

OBITUARIES

Ian Player Is Dead at 87; Helped to Save Rhinos

By DOUGLAS MARTIN

In 1952, Ian Player was a newly minted 25-year-old game warden assigned to the Umfolozi Game Reserve in South Africa. It took his breath away when he first saw prehistoric-looking white rhinoceroses solemnly pad out of a grove.

That evening he sat alone by a campfire. "I could think of nothing but the white rhino," he wrote in his 1972 book, "The White Rhino Saga." "Never had I been so impressed and at the same time strangely involved with an animal."

The reserve was established in the 1890s to protect the two dozen or so white rhinos thought to be alive. In an aerial survey in 1953, Mr. Player found that their numbers had grown to 437. But these were being steadily killed by farmers, hunters and poachers, and a disease outbreak could easily have exterminated such a concentrated population.

The young game warden devised a plan to capture rhinos, put them in crates — a task exactly as hard as it sounds — and ship them to other reserves, parks and game farms throughout Africa, as well as to zoos and safari parks around the world. By 1965, international authorities ruled that the white rhino had been "saved." Today, there are as many as 20,000.

Although a new wave of poaching is killing rhinos at the rate of three a day, Rachel Long wrote in *Africa Geographic* in 2012, "It is because of Dr. Ian Player that there are still rhinos around for us to save."

Mr. Player, a high school dropout whose doctorate is honorary, died at 87 on Sunday at his home in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa, his brother, the golfer Gary Player, announced. The South African Press Association reported that he had a stroke several days before his death.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Mr. Player led a successful campaign to designate two wil-

derness areas in South Africa, the first two on the continent. He started a wilderness school to promote skills for living in the wild that more than 50,000 people have attended. He helped found the World Wilderness Congress, which brings together thousands of scientists, politicians, bankers and others in international meetings every three years. He was a leader in starting foundations in Africa, Britain and the United States.

His efforts have had the practical effect of attracting ecotourists to the South African wild, where their spending generates income for native people, reducing their incentive to kill big game. By selling animals abroad, Mr. Player raised money for conservation and helped start a new business: safari parks, which mimic the African experience. Meanwhile, the genetic base of white rhinos has grown and diversified.

Mr. Player acted from an almost mystical belief that experiencing wilderness returns people to ancient intimations and understandings like those described by the psychiatrist Carl Jung. He helped found the Cape Town Center for Applied Jungian Studies.

"Without wilderness and wild-life, many people could not maintain their sanity," Mr. Player wrote in the *International Journal of Wilderness* in 1995.

He said that he himself had learned the meaning of the African wild from a former safari guide at the reserve, Magqubu Ntombela, who told him of great Zulu kings, taught him to track wild animals and became his best friend. He said it was Mr. Ntombela who had the idea of forming the World Wilderness Congress.

Mr. Ntombela also gave him a rather precious gift. "I was steeped in the racial prejudice of my country," Mr. Player said in an interview with *The Washington Post* in 1984. "Magqubu transformed me."

Ian Cedric Player, the son of a gold miner, was born in Johannesburg on March 15, 1927. He laid the foundation for the famed physical fitness of his brother, Gary, who was eight years

younger, by making him climb a rope and lift weights. "He made me promise I would exercise for the rest of my life," Gary Player told *Golf World* magazine in 2013.

Ian left school at 16 and joined the South African Army. After his discharge, with jobs scarce, he worked as a gold miner. He hated the lack of sunlight and went on to jobs on the Durban docks, as a fisherman and as an accountant's clerk.

As a soldier in Italy during World War II, he had the idea of a 75-mile canoe race from the city of Pietermaritzburg to Durban. It materialized in 1951. Of eight entrants, he was the only one who finished the race, despite being bitten by a poisonous snake. Since then, 12,374 people have competed in the annual race, the Dusi Canoe Marathon, according to its sponsors.

In addition to his brother, Mr. Player's survivors include his wife, Ann; his sons, Kenneth and Amyas; and his sister, Wilma.

Mr. Player's many conservation activities ranged from fighting a proposed mine near one of his wilderness preserves to helping develop a strategy to protect the tamarau, the Philippines' largest terrestrial mammal. As a government game official, he once airlifted crocodiles by helicopter from a highly saline part of the immense Lake St. Lucia in South Africa to a fresher part of the lake.

In his 1998 book, "Zulu Wilderness: Shadow and Soul," Mr. Player wrote of another crocodile experience early in his career. Farmers were complaining that the reptiles were lounging on their doorsteps, a claim Mr. Player with a white rhino he had just darted from horseback in South Africa. Captured animals were shipped throughout the world.

er knew was false. He was nonetheless assigned to take care of the problem. When he asked how, his boss said only, "You are in charge of the operation."

"He needed to say no more," Mr. Player wrote. When a croco-

dile hunter arrived, he issued him “a leaky boat” and “a totally unreliable rifle.” The hunter “complained that I really did not want him to kill any crocodiles.”

Mr. Player shrugged his shoulders. The hunter soon left.

Mr. Player in 1964