held at the London Zoo. It was heartbreaking to receive an email from him in January 2008 informing us that he was not well and wanted to spend his remaining time with family.

Nico is survived by his wife, Tineke van Strien-Reijgersberg, and sons Maarten and Willem. Perhaps the greatest tribute we can pay in memory of Nico is by carrying forward the conservation tasks of Asian rhinos to ensure that all the three species of Asian rhinos (Indian rhino, Sumatran rhino and Javan rhino) live on this planet for many years to come. It will be challenging but not impossible if all of us work together for the well-being of the rhinos and their habitats.

A tribute to Hezy Shoshani

23 January 1943 - 21 May 2008

Iain Douglas-Hamilton

email: info@savetheelephants.org

Professor Hezy Shoshani, teacher, scientist, and great friend of the elephants, died of injuries sustained from a bomb that blew up the minibus in which he was travelling in Addis Ababa on 21 May 2008. This brought to an end nearly four decades of working with and for elephants. Hezy was Israel's leading elephant scientist, and with dual American nationality he also taught undergraduates at Wayne State University for a span of 25 years.

Having found his love for elephants as a child from reading a book, Hezy started his career as a keeper in a zoo and ended at the age of 65 with over 168 scientific publications to his name. He was a team builder and net-worker and produced encyclopaedic books, such as *Proboscidea* and *Elephants Majestic Creatures of the Wild*, that owed their excellence not only to his own prolific writing but also to his capacity to elicit the best out of his wide range of colleagues and friends. Beyond the



Iain Redmond

Professor Hezy Shoshani marks confiscated tusks at Mt Elgon National Park, Kenya 1987.