

## Anthony J. Whitten (1953–2017)

Jane Whitten

Tony was born in 1953 in South London. His early fascination with animals and plants was nurtured by his mother's love of nature walks and wild flowers and his father's business lunches at London Zoo. As a teenager he persuaded his mother, who liked to keep her house very clean and tidy, to allow him to hatch a clutch of ducklings in his bedroom in order to study their sense of smell. His interest in how things worked resulted in boiling up a rather smelly badger that had died crossing the road to extract its skeleton. How he persuaded his mother to allow this we will never know.

During the school holidays, Tony worked at Peter Scott's Slimbridge Wildfowl Trust and developed a strong interest in wildfowl. At 18, he spent three months visiting New Zealand on a Churchill Fellowship. At the time he was the youngest person to have been given this opportunity. He studied methods of bird conservation in New Zealand and was captivated by the rare Blue Duck. His initial applications to university were rejected as exams had never been his strong suit, but as in later life, his determination and enthusiasm carried him forward and following the Churchill Fellowship he was accepted by Southampton University to study Environmental Science. There he reveled in the breadth of the course, developing an interest in ape behavior. We met through a mutual friend, and within a few months, had decided to spend our lives together.

Through Sir Peter Scott, Tony heard about the Mentawai Islands in Indonesia, and specifically Siberut, home to four species of endemic primate and a near-stone age culture. This combination of unique wildlife, a remote location and an interesting culture captured his imagination and he decided to go there to study the Kloss Gibbon. He enrolled as a PhD student under David Chivers at the University of Cambridge, at Kings College. He was doubly thrilled to be a member of this college, who's world-famous choir meant

he could easily indulge his passion for choral music. We spent two years working together on Siberut where, alongside my study of small mammals and Tony's of gibbons, we conducted primate surveys and co-wrote the first management plan for the island. We went back to visit Siberut in 2009, taking our grown children with us and revisiting the Mentawai family who had befriended us and taught us about the forest and local culture all those years ago. Living on Siberut marked the start of Tony's life-long passion for taking people's needs into account when seeking to protect wildlife. In this unique environment, he also collected for the Natural History Museum and came to understand the vital importance of being able to name things, so that we can care about them. Forty years later no less than 30 new species and two new genera have been named after him, mainly the herps and invertebrates that so fascinated him. *Pilosphaenops whitteni*, a blind cave beetle from southern China was his favourite.

After writing up his PhD in Cambridge, he took a job with The Canadian International Development agency, CIDA, at the University of North Sumatra in Medan. Seeing Indonesian ecology taught with textbooks about American deciduous forest convinced him that there was an urgent need for relevant, local language ecology text books and *The Ecology of Sumatra* was born soon after our daughter, Ruth. The book appeared in two versions, English and Indonesian, and was the first book of its kind to be available to Indonesian speakers. Over the next 40 years he was delighted to receive first letters and then emails from people for whom this book had been formative. Following a brief spell in England for the birth of our second child, Peter, we returned to Indonesia this time to Bogor in West Java, where Tony continued with CIDA working on the Environmental Management Development Plan in Indonesia (EMDI). The family was based here while Tony wrote *The Ecology of Sulawesi*, and led the team writing the *Freshwater Fishes of Western Indonesia and Sulawesi*.

There followed two years back in Cambridge when he worked at The Nature Conservancy Council compiling the



Tony sorting snails from leaf litter, on board the Ombak Putih in Eastern Indonesia, January 2013. Photo by Jennifer Hayes.



Tony during the Ombak Putih cruise in Eastern Indonesia, November 2016. Photo by Jennifer Hayes.

Recovery Program for Britain's protected animals and plants, and our third child, Jon was born. In 1990 Tony rejoined EMDI, authoring *The Ecology of Java and Bali*, the third in the series, which was also published in two language editions. For a year of this four-year project, just after our youngest, Andrew was born, the family was based in Bali and joined Tony on many of the field trips researching the book. The children were adept at collecting snail shells from an early age, although it took them longer to wonder why our holidays always seemed to be in limestone areas!

