

MSU Alumni Couple Active in Congo Wildlife Conservation

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has been much in the news of late, generally in the context of its recent civil war and the many ensuing problems facing the country. Recent coverage has included a *New York Times* article suggesting that the world's "worst current human crisis" is occurring in the eastern part of that country, with thousands of deaths every month. Periodic fighting and civil unrest still continue throughout the DRC in the uneasy aftermath of the war, a conflict that was complicated by the involvement of foreign troops. Uncontrolled militias operate outside the law in much of the country, causing (among other problems) a crisis of internally displaced persons. Conflicts in neighboring countries, including Rwanda, have caused foreign rebel groups and refugees to cross into the border regions of the DRC. Most recently, concerns over an outbreak of cholera in refugee camps have surfaced.

Amidst the human chaos, and to a major extent because of it, the stress on the environment has worsened and the normal strategies for protecting it have proven inadequate. One cause of continued violence is the desire to profit through exploitation of the country's natural riches, including diamonds, gold, timber, and ivory. Income from this exploitation, in turn, helps to maintain and arm both government and militia forces. Endangered species such as forest elephants and mountain gorillas have become targets in the search for food.

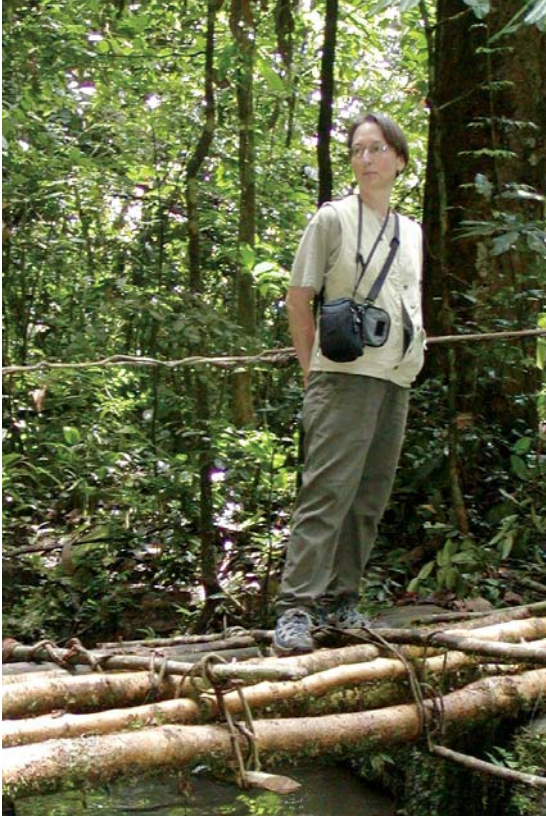


Two MSU alumni, Terese and John Hart, are working to foster conservation in the midst of armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Terese is currently the director of the Wildlife Conservation Society's (WCS) operations in the DRC, and her husband John heads up a major wildlife inventory and monitoring initiative in that country involving the Okapi Wildlife Reserve and several national parks. The Harts did their graduate research in the DRC (then called Zaire) in the late 1970s and early 1980s and have been working on environmental issues there ever since. Terese earned MSU master's in entomology in 1979 and a Ph.D. in botany and plant pathology in 1985; John earned a master's in geography in 1979 and his doctorate in fisheries and wildlife in 1986.

The DRC is Africa's third largest country, roughly the size of western Europe, and home to more than half of Africa's rain forest. According to the WCS website, the Harts' extensive surveys of wildlife in the tropical Ituri Forest, near the eastern border with Uganda, helped pave the way for the 1992 establishment of the 5,200-square-mile Okapi Wildlife Reserve, a protected area inside that vast forest system. The reserve was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1996.

The Harts have conducted extensive studies of the okapi, a shy relative of the giraffe that lives in wooded areas of eastern and northern DRC. Although not officially endangered, the Harts consider *Okapia johnstoni* (photo, left) to be an at-risk species, vulnerable to deforestation and human encroachment. As they have studied the okapi and other area wildlife, they have lived for long periods of time with the local Mbuti people residing in the Ituri forest. They have relied heavily on Mbuti trackers, who helped to capture a number of okapi so they could be equipped with radio collars and their movements tracked. The couple has published a number of works on okapi that are helping environmentalists better understand the ecosystem they inhabit.

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MSU alumni Terese and John Hart have been involved in wildlife studies and conservation efforts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo since the 1970s. Here, Terese is standing on a bridge over the Lenda River and John is bird watching in a smaller stream.

The Harts and other WCS staff are currently based in Kinshasa, the DRC capital, hoping that a tentative peace will open up opportunities to move conservation to a national scale. “We now have activities in Salonga National Park, Kahuzi Biega National Park, and Maiko National Park, as well as the Okapi Wildlife Reserve,” Terese said. WCS has joined with several other environmental organizations in Kinshasa to encourage the new Congolese government to step up efforts to protect the national parks. The threat of violence limits their activities in some areas. After a recent return visit to the Ituri, Terese reported, “The Okapi Faunal Reserve is not accessible throughout. Our monitoring team estimates that

it can work in about half of it. There is serious elephant poaching happening in the rest of it. The poaching is facilitated by military that are not yet integrated into the national army.”

The Harts have recently published a number of articles built on their conservation efforts in the context of conflict. Among their plans for the future is the continuation of work in the Itombwe Upland just west of northern Lake Tanganyika. According to Terese, it is “a highly diverse part of the Albertine Rift—not yet protected—home of Grauer’s gorilla. Our hope is to help create a protected area and help contribute to its effective protection in this important area.”

