

**Alan Rabinowitz, 1953–2018**

Dr. Alan Rabinowitz, world-renowned champion of wild cat conservation, died of lymphocytic leukemia in New York on August 5, 2018. He helped to advance conservation in Thailand and neighboring countries, and contributed as an author and editor to the *Natural History Bulletin of the Siam Society*.

His colorful career took off in 1982 when he was recruited by the New York Zoological Society (NYZS) to study jaguars in Belize. He carried out the first scientific study of the ecology of the species there, which earned him a staff position at the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), the conservation arm of NYZS where he worked for nearly all of his career. Rabinowitz was dismayed by the poaching and habitat destruction he witnessed in Belize, and began a crusade to save the jaguar, the top predator of the American tropical forest ecosystem. In 1986, he persuaded the government of Belize to create the Cockscomb Basin Jaguar Preserve, turning the tide on the loss of the country's wild heritage. He would, in later years near the end of his life, extend the conservation of jaguars down a corridor through Latin America from Mexico to Argentina.

Rabinowitz's contributions to conservation are best appreciated by reading his four major books on his campaigns to promote research and conservation of cats and other wild species. His first book, *Jaguar: One Man's Struggle to Establish the World's First Jaguar Preserve* (New York: Arbor House, 1986), established the genre. His books are not dignified, scholarly accounts of his work and travels (as, for example, the scholarly but highly readable books of NYZS's renowned wildlife biologist George Schaller), but are more like exciting adventure stories featuring one of conservation's biggest heroes. Rabinowitz lets it all hang out—his personal struggles, problems and even love life are in the forefront. He had a talent for riveting prose that reads like a novel, but at the same time explaining conservation science in simple terms. The style of *Jaguar* raised some eyebrows back at NYZS, but the director realized that maybe this kind of writing was what conservation needed to attract the public's attention. More "let-it-all-out" adventure books by Alan followed.

After Belize, Rabinowitz was assigned to work in Thailand at the invitation of the Thai government, to help establish a research and conservation program for big cats in Thailand's western protected areas. His adventures in Thailand, spanning 1986–1990, are recounted in *Chasing the Dragon's Tail: The Struggle to Save Thailand's Wild Cats* (New York: Doubleday, 1991). This book seems less of a heroic adventure than his other three, because when Rabinowitz arrived in Thailand the kingdom had already passed wildlife conservation legislation and established a complex system of protected areas. Rabinowitz's main contribution was to help establish a world-class field research program in the Wildlife Conservation Division. His project was based at the remote Khao Nang Rum Research Station in Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary, in the heart of what is arguably Southeast Asia's most important big wildlife (tiger, leopard, elephant, gaur, banteng, deer etc.) conservation area. He instructed wildlife officials and other assistants how to survey for wildlife, and to trap and radio-collar cats and civets to study their ranging behavior.

The most absorbing events in *Chasing the Dragon's Tail* are the author's cultural encounters: his attempts to understand the behavior, habits and beliefs of Thai officials, Buddhist monks, workers and rural tribal people. As in the case with the Mayans in Belize, these often presented obstacles in the way of the author's attempts to carry out research or

implement conservation. Rabinowitz was a keen observer of people and always tried to get to know and understand the people around him, no matter how unimportant or indigent they were. He had a talent for connecting with people that makes his writing a personal and emotional experience. His dealings with influential people and Thai officialdom also illustrate the reasons for Thailand's slow and rocky advance toward effective environmental conservation.

