

## Obituary

### In Memory of Kris Tindige (1966-2007)



**SAMKRIS TINDIGE** was born on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1966 at Desa Tabang on Karakelong Island, one of the Talaud Islands between Mindanao in the southern Philippines, and the north coast of Sulawesi. He grew up in the small city of Girian (Bitung) at the entrance to the well-known Tangkoko-Duasudara Nature Reserve on the northern tip of North Sulawesi.

During the Suharto regime, Kris' father had been imprisoned for many years as a suspected communist sympathizer. The inspiration for his son's name derived from this 'period of crisis', which translates to 'saman kris'. As a younger man, Kris' father had realized that an ability to speak English provided opportunity for increased earnings, so he resolved to provide the facilities for his son and daughter to embrace the English language. Whilst at school, Kris took many menial jobs including heavy quarry labouring to contribute to the payment of his school fees, but when this burden became too great for the family, an English clergyman continued to tutor him, and he was finally accepted as a student at the Foreign Languages Academy in Manado, North Sulawesi.

Kris graduated from the Foreign Languages Academy in 1990 with a diploma thesis on the subject of tourism in Bitung. A year later, he moved to Papua (formerly Irian Jaya or West New Guinea) to follow his dream of observing Birds of Paradise in the wild. He settled in Sorong on the western tip of Papua with a Biak tribe family who adopted him as their own child, and worked as the supervisor at PT Irian Beach Hotel while grappling with a totally unfamiliar avifauna.

From 1993 Kris conducted bird tours and led ornithological expeditions throughout Papua, Sulawesi, Maluku and Komodo Island. He also organised cultural tours to villages of the Korowai, Kombai and Asmat 'tree house' tribes of southern Papua, as well as those of the Dani and Lani tribes of the Baliem Valley. His knowledge of the Papuan avifauna finally earned him a contract with the BBC Natural History Unit in 1995, when BBC produced today's most acclaimed documentary on the Birds of Paradise, '*Attenborough in Paradise*', with arguably the world's best known natural historian Sir David Attenborough, who acknowledged Kris' vital role on screen and in the related publication. Kris' experience with BBC opened the door for work with other international television companies such as TFT1 (France), NHK (Japan), Discovery Channel and PBS (USA), West Deutsche Rundfunk (Germany), and Zebra Films,

Partridge Films and Tigress Production (UK). In his home country, Kris became a consultant and researcher for several Indonesian television stations in the production of wildlife documentaries, and worked with the well-known Indonesian film director Garin Nugroho, who produced the first natural history TV series for children.

In 1996 Kris founded the Papua Bird Club (PBC), the first ever bird club for the region. One of the principal objectives of the club was the active promotion of the study and conservation of birds through an educational programme in schools and village communities entitled 'Wild Bird Conservation Awareness'. This involved talks, slide shows and field trips. PBC also provided scholarships for motivated students in remote villages to attend high school and even university. As a Yayasan (non-profit NGO), PBC receives financial support from donors, though many of its activities have been funded by the income generated from Kris' natural history tours.

In 1999 Kris co-founded the Netherlands-based Papua and Maluku Wildlife Eco-guide Fund (WILCON), and in the following two years made essential contributions to the expeditions that led to the rediscovery of the rare Waigeo Brush Turkey *Aepyodius bruijnii*, which he was the first to photograph. Sponsored by WILCON, Kris travelled to Europe in 2002 as a member of the International Museum Organisation, giving guest lectures and receiving further training in wildlife education and animal welfare at Blijdorp Zoo in Rotterdam. Kris also wrote articles for several journals, including the Oriental Bird Club Bulletin, Geo and *Kukila*. His growing reputation earned his election to the Advisory Board of the US-based Project Bird Watch and to the Indonesian Parrot Project. Kris was also appointed as a Board Member of the Indonesian Ornithologists' Union (IdOU) soon after its formation in 2004, in recognition of his important contributions to Papuan ornithology.

After suffering increasing pain during the final months of 2004, Kris was encouraged to seek a medical examination in January 2005. Immediately upon learning of the tentative diagnosis of cancer, the 'Help Kris Campaign' was established in Holland, and together with organisations such as WILCON, 'Friends of Kris Tindige in Australia' and the Indonesian Parrot Project, and more than a hundred individuals from 15 countries, raised the necessary funds to cover the considerable costs of Kris' travel to Australia for further tests and treatment. Kris first flew to Darwin, where he presented a well-received talk on Papuan ecotourism at Charles Darwin University while awaiting the test results that confirmed our worst fears. He was then flown to Brisbane, where he sustained a rigorous, six-month programme of chemo- and radio-therapy at the Mater Hospital, Brisbane, an ordeal that would have been unbearable without the tireless support of his loving partner Shita Prativi, and the enduring hospitality and compassion of Sue and Lloyd Akeroyd, who welcomed Kris and Shita into their home as part of their family. As we had come to expect, Kris' condition did not stop him from birding and giving talks to the Queensland Ornithological Society and church communities around Brisbane.

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On completion of his medical treatment, Kris returned with Shita to Papua to resume bird tours and to continue PBC's invaluable community work. Tragically, Kris enjoyed only a brief remission from his cancer, and he was forced to return to Brisbane for tests on 1 January 2007, once again guests of the Akeroyd family. After a further five months of painful treatment, Kris decided to return to Papua to see out his remaining days in the land that he had grown to love.

Kris passed away on 20<sup>th</sup> August 2007 at his home in Manokwari, West Papua. With his passing, Papua has lost one of its only champions, and Indonesia, one of its most passionate and active conservationists.

Our sincere thanks go to all those who so generously donated medical expertise, money, time, compassion and friendship. In particular we owe a debt of gratitude to Sue and Loyd Akeroyd for their unswerving devotion to Kris, as well as to Rob McKay (who worked unstintingly to organise Kris' travel documents and medical tests), Ian Tillotson (who wrote regular update bulletins for Kris' supporters), Johan van den Berg (who coordinated the collection of funds for Kris' treatments) and Stewart Metz (Indonesian Parrot Project). The author also thanks Kees Heij for his valuable contributions towards this tribute.

Our greatest gratitude, however, must go to Kris – a very special person whose determination and courage will continue to inspire us all.

Richard Noske  
Darwin, Australia

#### **POST-SCRIPT**

The work of the Papua Bird Club (<http://www.papuabirdclub.com>) continues under the dedicated direction of Shita Prativi, and with the support of its donors. IdOU supports this work, and we hope that the Club gains strength for the long battle to save one of the world's last remaining tropical rainforest wildernesses.

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