

## The Anton Rupert Award for Lifetime Achievement in Conservation presented to Dr Ian Player

On 5 April 2012, the inaugural Anton Rupert Award for Lifetime Achievement in Conservation was presented to Dr Ian Player by Mr Werner Myburgh, Peace Parks Foundation CEO, and Dr Frank Raimondo, member of the Peace Parks Foundation Board of Directors. By handing him the Award, Peace Parks Foundation and the Rupert Family gratefully applaud and pay tribute to the exceptional contribution Dr Ian Player has made to conservation and the environment.

The Award consists of a certificate, signed by Peace Parks Foundation chairman, Mr Johann Rupert, and a monetary component donated by the Rupert Family.

### Background

While 99% of the species that were present in southern Africa still exist, the numbers of large mammal species have declined by more than 70%. Protected areas are being invaded, natural resources extracted in an irresponsible manner and mining operations permitted without due consideration for fragile ecosystems already under pressure from development.

The region's governments, to a greater or lesser extent, and numerous international and national agencies apply comprehensive conservation strategies to counter these realities. A number of individuals, thanks to their unique ideas, coupled with dedication and passion, have also contributed greatly to the region's conservation efforts.

Peace Parks Foundation has, since it was founded in 1997 by Dr Anton Rupert, been promoting the establishment of conservation areas that straddle international borders and of peace between humans and animals. At nearly 900 000 km<sup>2</sup>, southern Africa's peace parks today incorporate over half of the declared protected areas of the region. In addition, 145 336 km<sup>2</sup> of land has been consolidated and added to the conservation estate in the various TFCAs.

Dr Rupert was widely recognised for his contribution to conservation. Dr Rupert was a founding member of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and it was in his role as the president of WWF's South African branch that he established Peace Parks Foundation to facilitate southern Africa's peace parks or transfrontier conservation areas (TFCAs). He also established the 1001 Club: A Nature Trust in 1970 to fund WWF. The Rupert Family and Peace Parks Foundation, in celebration of its 15 years in existence, would like to honour Dr Rupert by initiating the Anton Rupert Award for Lifetime Achievement in Conservation that will recognise those individuals who, like him, have made a significant contribution to the region's conservation efforts. The recipients of the Award will be determined by Peace Parks Foundation's Executive Committee and the Rupert family.

The first and very worthy recipient of the Anton Rupert Award for Lifetime Achievement in Conservation is Dr Ian Player. Dr Player's enormous contribution to conservation has been recognised by many entities. By making Dr Player the first recipient of the Anton Rupert Award, Peace Parks Foundation is adding its vote of thanks.

### About Dr Ian Player\*

Dr Ian Player has a distinguished career both in the formal and private conservation sectors. He has always seen that people must be brought into the conservation arena if protected areas, including wilderness areas and wildlife, are to survive. Together with his colleague and mentor, Magqubu Ntombela, he has brought people from all walks of life and parts of the world together to experience how wilderness and conservation of our natural resources are an integral part of living.

Dr Ian Player joined the Natal Parks Board (NPB) in 1952 and was posted to Zululand. While he was Warden of the iMfolozi Game Reserve, he spearheaded two important and far-reaching initiatives. The first was Operation Rhino that saved the few remaining southern white rhino that were on the brink of extinction. Now there are white rhinos in their former distribution range in formal national parks and game reserves and in zoos and parks around the world. The second was the designation of the iMfolozi and St. Lucia Wilderness Areas in the late 1950s. These were the first wilderness areas to be zoned in South Africa and on the African continent. He resigned from the NPB in 1974 to continue his vocation in conservation work in the NGO sector.

Dr Player is the Founder of the Wilderness Leadership School that has taken many leaders from southern Africa and other countries of the world on wilderness trails into the African wilderness. This led to the formation of the International Wilderness Leadership Foundation (WILD), the Wilderness Foundation (SA), Wilderness Trust (UK), and the Magqubu Ntombela Foundation. It also led to the founding of the World Wilderness Congresses that bring together many cultures and nations of the world including academics, professionals, indigenous peoples, artists, poets, writers and the general public who are concerned about wilderness conservation. Nine World Wilderness Congresses have been held since 1977, making it the longest running environmental forum globally. Dr Player also founded the renowned Msunduzi Canoe Marathon from Pietermaritzburg to Durban that attracts increasing numbers of canoeists each year.

Dr Player served as a Board Member of the Natal Parks Board, the only former staff member to have achieved this honour, and later as a Board Member of the KwaZulu-Natal Nature Conservation Services Management Board. He has led an active life and leading role in the field of conservation and has received many awards in recognition of his commitment and work spanning several decades. These include:-

- Knight in the Order of the Golden Ark
- Decoration for Meritorious Service (highest Republic of South Africa civilian award)
- Gold Medal for Conservation, San Diego Zoological Society
- Conservationist of the Year - Game Conservation International, United States
- Conservationist of the Year - Mzuri Wildlife Foundation, United States
- Paul Harris Fellow - Rotary International. Two Awards
- Conservation Statesman Award - Endangered Wildlife Trust
- Gold Medal of Game Rangers Association of Africa
- Bruno Schubert Lifetime Achievement Award (Germany) June 2003
- South Africa Brewery Lifetime Achievement Award- October 2003
- Golden Eagle Award - St John's School Johannesburg - 2004
- Spirit of Africa - Game Rangers Association of Africa - 2004

He is the recipient two honorary doctorates. These are Doctor of Philosophy, Honoris Causa from the University of Natal and Doctor of Law (LLD) (h.c.) from Rhodes University. He has been a Distinguished "Wilderness Resource" lecturer - University of Idaho, United States.

Finally, Dr Player is the author of three books.

\*Courtesy of <http://www.wilderness.org.za/>

## **Caption**

Peace Parks Foundation CEO, Mr Werner Myburgh (second from right), hands the Anton Rupert Award certificate to Dr Ian Player (second from left). Dr Player and Mr Myburgh are flanked by Mrs Ann Player and by Dr Frank Raimondo, member of the Peace Parks Foundation Executive Committee and Board of Directors.

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