

4 IN BLACK AND WHITE

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Pachyderm pal

DR. KEES ROOKMAAKER
has done seminal
research on the rhino.



“Knowledge pays the best interest.” This saying by Benjamin Franklin illustrates how gathering knowledge is the most important aspect of working in any field. In this age of information, many people are devoted to learning about different fields of knowledge, but little about wildlife, even specific species. Rhino conservation is a micro field and despite regular research, comprehensive information on this magnificent creature is still to exist. In this world, there may only be a handful of people who are consistently working and are deeply committed to collecting study materials for rhino conservation and research support.

Dr. Kees Rookmaaker is one such person, a pioneer who ardently ‘loves’ the rhino and has collected all types of information from different corners of the globe for more than 50 years now, and even started the free information website on this pachyderm — the Rhino Resource Centre (RRC), in 2004.

Dr. Kees’ interest in rhinos began when he was in secondary school. He had an opportunity to spend some time every week in the library that used to belong to the Amsterdam Zoo. It was an old library that has an amazing collection of books on Zoology published in the 19th century and earlier. His thirst for knowledge helped him develop an interest and passion for zoological research. Initially, he was a bit confused and overwhelmed by all the information about mammals, but eventually, he decided to choose only one group of mammals to study and that is the rhinoceros.

Dr. Kees worked to prepare the historical documents of the University of Cambridge, including the manuscripts by both Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace. He did his Ph.D. on the zoological exploration of southern Africa, looking at the increase in knowledge about the mammals and birds of the region. He still holds an interest in exploring many possibilities

Rhino: Past, Present, And Future, released by WWF in 2017. Currently, he is working on a comprehensive history of the rhinoceros in South Asia, including Assam and its bordering states, and any old information or photographs are actively pursued.

The family members of Dr. Kees have invariably supported his noble passion. He visited Assam in 2010, 2013 and 2019. During his maiden visit in 2010, he came with his late wife Sandy and met a number of researchers, forest department personnel, journalists, and writers. He acknowledged the government of Assam, and the people of Assam for doing their utmost to conserve the world's largest population of greater one-horned rhinoceros from the brink of extinction. He was also pleased to see the newly established rhino population at the Manas National Park. Assam has a unique rhino culture that he applauds. But he does feel that much research on the greater one-horned rhinoceros would still be necessary for better management of this species and its habitat.

Dr. Kees' RRC is a goldmine that includes all aspects of rhino information. Accessible to all through the internet, anybody can read what has been done in the field of rhino research and conservation in any part of the world. Presently, the RRC provides free access to over 22,000 books and articles about rhinoceros, many of which are available as full texts. These are helpful resources that can help anybody interested in the rhinoceros. The past and present scientific matters and general articles on the rhinos of Assam are also available on the website.

Dr. Kees devotes several hours every day to explore any kind of research being done on the rhinoceros for RRC, along with an enthusiastic group of editors with specific sets of knowledge. There are many people working on different aspects of the rhinoceros' biology and history who contribute their material to the RRC. Appreciably, RRC is purely run on a virtual domain with the support of international donors like SOS Rhino, the International Rhino Foundation (IRF), and Save the Rhino International. RRC has no office, but it is a registered charity in the Netherlands where RRC's board of directors resides. Renowned rhino ecologist and conservationist Nico van Strien, as well as Esmond Bradley Martin, have guided the early framework of RRC.

Dr. Kees' extraordinary love and dedication for rhinos provides a valuable resource for both current and future generations of rhino researchers and conservationists. Besides being helpful academically, the RRC provides a wealth of information on creative fields to sociologists, economists and poli-

cymakers. Furthermore, other micro fields of research may also be benefited from this digital resource platform. There are a number of micro fields of research in North-East India, which may develop into a global platform like the RRC. One can only wish that more individuals like him would volunteer into wildlife and Nature research.

(The writer is a wildlife biologist with an interest in Indian rhino conservation and is currently working as Landscape Coordinator of WWF-India.)

