

Hu Berry: Namibia loses conservation leader

• JANA-MARI SMITH

WITH the death of Hu Berry Namibia has lost "intellectual leadership in the field of conservation and tourism".

This is the view of Peter Tarr, a personal friend and professional colleague of the late Berry.

Berry died on Monday, only months after the death of his wife, Conny. Friends say Berry was devastated by the loss of his life partner.

Through decades of work as a biologist and ecologist in Namibia, Berry became one of the larger-than-life conservation figures who contributed to several key conservation movements in Namibia: this included his work with the Etosha lions, his call to open up larger areas for migra-

tory passages of animals and his promotion of the Namib Desert as a unique and highly valuable global resource.

Steve Brain, a well-known ornithologist who occasionally worked with Berry, said yesterday that Berry was "an upright ambassador" for Namibia's wilderness and animals. He said Berry continued to be a staunch conservationist even after he left the Ministry of Environment and Tourism where he had worked for more than three decades.

According to close friend Tarr, Berry's death is "the end of an era in many ways".

"People of that calibre are very hard to replace," Tarr said. He said Berry continued to be inspirational and a mentor, to new



Photo: Contributed

ETOSHA YEARS ... Here Dr Berry and his son Mark work on a sedated lion in Etosha National Park.

biologists entering the field in the last decade.

"Dr Hu Berry was the most special of scientists because at his heart was peace and kindness to animals. He did not see them as a means to a scientific end. His loss is a loss to

all, not only in Namibia," said Yanna Erasmus, a friend and admirer of the biologist.

He was a key figure in "his contribution towards enlightening the public about the beauty and great value of the Namib Desert"

Tarr said.

"Where people always think of the desert as a useless wasteland – he reminded us that this is the resource we should not sell cheaply and allow to be degraded. The Namib is one of our most valuable assets."

Although Berry's work with the Etosha lions is often the first thing that comes to mind when his name is mentioned, Tarr said that Berry contributed significantly in other respects.

One of his earliest contributions was made during his work with wildebeest.

Berry realised that one of the main management challenges in African parks was that animals such as wildebeest need more space in which to migrate and move.

Berry made "a call that more space is needed for mega-herbivores to be able to move freely in open ecosystems". His work here contributed to that of others and led to the creation of conservancies "to promote a landscape approach to conservation. That was a real ecological concept", Tarr said.

Dr Berry wore many cloaks: He trained as an entomologist and zoologist at Pretoria University. After his move to Namibia from his place of birth in South Africa, Berry was employed as an ornithologist and chief biologist at the Etosha National Park. Here he quickly rose to become the control warden.

He worked extensively with a wide variety of wildlife during his more than three decades at the

Ministry of Environment and Tourism, conducting studies on birds, herbivores and carnivores.

Berry was instrumental in researching alternative ways to control lion populations as opposed to culling the king of predators.

During his work at Etosha, his research into implanting contraceptives in a number of lionesses in order to control population growth, garnered him respect and fame in conservation circles.

After his retirement from the ministry, Berry became a specialist guide, granting tourists a unique opportunity to travel the country alongside a highly qualified man whose love for the country was documented through countless articles, both scientific and popular.

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