



## ESMOND BRADLEY MARTIN 1941 - 2018

# DEATH ONE AFTERNOON

A tribute by Peter Bradley-Martin to his brother Esmond

**E**smond's first introduction to East Africa back in 1959, when he was 18 years old, was almost his epilogue. He was on safari in the Belgian Congo, when by chance he got an audience with King Charles Mutara III of Rwanda-Burundi, a very tall Tutsi educated in England.

Invited him to a banquet with the king that evening, Esmond declined, as he didn't have suitable dress for the occasion. That night back in camp, he heard on the wireless that everyone at the party, including the king, was dead, poisoned. That tragic event sparked the Hutu-Tutsi conflict.

My brother returned to East Africa roughly a decade later, after geography studies in the United States and England, to a dry country where today too many people are now competing for too little arable land and water, where wild animals vie with humans and die for the same territory. It wasn't always that way.

When he built a house and settled with his wife Chrysee on the outskirts of Nairobi, their 25 acres bordered Nairobi National Park, it was a rural, peaceful milieu. Fugitive lions and leopards from the park often ambled through the neighborhood. Delinquent baboons and monkeys made destructive forays to the residential properties, which was about the extent of crime in the neighborhood at the time. It was a paradise for wildlife and human inhabitants, where both lived in symbiosis, with downtown

Nairobi less than a 30-minute drive on roads with little traffic.

Over the years the community grew; another American, Peter Beard, took up temporary residence nearby and became a famous conceptual photographer of wildlife and friend. It was certainly an agreeable life for the expats society; what it might have lacked in sophisticated artistic culture, it made up for it with primal beauty and rich natural history.

The game parks were thick with animals, herds of wildebeests strung out far as the horizon; immense herds of zebra mingling with impala, gazelles and topi blanketed the plains, while towers of elegant giraffes ambled amid the acacia. Family sets of rhinos shuffled across the dusty landscape and herds of elephant were so numerous they could be found nearly everywhere. It was these two species that first fascinated him the most and which jumpstarted his career in conservation.

However, his first insight into smuggling began in 1970 while taking an interest in the dhow trade off the East African coast. His study of those ancient lateen-rigged sailing ships that plied the Indian Ocean trafficking in ivory and other illicit goods fascinated Esmond and culminated in the publication of a book co-authored with his wife Chrysee, *"Cargoes of the East"*.

When this willowy, independent individual from New York first settled in Kenya in the 1970s rhino and elephant populations were not in such dire

danger of survival as today. In the Tsavo region alone there were approximately 35,000 elephant. Drought in the 1970's killed 6,000. But in the 1980s, at the height of poaching for ivory, only 6,200 remained in Tsavo. Much the same decline can be found in the rhino population. In 1970's there were 20,000 Black rhino, but today only 540 remain. Such shocking statistics moved Esmond to wage an undercover war against poachers and their foreign clients; a clandestine war that impelled him to investigate remote regions, notorious districts and major cities around the globe.

Esmond's intensely inquisitive nature, his love of statistics and his doctorate in geography facilitated this research in the illicit trade. During the early 1980s he travelled extensively through Africa and Asia, consulting with the world's leading experts on conservation, trade ministers and heads of state. In Africa he befriended such notables as George and Joy Adamson, Richard Leakey, Jane Goodall and Dian Fossey.

He conferred with international experts on rhinos, learning as much as he could before beginning his pursuit in earnest under the sponsorship of the World Wildlife Fund. During one of his trips to Yemen researching the illicit trade of rhino horn for handles for men's dagger called jambiya nearly cost him his life. At 3 o'clock in the morning his hotel phone rang and the caller told him he wouldn't leave the hotel alive.

To get out of the hotel, he disguised



himself as a woman wearing a balto, the black garment that covers from head to foot. That incident wasn't the only threat to his life while monitoring rhino horn traffic in Yemen. He ultimately decided, after finding he was flagged by the authorities, that the risks were too great to personally carry on fieldwork in that hazardous country. Instead he began promoting alternative materials as a substitute for rhino horn. Water buffalo horn proved the most successful and now nearly 100 percent of jambiya handles are made from that material. \* See Esmond's report co-authored with Lucy Vigne "Amid Conflict, Yemen's Demand for Rhino Horn Daggers Continues" in the Jan-March 2018 issue of Swara.

