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## In memoriam

# Navjot S. Sodhi: the professor who wore his cap backwards

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Navjot S. Sodhi was born on 18th March 1962 in Nabha, India. He went to Panjab University for his Bachelor and Master's degrees in Zoology. In 1991, he received his doctorate in Biology from the University of Saskatchewan, Canada, where he was trained as a field ornithologist. Navjot spent the following four years as a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Alberta and then the National Institute for Environmental Studies, Japan. In 1995, Navjot was appointed Assistant Professor at the Department of Biological Sciences, National University of Singapore (NUS). He received his academic tenure (Associate Professor) in 2001, and became Professor of Conservation Ecology in 2007.

Navjot was particularly drawn to Harvard University, which he felt was unequivocally the "best University in the world". He was at Harvard as Charles Bullard Fellow in 2002, and as Sarah and Daniel Hardy Fellow in Conservation Biology in 2008-2009. On several occasions of self reflection, Navjot remarked to us that the first sabbatical was a turning point in his conservation career. He returned a more optimistic and purposeful conservation scientist, determined to make a difference to the teaching and practice of conservation in the tropics.

We got to know Navjot personally when we joined the then Conservation and Behavioral Ecology Lab about 12 years ago. Lian Pin was just starting his Honors research in the fourth year of his bachelor program; Tien Ming was supervised by Navjot under the university's Undergraduate Science Research Programme (UROPS). We eventually stayed on through our Master's research. There was never any doubt that Navjot would have to be our project supervisor. Dressed in his baseball cap (worn backwards), t-shirt, bermudas and sandals, Navjot was easily the coolest and hippest Professor we knew.



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Navjot's mentoring style was just as unique. He never expected his students to show up in his lab, although the lab was always busy. In fact, he once told us that he didn't care if students danced naked as long as they got the job done. A typical day in the Sodhi lab would begin with him and his students sipping coffee or tea in a sofa corner. (Instant pre-mix coffee was his favorite.) As our conversations would switch effortlessly between gossip and science, we would scribble ideas, equations and graphs on the whiteboard. Several of those doodles eventually led to projects and publications, with important impacts on conservation science. Sometimes our conversations would drift towards the more philosophical. When asked what he would like to have accomplished in his lifetime as a scientist, Navjot replied that science progresses in small steps, to which he hoped to contribute a little.

In fact, through his many students and vast network of collaborators, Navjot made huge strides in advancing conservation science. (Incidentally, one often sees multiple co-authors in Navjot's publications, which he believed, is how science should be done—collaboratively.) Over the past several years, he had been studying the effects of human activities on forest biodiversity in Southeast Asia. With his students and collaborators, Navjot collected valuable empirical data from numerous field sites, spanning the lowlands to the highlands, and across diverse landscapes. Through these projects, Navjot demonstrated that tropical primary forests are irreplaceable for biodiversity conservation.

Navjot's most significant contribution to conservation, however, is a book that he co-edited with Paul Ehrlich of Stanford University. "Conservation Biology for All" is a compilation of articles written by leading ecologists with the goal of communicating the best conservation science as widely as possible. Navjot had insisted to the book publisher that a copy be made freely available on the web. This has undoubtedly benefited countless students, teachers, resource managers and budding conservationists in the developing tropics who would otherwise not have access to a book of such importance. (Link to this book: http://www.mongabay.com/conservation-biology-for-all.html)

In his career, Navjot published more than 100 scientific papers in international peer-reviewed journals, many of which were highly respected and cited by colleagues. He was an avid supporter of Tropical Conservation Science, where he had served as editor since 2010. He was also an editor and/or board member of almost all other major conservation journals, including Biological Conservation (2008-2011), Conservation Biology (2003-2010), Animal Conservation (2006-2010), Environmental Conservation (2011), Biodiversity and Conservation (2011), Auk (2003-2007), Biotropica (2006-2008), and the Raffles Bulletin of Zoology (1996-2011). Navjot had written and edited six books, despite repeatedly saying that each was his last. With the help of colleagues and students, he was still working on two books and numerous manuscripts from his hospital bed.

Navjot had supervised 17 graduate students and the same number of undergraduate research projects in his career. Many of his former students have gone on to successful careers in conservation. But they continued to collaborate with Navjot, who continued to advice and support them, no different than how a father would ceaselessly care for his children. Navjot was extremely generous and forgiving to all his students, and never expected anything in return.

When Navjot visited Yale University in February 2011, Tien Ming met him for the final time. They parted ways with grand and exciting research plans. Lian Pin last saw Navjot in Singapore, April 2011. Physically Navjot had become a poor shadow of his former self; but mentally he was still as sharp as ever. They also made great plans to work more closely together when he got better. On 12 June 2011, Navjot lost his battle with lymphoma. The world lost a great scientist that day.

We are extremely proud to have Navjot as our academic father. We are even prouder to have had him as a dear friend. We have no doubt that Navjot's legacy will continue to inspire future generations of conservation scientists. Our sincerest condolences to Navjot's family—Bubblie, Ada and Darwin.



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