

Emanuel Apostolos ‘Nolly’ Zaloumis (1932–2003)

One of South Africa’s best-known and best-loved conservationists, Dr ‘Nolly’ Zaloumis, has lost his fight against cancer, dying peacefully at his Durban home on 23 March 2003 at the age of 70.

Respected, honoured and admired by everyone in the conservation world, Nolly was always passionate about environmental issues and from 1964, when he came to Durban from Zambia where he had been born and where he had first practised as a dental surgeon, he was deeply involved with the Wildlife Society.

Whether he was leading an outing through the bush or sitting on a committee, giving a lecture on ducks or fighting for a cause, he quickly became the public face of the Society in the province. He was mentor and guide to many people, passing on his own set of conservation values and ethics and his deep sense of commitment. Perhaps his greatest skill was his ability to create a team of people who worked with, rather than for him on his many projects – a team to which he always generously deflected any praise for results achieved.

Chairman of the Natal Branch of the Society for a number of years and then, after eight years as its vice-president, the Society’s National President from 1981 to 1989, he continued to serve on the Board of WESSA until last year. As a member of its national Conservation Committee for many years, he was instrumental in shaping many of the Society’s policies, as well as leading many of its crusades.

One of the most successful of these was the successful campaign to raise funds for the purchase of the Umgeni Valley Reserve at Howick, so that it could be used as a permanent home for a conservation education programme within the Society. The necessary R250,000 (a considerable sum 25 years ago) was raised, the area was purchased, and

the Society was able to make environmental education a reality – with Umgeni Valley eventually becoming the national headquarters of the Society's education programme. As chairman of the Environmental Education Committee in Natal and the African Conservation Education (ACE) project in the mid-seventies, he was largely instrumental in shaping the initial stages of the Society's education programme and was able to watch it grow into an internationally-acclaimed aspect of the Society's work.

Another memorable crusade was the Campaign for St Lucia in which, as its first chairman, Nolly fought fearlessly and tirelessly to stop the proposed mining of the eastern shores of Lake St Lucia, campaigning instead for an eco-tourism alternative for the area. With a group of equally dedicated conservationists around him, Nolly spear-headed the carefully-planned and successful strategy from the time of the first rumours of an attempt to mine the St Lucia dunes, through the concerted media campaign, the national and international petitions to the Leon Commission of Inquiry which led to the government finally announcing that there would be no mining.

Yet another important Society initiative in which Nolly played a major role was the 'People and Parks/Parks and People' conference which highlighted community capacity-building and empowerment, working with people who lived in and around the protected areas of the province. The conference had an important and far-reaching impact on policy in the province and further afield.

Nolly's expertise was shared with many other organisations. He was a member of the board of the former Natal Parks Board for many years, initially serving from 1974 until 1992 and then, in 1998, being re-appointed as a member of the newly-amalgamated conservation body, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife. His single-minded dedication to the integrity of the conserved areas of KwaZulu-Natal sometimes made him unpopular, though he always retained the respect of all who worked with him and it was appropriate that he was presented with the Natal Parks Board Conservation Award in 1997.

He was also, at various times, the executive chairman of the South African Association for Marine Biological Research; a trustee of the National Parks Board of South Africa; a member of the Bophutatswana National Parks Board; president of the S.A. Wildlife Management Association; a trustee of the Durban Science Museum's Advisory Committee and the Joint Museums Board; vice-chairman, and later vice-president, of the S.A. Crane Foundation, and he represented South Africa at a variety of international conferences.

He was honoured by many organisations during his lifetime, receiving the State President's Gold Medal Award for meritorious Service in 1992; the Wildlife Society's Gold Medal (its highest award); Rotary International's Paul Harris Award for services to conservation and, in 2003, a Sapphire Pin to that award; an honorary Doctor of Science degree from the University of Natal; the St Michael Award (an award for outstanding service from Michaelhouse, which he had attended as a schoolboy); the Natal Conservationist of the Year Award; the Natal Hunters' Association Conservation Award, and others.

His one regret at the end of his life was that he had never had the time to write the definitive book on the ducks and geese of South Africa which he had planned for many years and for which he had amassed an amazing collection of his outstanding photographs. He had, however, been co-author of a best-selling field guide to the antelope of southern Africa and had written many articles and papers on a variety of conservation

issues, especially waterfowl and wetlands.

Nolly's enthusiasm for the environment was infectious and very few people who came into contact with him were left untouched by it. At one time there was a joke that almost every volunteer working for conservation in the province was a patient of Nolly's – for when a dentist, drill in hand asks you a favour, very few have the courage to refuse him!

Nolly always paid tribute to the support he had received over the years from the members of his family who had allowed him time to devote to his conservation interests – especially his wife, Molly-Ann. To her and to their children Penny, Paul and Andrew and their families, the KZN Region of Wessa, its members and all those whose lives he touched, extend their deepest sympathy.

ROBERT CROSS

Reproduced with kind permission from *Wessa KZN News*,
Volume 44 Number 2, April/May/June 2003.