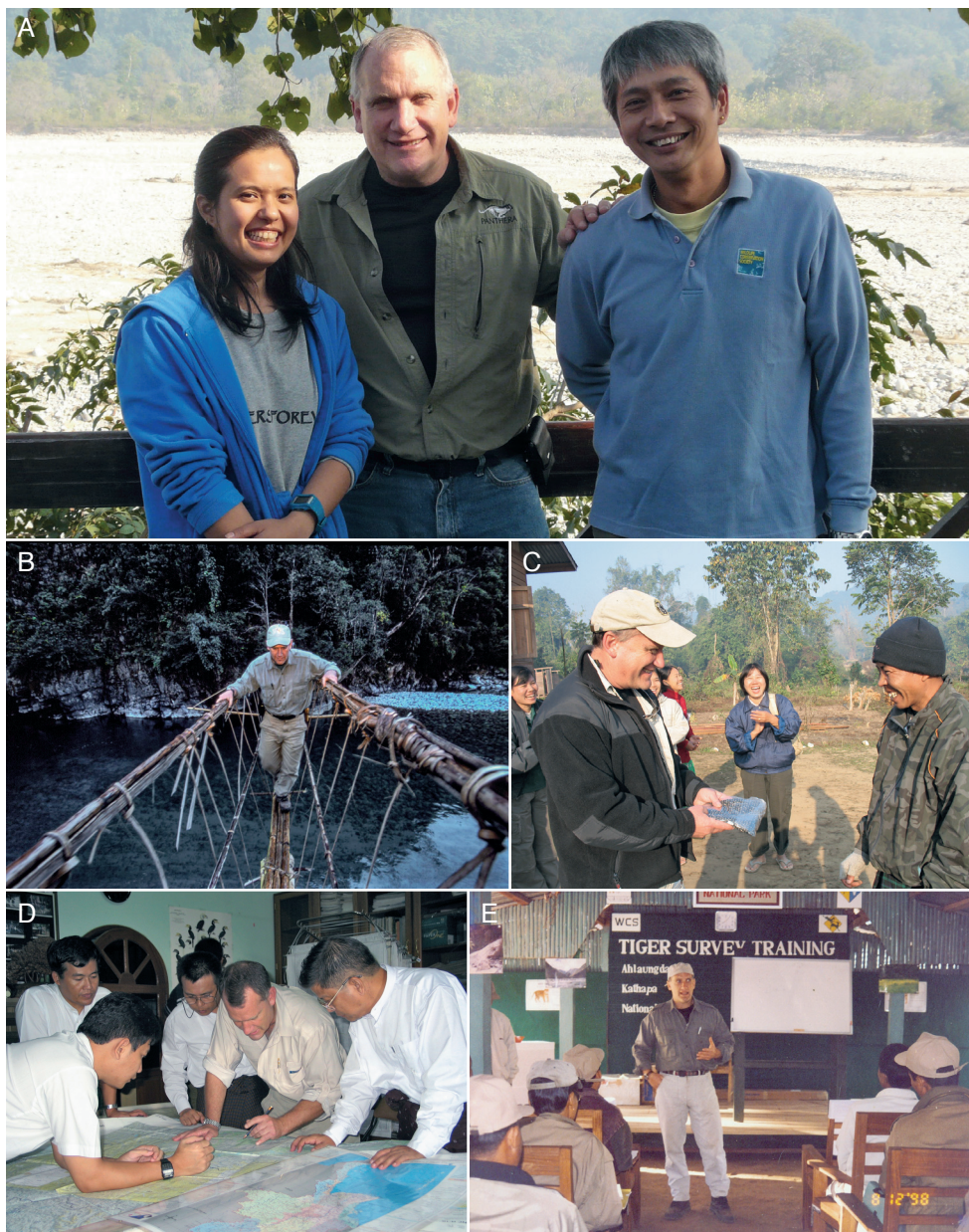
Occasionally Alan's behavior was rash, as when he went chasing after armed poachers on foot, or when he carelessly injured and then reinjured his left leg in a motorcycle crash, or when he became angry at someone and lost his composure. He had a habit of creating his own problems. Sue Walker, his research assistant and sometime girlfriend, sometimes tried to calm his behavior, usually without much success.

Rabinowitz's two books about his work in Myanmar are perhaps his most important and successful. These are *Beyond the Last Village: A Journey of Discovery in Asia's Forbidden Wilderness* (Washington DC: Island Press, 2001), and *Life in the Valley of Death: The Fight to Save Tigers in a Land of Guns, Gold, and Greed* (Washington DC: Island Press, 2008). The first book details his initial exploration up into the Kachin State, a largely untamed wilderness area contested by the Myanmar government and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). We follow Rabinowitz's expedition up the spectacular and dangerous Nam Tamai River gorges to the northernmost region of Myanmar, whose mostly ethnic Tibetan villagers rarely see outsiders, and eke out a precarious existence as hunters and primitive agriculturalists. They trade wildlife parts to Chinese for salt, ironware and other essentials. Rabinowitz found that virtually no part of this region was untrammelled wilderness, and wildlife was becoming scarce.