In 1994, Tony took up the role of Senior Biodiversity Specialist, for East Asia and the Pacific Region, with The World Bank based in Washington DC. Originally conceived as an eight-month job, it quickly became apparent that even Tony could not turn the supertanker that was the World Bank in the directions he wanted in only 8 months! We all stayed in Washington for 5 years, and Tony continued in the job for 16 years. In his role at the Bank, he worked on many major projects and raised the profile of biodiversity in general, and freshwater and karst biodiversity in particular. He continued to spend a lot of time in Asia. Karst 'island' habitats with their local endemic species resonated with his belief that all species matter, in their own right, and that we must name them in order to be able to care about them. Having said that, he was a pragmatist who understood the

need for industry and progress, but he felt passionately that humanity must confront and acknowledge what we are losing, if that is the decision, rather than destroy blindly. In 1999, he co-authored Biodiversity and Cultural Property in the Management of Limestone Resources: Lessons from East Asia, published by the World Bank, highlighting threats to karst habitats throughout the east Asia and Pacific region. This generated interest in limestone ecosystems, inspiring conservation projects in Vietnam and China and dialogue with the World Business Council's Sustainable Cement Initiative.

Caves had been a fascination for Tony for many years. I remember sitting Ruth on a blanket in a cave before she could crawl so that we could photograph scutigerid centipedes and other marvels. Then her 25<sup>th</sup> birthday was spent, perhaps not quite as she had imagined it, with us all looking for endemic crabs in a cave on Nusa Penida, off Bali. In recent years Tony had a regular slot teaching children about cave animals at the annual Cambridge Science Festival in which he encouraged participants to wear blindfolds and use long balloons to find their way around and locate each other. A real cave invertebrate experience!

Tony liked to say that he did not work for the World Bank, they worked for him. He used his position to facilitate major



Tony giving a speech in traditional dress at his farewell event when he left the World Bank Mongolia Program. Bogd Khan Mountain, Mongolia, 2010. Photo: author unknown.

conservation progress across Asia by his innovative use of large funding streams and managed a portfolio of environmental projects amounting to around \$15 million. He continued to be broad in his interests- equally enthusiastic about the use of bivalve molluscs in water quality improvement in China and getting Fairtrade coffee into the World Bank Cafeteria.

Mongolia became a great passion for him with its unique landscapes, plants, animals and rugged people. He was able to channel millions of dollars into conservation in the country. This enthusiasm continued after he broke his collar bone falling off, or ‘thrown’ as he referred to it, from a horse while travelling to Lake Hovskol. His achievements were recognized with three separate awards: The President’s Friendship Medal, the Outstanding Worker for Environment Medal and the 2008 Silk Road Award from the Mongolian Chamber of Commerce and industry for ‘*outstanding contributions to nature conservation and biodiversity*’.

Tony cited his own Christian faith as a motivator for taking care of all creation, no matter how small or uncharismatic and was instrumental in bringing faith communities into dialogue with environmental managers. In Mongolia and Indonesia, he facilitated dialogue about the conservation of



Tony (left) at an Alliance for Religion and Conservation (ARC) meeting, with (from right to left) HRH Prince Philip, Martin Palmer (ARC) and Jeremy Linsell (Arocha). Photo: author unknown.



Tony explaining about mangrove ecology during the Ombak Putih cruise in Eastern Indonesia, November 2015. Photo by Jennifer Hayes.

sacred places between groups who had very different motivations but found that they shared similar aims. In 2014, with the Alliance of Religions and Conservation, Tony worked with Indonesia’s Islamic clerical body to issue a fatwa against the illegal wildlife and forestry trade. Issued by the Indonesian Ulema Council, it declared that “all activities resulting in wildlife extinction without justifiable religious grounds or legal provisions are *haram*[forbidden]”.

Recognizing that the key to inspiring people to care about wildlife is knowing what they are looking at, Tony initiated the Bank’s programme to produce more than 100 beautiful local-language field guides on mammals, birds, trees, freshwater fish and more. He saw this as one of the most important outcomes of his time at the Bank.