The book "Run, Rhino Run" co-authored with his wife Chrysee, was the outcome of those years. Esmond was appointed Special Envoy for Rhino Conservation by the executive director of the United Nations Environment Programme, and awarded the Order of

the Golden Ark by Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands. His exhaustive efforts brought about legislation prohibiting rhino horn trade, thereby witnessing China, Taiwan and South Korea officially banning rhino products.

Esmond readily saw that one of the perils to conservation was the soaring human population in Kenya. When he first settled in Nairobi the population was 531,000. It now stands at 3.36 million. The national consensus was even more alarming; in 1970 the population stood at 11.25 million, in 2016 it rose to 47.25 million. That is a lot of people competing with wild animals for limited land and water. As the human population rapidly burgeoned, along with their goats, cattle, and tempting gardens, ivory poaching exploded and elephants suffered the consequences. He swapped hats and began identifying illegal ivory traders both national and international.

Occasionally disguised, he would pry the souks and back alleys of Khartoum

documenting ivory dealers and tracing their links with big cartels. It was very risky work and it nearly got him arrested, or worse, several times. He eventually had to keep out of Sudan altogether for fear of his life.

His undercover pursuits then found him traveling to Asia investigating the ivory trade in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea, China, India, Burma, Laos -- where he was beaten up for his efforts, and Nepal -- where he came down with a severe infection that laid him up for months. Through all the danger he confronted, his passionate dedication to his work never faltered, until he was brutally murdered one afternoon at his home by people who coveted his land.

Bled of blood. No breath left. His tenacious endeavour to save elephants and rhinos came to an end well before his time.

He was my brother. ●



**Chui Lodge**  
OSERIAN TWO LAKES

Set on an 18,000 acre wildlife sanctuary, just 90 minutes from Nairobi you will find Naivasha's best kept secrets, Chui Lodge and Kiangazi House.



**Kiangazi House**  
OSERIAN TWO LAKES

Whether you want to relax by the pools, watch the sunset over the Mau Escarpment with a glass of wine, or enjoy a game drive along the shores of Lake Olodien, we are able to offer you the best of both worlds.






For Reservations:

Call: 0722 200 596/ 0707 645 631    Email: [reservations@oseriantwolakes.com](mailto:reservations@oseriantwolakes.com)    Website: [www.oseriantwolakes.com](http://www.oseriantwolakes.com)  
PO Box 209 - 20117, La Pieve Ltd, Moi South Lake Road, Naivasha





ESMOND BRADLEY MARTIN  
1941 - 2018

## A TRIBUTE BY DAN STILES

I write this with a heavy heart, as my friend and mentor Esmond Bradley Martin has left us under tragic circumstances. Esmond was a friend for 21 years before he also became a professional colleague and workmate for the final 19 years that we knew each other. And Esmond's wife Chryssee was an integral part of that friendship. I grieve as much for what Chryssee must be going through as I do for the loss of my good friend. Giving condolences does not seem enough.

I remember first seeing Esmond while attending University of Nairobi and British Institute in Eastern Africa talks and seminars. I was Lecturer in Archaeology at the University of Nairobi at the time. I did not know what to make of Esmond in the beginning.

He always arrived alone dressed in a smart suit and silk tie with matching breast pocket silk handkerchief, incongruously carrying a battered leather satchel. He stood out in a crowd by his height, extravagant dress and the unruly shock of white hair on his head. He would take a seat and lift out a large hard-backed notebook from the satchel for taking notes, which he did using an old-fashioned fountain pen. Esmond invariably asked knowledgeable questions and showed a deep interest in the subject under discussion, regardless of how trivial it might be.

I mean no disrespect to those giving talks or organizing seminars by using the term 'trivial', but the subjects always dealt with some obscure aspect of eastern African coastal history or archaeology that were far outside of the mainstream. My turn finally came after I had made a few research trips to Lamu District on the Kenya coast to study Boni and other hunter-gatherers.

I think my seminar was in late 1978. Afterwards Esmond came up and introduced himself and invited me



Dan Stiles, Tom Milliken and Esmond Martin at the CITES 17th Conference of the Parties in Johannesburg in 2016.

to dinner -- he wanted to know more about hunter-gatherer trade. That set off our long friendship and I was to visit the Martin mansion in Langata innumerable times over the following years. In 1982 I even stayed there for two weeks housesitting while they were away on one of their research trips.