Noteworthy accomplishments resulted from Rabinowitz's expeditions in Myanmar. At the urging of Rabinowitz and with the support of the Wildlife Conservation Society, Myanmar more than doubled its protected area coverage and added 12 new protected areas and wildlife sanctuaries to the system. These include the spectacular Hkakabo Razi National Park in the extreme north, and the wildlife-rich Hukaung Valley Wildlife Sanctuary in the subtropical evergreen forest zone. The latter was set up largely as a large tiger conservation reserve.

*Life in the Valley of Death* relates Rabinowitz's valiant efforts to set up a huge multiple-use wildlife sanctuary centered on the Hukaung Valley in the drainage of the northernmost branches of the Chindwin River. This area contains some 50,000 inhabitants consisting of Burmese settlers, Kachin villagers, insurgents and assorted other tribal peoples. Rabinowitz recounts his tricky (and sometimes humorous) negotiations with forestry officials, military generals, the Kachin Independence Organization, KIA and several tribal groups and village heads. WCS's main role was to try to obtain benefits for the local people whose cooperation would be essential to success. The success of this major conservation effort has been compromised by rampant illegal gold mining in all major streams and enclaves in the lowland removed for plantations. The renewed skirmishing between the Myanmar army and the KIA has not helped conservation efforts.

Elsewhere in the region, Alan, along with George Schaller, became involved in fieldwork in the Annamite Mountains in Laos in the mid-1990s. Together they published one of the first scientific papers on the Saola, a newly discovered, primitive kind of forest antelope. As Asia Director of the Wildlife Conservation Society he then established the WCS Laos Program to focus on the conservation of the Annamites. Again, never one to avoid controversy, Alan publicly supported the position of the World Bank and their participation in the Nam Theun II dam project, in the hope that the engagement of the World Bank would hold the government to a number of conservation commitments. He was less involved in Cambodia, but it is perhaps



A, Alan (middle) with Mayuree Umponjan (left) and Melvin Gumal (right) at Jim Corbett Tiger Reserve, Rajaji National Park, India, in December 2011 (© WCS); B, Alan crossing the Adunlong Stream just south of Tazuhtu Village in Hkakaborazi National Park, Myanmar in December 1996 (© Steve Winter); C, Alan giving a small present to U Win Zaw at Shin Bway Yang Village, Hukaung Valley Wildlife Sanctuary, Myanmar in December 2005 with Daw Khin Htay, Daw Khin Htwe Yin and Daw San San Nwe in the background (© WCS); D, Alan planning surveys in Kachin State with WCS personnel in their office in Yangon, Myanmar (© Steve Winter); E, Alan lecturing at a tiger training workshop at Alaungdaw Kathapa National Park, Myanmar (© WCS).



fitting that his last published paper was again typically one that challenged conservationists to think harder about what they do and why, when as a co-author of a 2018 paper he helped critique the science behind a study of the proposed reintroduction of tigers into the country.

In 2006 Alan helped found Panthera, an international NGO devoted to the conservation of the world's 40 wild cat species. This organization has made great progress in conserving the jaguar, and has developed plans for conservation all the large cat species.

Alan Rabinowitz had such an impact because of his life-long dedication and great passion for his work. His talent for writing and use of the public media helped him ensure success. He was indeed a rare species of conservationist.

He is survived by his loving wife Salisa and two children, Alexander and Alana.