In 2010 he returned to live in Cambridge and took up the role of Regional Director for Asia-Pacific at Fauna and Flora International (FFI). The new David Attenborough Building in Cambridge, now home to FFI, was a perfect base for him, with its multiple academic as well as global conservation institutions. Here he directed about 140 conservation projects in the region and was never happier than when



One of the display cases at the David Attenborough Building showcasing the increasable contribution Tony made to conservation in Asia. In this case, the publications from his time on Siberut Island, where he studied for his PhD, are being highlighted. Photo by Stephen Browne/FFI.

visiting people working on the ground to give support and encouragement. Tony also persuaded the IUCN Species Survival Commission to establish a Specialist Group on cave invertebrates, to raise their conservation profile.

His passion for communicating the wonders of the world around him and an eye for seizing opportunities when they arose resulted in a partnership with John and Marla Priebe at Sea Trek, where he worked as a guest lecturer on the *Ombak Putih* boat in Eastern Indonesia for a few weeks each year. He engaged the guests with both the wonders of the bird and sea-life of the region, but also its history and environmental challenges. Collecting plastic on a remote, uninhabited speck of an island was a sobering and memorable experience for them. These trips also enabled him to keep in contact with environmental projects and communities that were far off the beaten track.

He had recently stepped back from full-time work at FFI, allowing him to devote more time to promoting conservation of karst systems amongst others, and to have more time for his family and new grandchildren. Tragically, that was not to be as he was hit by a car while cycling home from work. His legacy is immense: multiple books, protected areas, and a vast cadre of conservationists more knowledgeable about, and committed to protecting, the species, caves and other wild places of Asia and the world. He is sorely missed by the many people around the world whom he mentored,

encouraged and befriended. His family and I miss him terribly every day.

#### DISTINCTIONS

- President's Friendship Medal, Mongolia
- 2009 Outstanding Worker for Environment Medal, the highest environmental award in Mongolia
- 2008 Silk Road Award from the Mongolian Chamber of Commerce and Industry for "*outstanding contributions to nature conservation and biodiversity*"
- 2007 One of the UK's Top 50 Conservationists, BBC Wildlife July 2007
- 1971 Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Travelling Fellowship (three months) to study methods of bird conservation in New Zealand.

## Chronological list of publications by Tony Whitten

Authorship is given as it appears on the document, as Anthony J. Whitten, Tony Whitten or Anthony Whitten.

### Thesis

Whitten AJ (1980) The Kloss gibbon in Siberut rain forest. PhD thesis. University of Cambridge, Cambridge.

### Blogs

<http://blogs.worldbank.org/team/tony-whitten>  
<http://www.fauna-flora.org/author/tony-whitten/> (link no longer active; several articles can still be searched on the site)

### Books

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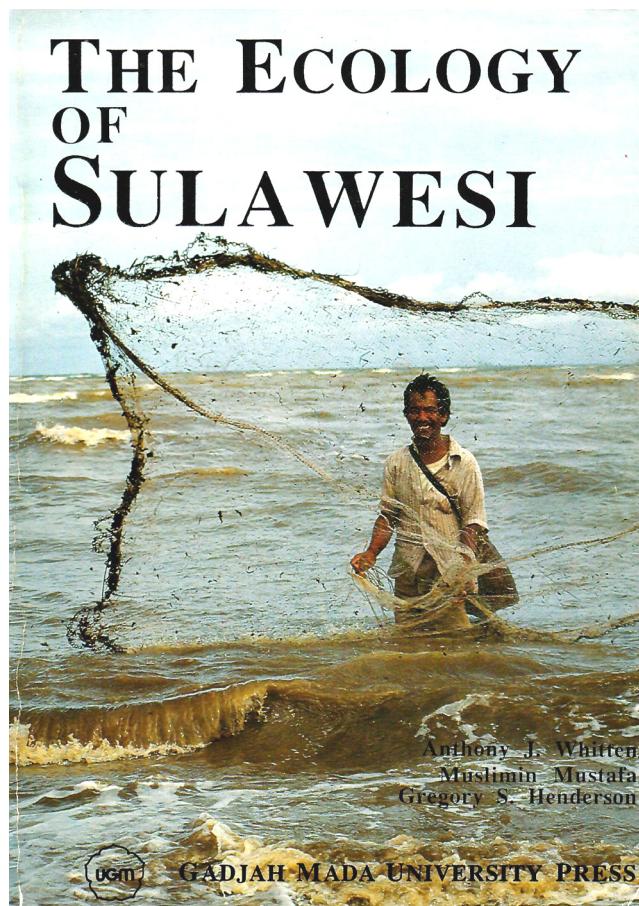
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*Sinella whitteni*, a springtail from a cave in China. Scale bar 0.5 mm. Photo by L. Deharveng.