Esmond is known today for his seminal work in wildlife trade, focusing on ivory and rhino horn. No other person on Earth had the breadth of knowledge and deep experience of investigating these iconic wildlife products as Esmond. But few know that his involvement in wildlife trade was almost accidental. A Geographer with a Ph.D. from the University of Liverpool, his first love was trade and history in the Arabian seas and western Indian Ocean, which formed the thesis of his doctorate, culminating in *Cargoes of the East* (1978) and several other books and

pamphlets on East African coastal towns such as Lamu, Malindi and Zanzibar.

Esmond is also a world authority on the dhow trade and he recorded an encyclopaedia of data on the types of dhows (there are dozens, from India to Zanzibar), the trade routes, the cargoes they carried, who was involved, the product uses, the prices and values and a myriad other facts and figures.

In the 1970s, wildlife products started increasing in volume in Esmond's dhow and port investigations. He and Chryssee began to look more deeply into what was going on here -- most of Esmond's early studies and publications were carried out as a partnership with Chryssee. They were the first to discover that half of the poached rhino horn ended up in the Yemen as dagger handles and the other half was not used as an aphrodisiac, but rather as a homeopathic aspirin to reduce fever in



the Far East. It drove the Martins mad whenever they read as late as last year journalists still reporting that rhino horn was used as an aphrodisiac – fake news!

During the 1980s and 1990s I was a spectator as Esmond focused more and more on wildlife, branching out to investigate trade in Japan, China, India and South East Asia. Our first joint publication was in 1994 in the pages of *Swara* (Vol. 17, No. 5) reporting on wildlife markets in South East Asia. I could see parallels with the wild trade products supplied to markets by twentieth century hunter-gatherers (a.k.a. poachers) in both Asia and Africa. The roots go back centuries. We warned about the threat that this trade posed in a region where quickly growing wealth made desired wildlife products more accessible to increasing numbers of people.

Esmond brought the empirical detail of the methods that he had employed in the dhow trade over to the open-air wildlife markets and shops that he intrepidly travelled to in his quest to gather every last fact possible to explain and understand the dynamics of pachyderm product trade. He opened this secret world up to the conservation community through his fearless dedication to tread where others would not.

I had to chuckle, however, whenever he recounted his ‘undercover’ investigations to me. Esmond was not a person who could go unnoticed undercover. After observing him work in Cairo in 1998, where we coincidentally collided, I saw that he obtained his information from brazen interrogations, with no thought as to the consequences that might befall him.

He accomplished his sterling work with consummate determination, an iron will and superhuman stamina. Even though in failing health at age 76, he had recently completed a taxing research trip to Myanmar which he told me about in the last of his periodic phone calls and was busy preparing the report with Lucy Vigne.

Esmond had a profound influence on my life. As head of the Editorial



**Dan Stiles and Esmond Martin in 2004 in Langata.**

Committee of *Swara* he urged me to join the East African Wild Life Society and the Committee, which I did in 1984, and as editor of *Kenya Past and Present*, the journal of the National Museums of Kenya, he brought me on board as assistant editor. I ended up not only editing dozens of manuscripts for the two periodicals but also publishing dozens of my own. He brought me into the Lamu Society, where I became its head, and in 1999 came the most important of his invitations. He asked me to join him in a survey of the ivory markets of Africa.

This last turned out to be a massive undertaking that took the better part of a year to complete, with countless hours spent with Esmond and Chryssee at their home putting the publication together for a Save the Elephants monograph. This ivory survey provided the baseline data used to assess future trends in the ivory markets of Africa. The report proved so useful that Save the Elephants, along with other donors, sponsored four more regional ivory surveys (South & South East Asia, East

Asia, Europe and North America) that we carried out together. I ended up completing several other wildlife trade investigations on my own for TRAFFIC, IUCN, NRDC, Vulcan and others.

This was something that never would have happened without Esmond Bradley Martin. He was my mentor and friend, very much like a big brother. He introduced me to so many fascinating people in his home or on walks to visit his neighbours – Iain Douglas-Hamilton, Daphne Sheldrick, Mike Norton-Griffiths, Cynthia Moss, Peter Beard, Ted Goss, Jonathan Scott, Ian Parker, the list goes on. And then there are the pachyderm intimates that I came to know and respect through Esmond – Holly Dublin, Tom Milliken, Diane Skinner and Lucy Vigne, an unbelievably dedicated, hardworking bunch of elephant and rhino devotees.

We all deeply mourn the passing of this extraordinary man who achieved so much in his time on our planet. My world will certainly be a lonelier place without him. I will greatly miss those phone calls. ●