

Great Gray Owl Award Tako Koning – A Lifetime Commitment to Learning and Teaching

By Chris Saunders



Tako Koning (pictured) is the latest recipient of AWA's Great Gray Owl Award for exceptional volunteer service.

Tako Koning is the recipient of the Great Grey Owl Award for 2022. The Great Grey Owl is the award AWA uses to recognize an exceptional volunteer for their service over a period of years. Tako is a worthy recipient. He has been a valuable contributor to AWA's Adventures for Wilderness program since its inception. Over the three years that the Adventures for Wilderness program has existed, Tako has led numerous Adventures which have drawn on his deep knowledge and enthusiasm for geology, and his concern about environmental damage.

I visited Tako at his home in Calgary to find out more about him. Although now in his early seventies, Tako's desire to learn and offer his knowledge to others is undiminished. Much of this stems from his passion for geology and his experiences while working in Africa for a large part of his career.

Tako was four years old when his parents emigrated to Edmonton from the Netherlands. Growing up in the North Saskatchewan River valley, he

was fascinated by the nature and, in particular, the geology, around him. In fact, he had decided he wanted to be a geologist by the age of twelve and saw geology as a way to expand his horizons and see the world. This led to a degree in geology at the University of Alberta and later a degree in economics from the University of Calgary. His first job was working as a wellsite geologist on the offshore drilling rigs on the Grand Banks of Newfoundland. A move to Calgary for a job with an international oil company followed and then transfers to foreign postings. With his wife Henrietta, he lived and worked for seven years in Indonesia, followed by three years in Nigeria and twenty years in Angola, the last thirteen years of which were as an independent consultant. In 2015 Tako and Henrietta returned to Calgary and Tako now works as a geologist on a semi-retired basis.

In Nigeria Tako and Henrietta joined the Nigerian Field Society which gave them a means of seeing some of the countryside with expatriates and Nigerians, in the relative safety of an organized group. It turned out to be an excellent way to learn about the country's culture and landscape. Tako also started giving presentations on geology and resource economics to university students in Lagos and other cities which allowed him to pass on his knowledge and experience to those starting in the profession.

In Angola, after the end of the long and terrible civil war in 2002, Tako and Henrietta formed the Angolan Field Group, based on their positive experiences in Nigeria. They took parties into the countryside to visit interesting geological and wildlife locations along with historical sites in the capital city of Luanda. The experience of leading field trips in Angola was very different from Alberta because one of the legacies of the civil war was the

millions of still-live land mines scattered across the landscape. A very real and dangerous issue. Tako also volunteered in several community assistance projects in Angola including the creation of the Angola Mosquito Nets project to combat malaria, drilling drinking water wells in northern Angola near the Congo and coordinating the shipment of used geological books and journals from Canada to universities in Angola and Nigeria.

Although now retired from fulltime work, Tako is still active as a professional geologist and remains an active contributor to his profession. In the past four decades, he has written over 200 abstracts, articles and papers for professional journals, conferences, and symposiums worldwide. For the past five years he has volunteered as a member of the board of directors of the Calgary Justice Film Festival. In addition, Tako leads field trips for AWA, the Alberta Paleontological Society and the Canadian Society of Petroleum Geologists. Each of these trips has had an environmental, geological or paleontological emphasis depending on the sponsoring organization.

For AWA, Tako has developed three Adventures to date:

1. Cochrane North - ice, glaciers, gravel, and oil
2. Southern Alberta - orphan oil and gas wells and foothills geology
3. Downtown and Inner-city Calgary - discovering 450-million-year-old Ordovician Fossils in buildings clad with Tyndall Stone

Tako said that because he enjoyed organizing and participating in field trips in Africa, it was logical for him to carry on his return to Alberta as an active coordinator with AWA's Adventures for Wilderness program. AWA is proud that Tako is one of its volunteers and he is a deserving recipient of its Great Grey Owl Award. Thank you Tako and congratulations!