## Taxa named for Tony Whitten

*Thopeutica whitteni* Cassola, 1991: 553 (a beetle from Sulawesi)  
*Lentipes whittenorum* Watson & Kottelat, 1994: 353 (a gobiid fish from Bali)  
*Anaglyphula whitteni* Vermeulen, 1996: 150 (a snail from Bali)  
*Cnemaspis whittenorum* Das, 2005: 241 (a gecko from Siberut)  
*Sulawesidrobia whitteni* Haase & Bouchet, 2006: 25 (an aquatic snail from Sulawesi)  
*Sinella whitteni* Zhang & Deharveng, 2009: 36 (a cave springtail from China)  
*Pilosphaenops whitteni* Tian, 2010: 71 (blind cave beetle from China)  
*Onthophagus tonywhitteni* Krikken & Huijbregts, 2011: 235 (a dung beetle from Sulawesi)  
*Hemiphaedusa whitteni* Nordsieck, 2012: 20 (a door snail from China)  
*Plectostoma whitteni* Liew, Vermeulen, Marzuki, & Schilthuizen, 2014: 63 (a micro-landsnail from Malaysia)  
*Papillacarus whitteni* Fernandez et al., 2015: 133 (an oribatid mite from Vietnam)  
*Hemiphyllodactylus tonywhitteni* Grismer et al., 2017: 891 (a dwarf gecko from Myanmar)  
*Dongodytes tonywhitteni* Yang, Huang & Tian, 2018: 133 (Chinese ground beetle)  
*Niphargus tonywhitteni* Fišer et al., 2018: 122 (an amphipod from Switzerland)  
*Laoparreysia whitteni* Bolotov et al., 2019: 3 (a mussel from Myanmar)  
*Landouria tonywhitteni* Nurinsiyah, Neiber & Hausdorf, 2019: 45 (a landsnail from Java)  
*Notharinia whitteni* Vermeulen, Luu, Keum & Anker, 2019: 176 (a land snail from Vietnam)  
*Amyntas whitteni* Bantaowong, Chanabun & Panha, 2020: 17 (an earthworm from Myanmar)  
*Shilinotrechus anthonyi* Huang, Tian & Faille, 2020: 23 (a ground beetle from China)  
*Folsomides whitteni* Deharveng, Bedos & Lukic, 2020: 39 (a springtail from Vietnam)  
*Alloscopus whitteni* Jantarit & Sangsiri, 2020: 49 (a springtail from Thailand)  
*Thalassaphorura whitteni* Sun, Bedos & Deharveng, 2020: 62 (a springtail from China)  
*Whittencampa* Sendra & Deharveng, 2020: 69 (a bristletail from China)  
*Pacidesmus whitteni* Liu & Golovatch, 2020: 79 (a millipede from China)  
*Burmaxytes whitteni* Srisonchai, Aung Lin & Panha, 2020: 92 (a millipede from Myanmar)  
*Catailana whitteni* Messana, 2020: 103 (an isopod from China)  
*Thailandoniscus whitteni* Taiti & Montesanto, 2020: 110 (an isopod from Myanmar)  
*Malayopotamon antonii* Wowor, 2020: 123 (a freshwater crab from Java)  
*Potamiscus whitteni* Ng, Hla Htoo & Win Mar, 2020: 132 (a freshwater crab from Myanmar)  
*Rahula tonywhitteni* Foon & Marzuki, 2020: 141 (a land snail from Malaysia)  
*Whittenia* Liew & Clements, 2020: 144 (a land snail from Malaysia)  
*Discartemon tonywhitteni* Sutcharit, Aung Lin & Panha, 2020: 154 (a carnivorous snail from Myanmar)

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*Lentipes whittenorum*, a freshwater fish discovered by Tony at a waterfall in Bali; female 46 mm SL (above) and male 38 mm SL (below). Photos by M. Kottelat.



*Pilosphaenops whitteni*, a blind cave beetle from China, about 8 mm. Photo by Sunbin Huang.