

# Introduction

Hornbills are wondrous — powerful and dramatic, even in distant silhouette. It is easy to understand why they have been important to local cultures throughout human history. With today's global communications, hornbills are now part of culture of the world. Beyond their appearance and their unique breeding system, in the last three decades hornbills have been identified as crucial to forest sustenance and regeneration. A growing group of biologists has been working out the roles of hornbills in an array of ecosystems, especially in Asia, where they are key components of the life of tropical forests. At the same time, threats to habitat are putting pressure on hornbill populations, with 21 species on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species in 2004 ( [www.redlist.org](http://www.redlist.org)). Although we have detailed knowledge of a few hornbill species, for most we don't even have complete information on distribution or population sizes.

Understanding basic hornbill biology is critical to the conservation of hornbills and their habitats and much more fieldwork is necessary. The papers in this volume, among those presented at the Third International Hornbill Workshop, held in Phuket, Thailand, in 2001, illustrate the spectrum of current work. They include initial studies of hornbills from Zimbabwe and Cambodia, long-term studies of the impact of forest fragmentation on hornbills and hornbill fruit and nest site preferences in Thailand, Indonesia and India. The breadth of topics is indicative of the expanding interest in hornbills and the increasing commitment to conserve them in the wild. With continued efforts from the academic and conservation communities, hornbills have a greater chance of continuing to be part of the world's culture.

## Dedication

This volume is dedicated to the memory of Elizabeth Glassco Hudson (1956–2002). One of Lis' most powerful and exhilarating experiences was in Singapore, in 1994, when a Great Indian hornbill (*Buceros bicornis*) flew just over her head, making that sound that only hornbill wings can make. She stood in that bird's wake, mesmerized.

At her untimely death, Lis was the Zoologist in charge of managing the renowned bird collection at the Wildlife Conservation Society's St. Catherine's Island Wildlife Survival Center. For the last three years of her life she found her calling here, gaining inspiration and strength from the quiet solitude and beauty of Georgia's barrier islands. Though her first love was waterfowl, the diverse hornbill collection and the threats to wild hornbill populations inspired and challenged her. She devoted herself to developing breeding protocols for these remarkable birds. One of the high points of her tenure was the successful, second generation hatching of a Rhinoceros hornbill (*Buceros rhinoceros*).

Partial funding for this volume was provided through the Lis Hudson Memorial Fund.