

CHUCK DARSONO

(1930–1999)

by

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Born in 1930 at Belinyu, Bangka Island, somehow I have always associated Chuck Darsono with islands. I first met him on an island in 1975. Are were spending a week end on Pulau Dua (the nature reserve and waterbird breeding colony off the north coast of West Java). It was Chuck who organized our trip, and it was Chuck who had built the small 'guest house' and indeed the two watch towers on the island (whatever the plaques on one of them may say now). None of this is surprising, because Chuck was a conservationist with a genuine concern for the wildlife of Pulau Dua, and he also included civil and mechanical engineering among his skills. As it turned out, it was Chuck who cooked our meals, and it was Chuck's innate hospitality and cheerful character that made it such a memorable weekend. Much was Chuck's mirth when I sank up to my navel in the soft new formed mud (the island was becoming joined to the mainland), but the roles were to be reversed on Pualu Dua several years later when I had to run for assistance to help Chuck, who had sunk to his chest.

His enthusiasm for the birds (I should say, for fife itself) was infectious, and the seeds of our own concern for the birds of Indonesia were indeed nurtured by Chuck over that first weekend. Ever an entrepreneur, his main business during the time that I knew him was the export of primates for medical research in western countries, Japan and elsewhere. This led him at times to be a controversial figure, and he has been vilified by some, to the extent that he sought a public apology for the libelous accusations made in a book on animal smuggling published in USA and UK. His many friends, and he numbers well respected international conservationists among them, came strongly to his defense. I recommended he should seek a substantial sum in damages, but I believe he finally accepted a written apology and one dollar. I would have liked him to have sought that big sum, to be donated to conservation, but Chuck's honour had been satisfied. International recognition eventually came in 1990 with the Senior Biology and Conservation Award from the American Society of Primatologists.

Unlike others engaged in the primate trade, Chuck was very concerned that the (at that time) insatiable demand for primates for research would lead to serious depletion of natural stocks, exacerbated by so many captured animals never reaching their purported destination. Subsequent experience has shown that habitat destruction has probably superceded trade as the prime cause of population declines. However, Chuck's vision, through international encouragement, had already resulted in the establishment of a free range primate breeding facility on islands off the south coast of West Java (Pulau Thijil and Pulau Deli see van Balen & Holmes, *Kukila*, 1996, vol 8:117–126). The dream was eventually realized: the release of quarantined macaques to an island where they would multiply in sufficient numbers to supply the demand with healthy stock, without the need for further captures from the wild. The Pulau Tinjil facility was developed as a joint endeavour of the Bogor Agricultural University and University of Washington, while that on Pulau Deli was private.

I have counted Chuck as a true and loyal friend throughout, as well as being a friend to *Kukila*, and to any conservationist who took the trouble to seek out the assistance (and the inevitable

hospitality) of Chuck and his wife Shanti. These were never withheld. The nickname of "Chuckles", used by one of his American sponsors on Pulau Tinjil, so neatly summed up his character. Whatever worries he may have had over developing the island facilities, the warmth of his hospitality, his concern for his guests, and his infectious humour, always remained irrepressible. The sheer enjoyment of the occasional weekends spent on "Chuck's island will always remain a unique memory.

Many of us last saw Chuck when he gave his daughter Anastasia's hand in marriage at a beautiful open air ceremony in Bali held against the sunset on September 18 1999. He passed away only a month later. We have all lost a friend, and we offer our deepest condolences to his devoted wife Shanti, and children Anastasia and Richard.