**Warren Y. Brockelman**  
**Colin Poole**

### **Publications of Alan Rabinowitz dealing with Asia:**

- RABINOWITZ, A., P. ANDAU, AND P. CHAI. 1987. The clouded leopard (*Neofelis nebulosa*) in Malaysian Borneo. *Oryx* 21(2): 107–111.
- RABINOWITZ, A. 1988. The clouded leopard in Taiwan. *Oryx* 22(1): 46–47.
- RABINOWITZ, A. 1989. The density and behavior of large cats in a dry tropical forest mosaic in Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary, Thailand. *Nat. Hist. Bull. Siam Soc.* 37(2): 235–251.
- RABINOWITZ, A. 1990. Notes on the behaviour and movements of Leopard Cats, *Felis bengalensis*, in dry tropical forest in Thailand. *Biotropica* 22(4): 397–403.
- RABINOWITZ, A. 1990. Fire, dry dipterocarp forest, and the carnivore community in dry tropical forest in Huai Kha Khaeng W.S., Thailand. *Nat. Hist. Bull. Siam Soc.* 38(2): 99–117.
- RABINOWITZ, A. 1991. Behaviour and movements of sympatric civet species in Huai Kha Khaeng W.S., Thailand. *J. Zool., London* 223(2): 281–298.
- RABINOWITZ, A., AND S. WALKER. 1991. The carnivore community in dry tropical forest in Huai Kha Khaeng W.S., Thailand. *J. Trop. Ecol.* 7(1): 37–47.
- WALKER, S., AND A. RABINOWITZ. 1992. The small-mammal community of a dry tropical forest in central Thailand. *J. Trop. Ecol.* 8: 57–71.
- RABINOWITZ, A. 1993. Estimating the Indochinese Tiger population *Panthera tigris corbetti* in Thailand. *Biol. Cons.* 65(3): 213–217.
- PATTON, S., AND A. RABINOWITZ. 1994. Parasites of wild felidae in Thailand: A coprological survey. *J. Wild. Diseases* 30(3): 472–475.
- RABINOWITZ, A., G. SCHALLER, AND U UGA. 1995. A survey to assess the status of Sumatran rhinoceros and other large mammal species in Tamanthi Wildlife Sanctuary, Myanmar. *Oryx* 29(2): 123–128.
- SCHALLER, G., AND A. RABINOWITZ. 1995. The saola or spindlehorn bovid *Pseudoryx nghetinhensis* in Laos. *Oryx* 29(2): 107–114.
- RABINOWITZ, A. 1995. The significance of biodiversity conservation to mankind. *Siam Trade* 4(40): 89–91.
- RABINOWITZ, A. 1995. Helping a species go extinct: the Sumatran rhino in Borneo. *Cons. Biol.* 9(3): 482–488.
- RABINOWITZ, A. 1995. Sumatran rhino conservation: Response to letters to the editor. *Cons. Biol.* 9(5): 5–6.
- RABINOWITZ, A., AND E. L. BENNETT. 1995. Wildlife management and field research: In-country training courses. Pages 162–165 in J. A. Bissonette and P. R. Krausman (eds.), *Integrating people and wildlife for a sustainable future*. Proc. First International Wildlife Management Congress. The Wildlife Society, Bethesda, Maryland.
- RABINOWITZ, A. 1995. Asian nations meet in Thailand to discuss transboundary biodiversity conservation. *Nat. Hist. Bull. Siam Soc.* 43: 23–26.
- WEBER, W., AND A. RABINOWITZ. 1996. A global perspective on large carnivore conservation. *Cons. Biol.* 10(4): 1046–1054.
- RABINOWITZ, A., G. AMATO, AND U SAW TUN KHAING. 1998. Discovery of the black muntjac, *Muntiacus crinifrons*, in north Myanmar. *Mammalia* 62(1): 105–108.

