

OBITUARIES

Esmond Martin

Tribute by Tom Milliken

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I write this tribute to Esmond Bradley Martin with my heart in my throat. This is not the way a pachyderm warrior exits a crisis, how a conservation hero takes his last bow, when an inspirational legend ends an unparalleled mortal existence. It is not the time to say good-bye to a mentor of such epic standing, unassailable credentials and stellar achievements, to put the father of modern ivory and rhino horn trade monitoring to rest, to lose the guiding voice of the wise one who has chronicled more pachyderm history than any living human being. There are still devoted loved ones at hand, and vital friendships and collaborations unfolding, and younger disciples on the margins eagerly absorbing a lifetime of poignant experience and knowledge. We all want more. There is unfinished business here: facts and information to distil, a narrative to shape, another ivory trade study to publish, Myanmar this time. There are so many more things to learn from Esmond, conversations to have, conclusions to draw, causes to pursue, another pachyderm chapter to serve up in the race to save the world's elephants and rhinos.

Because that is what Esmond does—and has always done—meticulously piecing together the pachyderm trade puzzle one piece at a time with unrelenting dedication and insightful accuracy for the forty years I have known and admired him. In some ways you could say Esmond has never really had a “job” in conservation, just an unabiding consummate passion that he has always pursued with a singular vision. He was our ‘eyes and ears’ for understanding ivory and rhino horn

trade dynamics, an intrepid empiricist, traveling the reaches of the globe, endlessly observing markets—shop by shop by shop—and endlessly publishing those observations to inspire us to action and a greater good for pachyderm conservation. Though completely ‘old school’ in his ways, he made it so totally ‘cool’. Go figure: tweed in the tropics, leather bound diaries to the ceiling chocker block full of hand written fountain pen notes, the most exalted part of his home: a library with a vast collection of books, a marvel all the more impressive in a digital age. But beware the tenacious Gentleman with a handkerchief in his suit pocket: nothing could impede his quest for market survey data. Beat up by thuggish traders in a Lagos market, Esmond was back the next day to complete the job; arrested on a Saturday in a German ivory shop having been reported as a thief casing the joint as a prelude to crime, he was doggedly back on Sunday peering through windows to finish the product count of a shuttered store. And so the story went.

And yes, throughout it all, Esmond worked under many institutional banners—IUCN, WWF, TRAFFIC, UNEP, Save the Elephants and so many more—and he has certainly done all proud with his sterling work. But in the end Esmond was never remotely tamed or defined by any of these labels or organisational forces. Rather he, himself, remained unfettered, inimitable, a complete loner like no other, no rival aft or fore, an unstoppable force.

But the unthinkable has befallen us and Esmond is no more, cruelly murdered at his Nairobi home on 4 February 2018 under circumstances that have yet to be understood. We stand unified in shock trying to process the magnitude of this tragic loss, diminished by the gaping void it will leave, and searching for the courage and will to honour his indelible legacy with renewed commitment for elephant and rhino conservation. It's all such a raw moment of profound disbelief, seismic shift and anguish. Our beloved Esmond has left us and it just feels unbearable.

These last couple of days, in idle moments, I just slide into endless reflection about where our lives intersected and I know so many others do too. I met Esmond in 1982 in Tokyo, Japan, the year I set up

TRAFFIC's first office in Asia, and before that we had corresponded. By then, he was already widely recognised as the man who had singularly pieced together Africa's post-World War II rhino horn trade, sounded the clarion call to prevent the extinction of the black rhino, unravelled the Yemen connection and followed all of the trade trail leads throughout Asia. He was accomplished and famous, I was a novice upstart. He had called me to his hotel and then generously invited me to dine with him at a Tony French restaurant with a dress code; obligingly I wore one of his jackets that was several sizes too large. He was commencing an ivory trade study in Japan and I got the full Esmond treatment: an interrogation that probed every possible angle imaginable in a serial bombardment of staccato questioning between furtive mouthfuls of fine French cuisine. Equally oblivious to the meal he treated me to, Esmond, with laser-like focus, seemed to transcribe everything I said into his diary. "So that's how it's done", I thought in a breathless exhale when it was all over.