—Jay Rodman

International Graduates Win 2004 Distinguished Alumni Award

MSU Alumna **Nguyet-Hong Thi Phung** stands with College of Education Dean **Carole Ames** after receiving a 2004 Distinguished Alumni Award. Phung is on the faculty at Cantho University and is a key participant in that institution's collaborations with MSU.



Purachai Piumsombun has held several high-level posts in the government of Thailand, most recently deputy prime minister. He is shown with his wife, **Somari**.



Mitsuaki Shimaguchi is a leading marketing expert in Japan and a professor at Keio University. He is joined by **Keith Williams**, executive director of the MSU Alumni Association.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MSU ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

More than 500 people attended the MSU Alumni Association's annual Grand Awards ceremony held at MSU's Kellogg Center in October 2004. Three international MSU graduates were among the recipients of the Distinguished Alumni Award.

■ **Nguyet-Hong Thi Phung** of Cantho City, Vietnam, received her doctorate in biological sciences in 1973 and is now a biologist and project coordinator in the International Collaboration Office at Cantho University in Vietnam's Mekong Delta.

Phung has earned an international reputation with her research on algae. She has served as the head of Cantho University's botany department, as vice dean of the faculty of biology and chemistry, and as coordinator for several projects, including the Cantho-MSU poverty reduction project that integrates school reform with community development.

Phung has extensive teaching experience, having developed and taught courses in biology, plant anatomy, plant taxonomy, freshwater algae, and scientific research methods. She has received the Medal of Education from the Ministry of Education and the Certificate of Outstanding Contributions in the Sector of Pedagogy in Vietnam.

■ **Purachai Piumsombun** of Bangkok, Thailand, graduated in 1975 with a master's degree in criminal justice. At the time of the ceremony, he was a deputy prime minister of Thailand and is also the former minister of justice and minister of interior.

Piumsombun is a longtime academic researcher and professor with an extensive political career. In 1998, he was a cofounder of the Thai Rak Thai (TRT) political party in Thailand and served as TRT secretary general from 1998 to 2002. TRT formed the current Thai government after winning the 2001 election. He currently is working on social policy and is involved in efforts to prevent human trafficking. In 2002, the Rajabhat Academic Institute named him the Outstanding Politician for Innovating the Social Order Policy.

Before his political career, Piumsombun served as a professor at the National Police Academy of Thai-

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land. He also held positions as dean, vice president, and president of the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA), establishing two NIDA campuses. In 1997, he founded Shinawatra University in Thailand, a research university that has since won the 2003 Asian Energy Award for its efficiency and conservation practices.

■ **Mitsuaki Shimaguchi** of Kawasaki, Japan, who received both his MBA and Ph.D. in marketing from MSU (1968 and 1977, respectively), is professor of marketing in the Graduate School of Business Administration at Keio University in Japan. He is a consultant to major Japanese corporations, serves on the board of some 20 public and government organizations, has published more than 20 books, and

teaches and lectures extensively in Western Europe and Asia. He has served as chief editor of the *Japan Marketing Journal*, the *Journal of Marketing and Distribution*, and the *Journal of Health and Society*.

Shimaguchi is considered the leading marketing professor in Japan and an expert on the Japanese distribution system. He was selected by several of Japan's top corporations, such as Toyota, Seiko, Suntory, Mitsubishi, and Dentsu, to lead assessment tours of various countries in Asia, Africa, the United States, and Europe. He also has participated in the activities of MSU alumni in Japan.

For more information about the 2004 Grand Awards Ceremony visit the website at www.msualum.com/events/2004/grand-awards/awards04.cfm

Alumni Serve in New Ambassadorial Posts

Two MSU alumni have taken on new ambassadorial challenges during this past year, one representing Estonia in a European Union context and the other representing the U.S. in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

■ **Riina Ruth Kionka** was appointed in August 2004 to the position of undersecretary for European Union Affairs in the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs following a four-year assignment as Estonia's ambassador to Germany (2000–04). In her current position, she has broad responsibilities for the Ministry's European Union (EU) involvements, particularly internal EU policies involving budget, newly admitted members, further expansion, and treaties.

Kionka graduated from MSU in 1983 with dual majors in international policy studies (James Madison College) and German literature (College of Arts and Letters). She went on to Columbia University, where she earned an M.A., a Certificate of Completion from that school's Harriman Institute for Advanced Study of the Soviet Union, and a Ph.D. She was born in Detroit and attended public grade and high schools in the Detroit metropolitan area.

Kionka has held positions with the ministry since 1993, where she directed a policy planning office and eventually

became the ministry's political director. She has taught at MSU and at Queens College (CUNY) in New York and is widely published in major newspapers and foreign policy journals.

■ **Roger A. Meece** was appointed in July 2004 to be U.S. ambassador to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where he had previously been deputy chief of mission. A native of Indiana, he is a 1971 graduate of MSU with a B.S. in mathematics.

Meece's long involvement in Africa began after leaving MSU, with a stint in the Peace Corps in Sierra Leone. He went on to several administrative Peace Corps positions in Niger, Cameroon, and Republic of the Congo (Brazzaville) and eventually became director of the Peace Corps in Gabon.

Meece's foreign service career began in 1979 with early postings in Cameroon and Malawi. He has rotated between assignments in Washington, D.C. and various African countries (and Canada) since that time. After a period as director for Central African Affairs at the State Department, he served as ambassador to Malawi (2000–03). Before his current assignment, Meece spent a year as "Diplomat in Residence" at Florida International University, interrupted for several months by an emergency posting as charge d'affaires at the U.S. embassy in Nairobi, Kenya.