- RABINOWITZ, A., AND U SAW TUN KHAING. 1998. The status of selected mammal species in far northern Myanmar. *Oryx* 32(3): 201–208.
- WIKRAMANAYAKE, E. D., E. DINERSTEIN, J. G. ROBINSON, U. KARANTH, A. RABINOWITZ, D. OLSON, T. MATHEW, P. HEDAO, M. CONNER, G. HEMLEY, AND D. BOLZE. 1998. An ecology-based method for defining priorities for large mammal conservation: The tiger as a case study. *Cons. Biol.* 12(4): 865–878.
- RABINOWITZ, A. 1998. Status of the tiger in North Myanmar. *Tigerpaper* 25(1): 15–20.
- RABINOWITZ, A. 1999. The status of the tiger in Indochina: Separating fact from fiction. in J. Seidensticker, P. Jackson, and S. Christie (eds.). *Riding the tiger: Meeting the needs of humans and wildlife in Asia*. Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge.
- AMATO, G., M. G. EGAN, AND A. RABINOWITZ. 1999. A new species of muntjac, *Muntiacus putaoensis* (Artiodactyla: Cervidae) from northern Myanmar. *Anim. Cons.* 2: 1–7.
- RABINOWITZ, A., THAN MYINT, SAW TUN KHAING, AND S. RABINOWITZ. 1999. Description of the leaf deer, *Muntiacus putaoensis*, a new species of muntjac from northern Myanmar. *J. Zool.* 249: 427–435.
- RABINOWITZ, A. 1999. Notes on the rare red goral (*Naemorhedus baileyi*) of north Myanmar. *Mammalia* 63(1): 119–123.
- RAO, M., A. RABINOWITZ, AND SAW TUN KHAING. 2001. A status review of the protected area system in Myanmar with recommendations for conservation planning. *Cons. Biol.* 16(2): 360–368.
- RABINOWITZ, A. 2002. Ground truthing conservation: why biological exploration isn't history. *Conservation in Practice* 3(4): 20–25.
- MILLER, B., W. CONWAY, R. READING, C. WEMMER, D. WILDT, D. KLEIMAN, S. MONFORT, A. RABINOWITZ, B. ARMSTRONG, AND M. HUTCHINS. 2004. Evaluating the conservation mission of zoos, aquariums, botanical gardens, and natural history museums. *Cons. Biol.* 18(1): 86–93.
- WOODROFFE, R., S. THIRGOOD, AND A. RABINOWITZ. (eds.). 2009. *People and Wildlife: Conflict or Coexistence?* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.
- SCHALLER, G., AND A. RABINOWITZ. 2005. Species of barking deer (Genus *Muntiacus*) in the eastern Himalayan region. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 101(3): 442–444.
- LYNAM, A. J., A. RABINOWITZ, T. MYINT, M. MAUNG, K. T. LATT, AND S. H. T. PO. 2009. Estimating abundance with sparse data: Tigers in northern Myanmar. *Pop. Ecol.* 51: 115–121.
- MIQUELLE, D., C. POOLE, S. MAHOOD, H. TRAVERS, M. LINKIE, J. GOODRICH, J. WALSTON, K. SEREYROTHA, AND A. RABINOWITZ. 2018. Comments on “A framework for assessing readiness for tiger reintroductions.” *Biodiversity and Conservation* 27(12): 3287–3293. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10531-018-1591-1>

## Popular publications:

- “Taiwan’s newest and biggest reserve” *Animal Kingdom Magazine*. Mar./Apr. 1989.
- “Following the big cat tracks” *Feature Magazine* (Thailand). Oct. 1990. (Translated into Thai with English abstract)
- “Chasing shadows called civets” *International Wildlife Magazine*. Nov. 1991.
- “The eye of the tiger” *Wildlife Conservation Magazine*. Nov. 1991.
- “Back to basics” *Wildlife Conservation Magazine*. July/Aug. 1993.
- “On the horns of a dilemma: can the Sumatran rhino be saved?” *Wildlife Conservation Magazine*. Sept./Oct. 1994.
- “New wildlife discovery in northern Myanmar” *Myanmar Perspectives* IV(6). 1996.
- “Lost World of the Annamites” *Nat. Hist.* 106(3): 14–18. 1997.
- “Discovery on Ice Mountain” *Wildlife Conservation Magazine*. Oct. 1997.
- “Home on the range” *Wildlife Conservation Magazine*. Oct. 1997.
- “Back of beyond” *Wildlife Conservation Magazine*. Oct. 1997.
- “On the road to Myanmar” *Wildlife Conservation Magazine*. Dec. 1997.
- “Killed for a Cure” *Natural History*. 107(3): 22–24. April 1998.
- “Turning over a new leaf: muntjac discovered in Myanmar” *Wildlife Conservation Magazine*. Nov./Dec. 1998.
- “A time for discovery” *Wildlife Conservation Magazine*. Apr. 2000.
- “The price of salt” *Natural History*. Sept. 2000.
- “Salt for the wilderness” *GEO Magazine*. July 2001.
- “The Carnivore Connection” *Wildlife Conservation Magazine*. June 2003.
- “A question of balance” *National Geographic Magazine*. Mar. 2004.
- “Guns, gold, and greed” *Wildlife Conservation Magazine*. Oct. 2005.