

“Rhino Man” Michael Werikhe Dies



Photo courtesy of The Rhino Trust

Celebrated “Rhino Man” Michael Werikhe, a lifelong conservationist and rhino advocate, died 9 August at a hospital in Mombassa, Kenya. According to newspaper reports, Werikhe’s death resulted from injuries sustained in an assault outside his home in Majengo Segha three weeks prior. Werikhe was 43.

Werikhe was known worldwide for his dedication to conservation, particularly that of the black rhino. He may not have had the chance to dedicate as many years as he would have liked, however Werikhe’s impact was felt throughout conservation circles. His full-time job was as a maintenance supervisor in a local auto factory, but his full-time passion was in dedicating countless hours to making known the dire necessity of saving the rhino.

During the 1980’s and early 1990’s, Werikhe drew the worlds’ attention to the plight of the black rhino with several highly publicized walks across East Africa, Europe and North America. During these walks, he helped raise over \$1.25 million for the conservation movement. The 1991 U.S. “Rhino Walk” galvanized the collective support of over 40 AZA member zoos and aquariums and their members, endear-

ing him to the public and to hundreds of AZA members nationwide.

“This is a devastating loss for his family, the rhinos and the entire conservation movement,” Dr. Meg Gammage-Tucker, president of The Rhino Trust said in a statement. “Michael’s almost single-handedly raised global awareness of the rhino crisis.”

He was the recipient of numerous conservation awards including: Guinness Stout Effort Award (1983), David Sheldrick Memorial Award (1984), Boots Action Award (1985), EAWLS Conservation Award (1986), UNEP Global 500 Award (1989), Goldman Environmental Prize (1990), Eddie Bauer Heroes of Earth (1991) and the San Diego Zoological Society Conservation Medal (1991).

While he was known throughout the world for his dedication to the conservation movement, those who met Werikhe will remember him as a kind, affable man who left an indelible mark on all he met.

“Michael Werikhe was quiet and unassuming, but his heart was as big as Africa. He was one of the most unselfish and dedicated conservationists of our time. It was a privilege to have known him. I can only hope that Michael’s untimely loss will cause us all to increase our efforts to preserve his beloved rhinoceroses,” said Dr. Michael Hutchins, AZA Director, Conservation and Science

A widower, Werikhe is survived by two daughters, Acacia and Kora who are now being raised by an aunt.

In the wake of Werikhe’s death, The Rhino Trust has established two funds. The “Michael Werikhe Conservation Fund,” is established as an endowment with income being used to insure long-term support of projects important to the management and protection of African rhinos and their habitats. Initial expenditures will be directed to programs at Tsavo National Park in Kenya. A special oversight committee of The Rhino Trust will direct investments from and for the Fund. Contributions to the Conservation Fund are tax deductible.

The second established fund is the “Werikhe Family Fund.” Proceeds from

this fund will go to Werikhe’s young daughters, ages eight and 10. Funds received will be passed on to the legal guardian of his children to the fullest extent possible given international exchange rates and provisions. Funds will be made available to provide for food, clothing, medical and educational needs. The President of The Rhino Trust will oversee contributions to and disbursements from the Family Fund. At this time, contributions to this fund are not tax deductible.

Werikhe was buried on 19 August at the St. Emmanuel Church cemetery in Kisauni. Hours before his burial mass, where he was elegantly eulogized by many, Werikhe was posthumously nominated for the “African of the Millennium” award by the British Broadcasting Corporation.

Donations

Donations for both the Michael Werikhe Conservation Fund and The Werikhe Family Fund should be mailed to:

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