



In Memory of Dr. Nico Van Strien (1946–2008)

Too soon, the rhino world has lost another great conservation leader. Dr. Nico Van Strien, 61, IRF Asian Program Coordinator, died peacefully on February 7th in Dorn, the Netherlands, following a year-long battle with cancer. “Nico”, as he was known to colleagues was, without a doubt, the world’s authority on both Sumatran and Javan rhinos, having studied and authored numerous scientific papers on both species. He dedicated more than 30 years of his life to rhinos.

Dr. Van Strien earned a M.Sc. In 1971 at the Free University of Amsterdam, and a Ph.D in 1985 in Agricultural Sciences from Wageningen University, Netherlands. His doctoral dissertation work, for which he spent 5 years in and walked 3800 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 worked as a biology lecturer at Chancellors College. He also provided critical technical advice to IUCN Asian Rhino Specialist Group, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. As Chair of the IUCN Asian Rhino Specialist Group over the past several years, his tireless efforts were instrumental in helping people to work together for rhino conservation throughout Southeast Asia, including convening experts working on greater one-horned rhino in India and Nepal last year so that cross-boundary conservation efforts between the two countries could take wing. Dr. Van Strien was a long-term member of many other distinguished organizations, chairman of the Van Tienhoven Foundation for International Nature Protection, serving on the Board of the Netherlands Committee for International Nature Conservation and the Golden Ark Foundation, and as a member of the IUCN Tapir Specialist Group, the Deutsche Gesellschaft fur Saugthierkunde, and a life time member of the Malawi Wildlife Society.

Nico officially served as the International Rhino Foundations (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 through 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 programs 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. “There is no doubt that both the Sumatran and Javan rhinos survive today because of Nico’s deep knowledge, passion and vision for their conservation,” said IRF’s John Lukas.

We will miss Nico’s dry sense of humor, his straightforward approach to life, and his dedication to and love for rhinos and the people who work so diligently to save them. To those who had the chance to work with him, he always seemed happiest when near wild rhinos - wandering in deep forest or boggy wetlands in his characteristic t-shirt, shorts and flip flops—looking in all directions for rhino sign. His enthusiasm and deep knowledge engendered deep respect from colleagues worldwide and will be forever missed in the conservation world.

Nico is survived by his loving wife, Tineke van Strien-Reijgersberg, and sons Maaarten and Willem. The IRF and IRKA sends its most profound condolences to Nico’s family, and we want them to know that all of his colleagues and friends around the world share in our sadness over this untimely loss.

Nico’s spirit will live on in IRF’s future endeavors with Asian rhinos.

The IRF will establish a scholarship fund in Nico’s memory. For additional information, please contact Dr. Susie Ellis at s.ellis@rhinos-irf.org. Memorial comments may be posted on IRF’s website (www.rhinos-irf.org) If you would like to add a photo of Nico to our gallery, please send it directly to me.