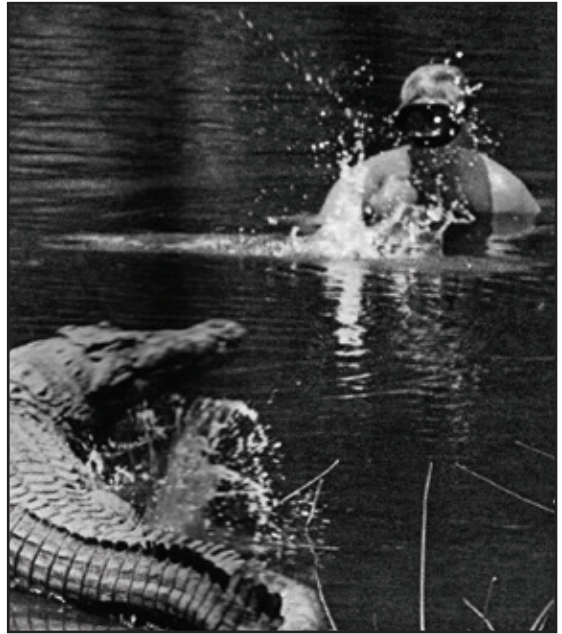
That meeting commenced a working lifetime of fruitful collaboration with Esmond. We were both locked in the pursuit of the same trade issues over the years—elephants and rhinos—but through different pathways and prisms, and yet we inevitably always seemed to arrive at the same conclusions. As ETIS, the CITES monitoring system for tracking illegal ivory trade using seizure data, took shape under TRAFFIC's tutelage and the conceptual guidance of statisticians Bob Burn and Fiona Underwood, I came to value Esmond's independent take on the ivory trade all the more and invited him to be a member of the MIKE-ETIS Technical Advisory Group (TAG). We needed someone to independently evaluate our work. Remarkably, his road through ivory markets, and our route through seizure data rarely, if ever, diverged. In so many ways, Esmond became a treasured touchstone amongst all of the noise, and general alignment of our respective views became an unspoken indicator that we were on the right track. It basically all came down to facts. ETIS results rest upon a knowledge base of law enforcement facts, and Esmond's work was dedicated to the evidence gleaned from intimately cataloguing the voice of the market. As colleague Dan Stiles has so aptly reported, Esmond only "cared about

facts. He didn't care about opinions."

So much has happened between "then" and "now", it is impossible to do any justice to a description of Esmond's seminal lifework in this note. I hold on to our last interaction. We last spoke at the very end of January some few days ago. The next day, I was heading off to a meeting in China in which ivory trade in Asia was the topic, and I needed to commune with my touchstone. Esmond's voice in the conversation was vigorous, his opinions sharp, offering clear thoughts on the situation in Myanmar through which he, with his long-term colleague Lucy Vigne, had just blazed a month-long trail of ivory trade monitoring in December; the worrying situation in Laos which the duo had chronicled a year earlier; and his unaltered prescient views that we have quite some distance to go before we will see any benefit from the Chinese ivory trade ban. It was vintage, wonderful Esmond, self-assuredly validating every contemporary belief that I hold about ivory trade. I put down the receiver feeling confidently prepared for what I would say in Beijing and happily thinking what a remarkable recovery Esmond had made from a long spell of sleep-deprived frailty which had us all so worried a couple of years back.

And now this devastating news. My heart goes out to Esmond's enduring partner in manuscripts, mischief and magic—really, such a marvellous life together—his eternal soul mate and wife, Chryssee, the gracious woman never behind Esmond, but always beside him. I also ache for Lucy and Dan and all of our colleagues who knew, worked and loved Esmond all of these years too numerous to count. I ache for myself. And most of all I salute Esmond for all he has done for conservation, elephants, rhinos, trade monitoring, friends, colleagues and me personally. We all stand in his shadow, even with the lights out.

With kind favour of Tom Milliken and IUCN. First published by IUCN/ February 10 2018.



We say farewell to our conservation friends, colleagues and family who have passed away in 2017 and 2018.

Above left. Esmond Martin (Courtesy of Chryssee Martin).

Above right. Alan Root. (Courtesy of Fran Michelmore-Root).

Below left. David Shepherd (Courtesy of Becky Thomas).

Below right. Krisztián Gyöngyi.

See *Obituaries* on pp. 132-137

