

In Memoriam: Nicolaas Jan van Strien (1 April 1946-7 February 2008)

Too soon, the rhino world has lost another great conservation leader.

Susie Ellis

Executive Director
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Dr Nico van Strien, 61, International Rhino Foundation (IRF) Asian Program Coordinator, died peacefully on February 7 in Doorn, 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 an MSc in 1971 at the Free University of Amsterdam, and a PhD in 1985 in Agricultural Sciences from Wageningen University, Netherlands. His doctoral dissertation work, for which he spent five years in and walked 3800km 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 a number of groups, including the UNDP-Global Environment Facility, the 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 rhinos 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 für Säugetierkunde, and a life member of the Malawi Wildlife Society.

Nico officially 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 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 Sumatran and Javan rhinos survive today because of Nico's deep knowledge, passion and vision for their conservation," said IRF's President, John Lukas.

We will miss Nico's dry sense of humour, 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 Maarten and Willem. The IRF 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 endeavours with Asian rhinos.

The IRF will establish a scholarship fund in Nico's memory. For additional information, please contact me at s.ellis@rhinos-irf.org. Memorial comments may be posted on IRF's website www.rhinos-irf.org.