

Mario A. Boza

1942-2021

In Memoriam

We mourn the loss of Dr. Mario Boza a founding member of the Board of The Leatherback Trust. He died on October 29, 2021, after a several months long battle with cancer. Mario Boza was a giant in the world of conservation, a scientist, an author, a teacher, a husband, a father, a gentleman, and a true patriot of Costa Rica.

Don Mario was a student when he went to the United States on a conservation field trip. He saw the wonders of the US National Parks, especially the Great Smoky Mountains, and returned to Costa Rica determined to save the forests, flora and fauna of Costa Rica for future generations. In 1970 he founded the National Parks of Costa Rica with Alvaro Ugalde and became the first Director of the National Parks System. With the help of US Peace Corps volunteers, he built the first few parks and established the basis for the continued expansion of the park system. From 1990 to 1994 he was Vice Minister of the Environment and established Parque Nacional Marino Las Baulas in Guanacaste by Executive Decree. In 1995 that park became permanent in law. In 2001 he joined us in forming The Leatherback Trust to protect the park and to save leatherback and other sea turtles.

A guiding light for conservation in Costa Rica Don Mario was always busy writing books, teaching, advising Ministers and Presidents, writing new legislation, supporting the park guards, and defending the national parks. He was the recipient of many international and national awards including the J. Paul Getty Wildlife Conservation Prize in 1983 and honorary doctorates from Drexel University and Purdue University in the 1990s. His latest award was an “Award of Special Recognition and Friendship” from his friends and colleagues at The Leatherback Trust.

Throughout his life Don Mario was never too busy or proud to take time to talk to the “regular people”, the Kike’s and Dona Esperanza’s of Costa Rica, the park guards who seemed to idolize him when he came to Volcan Arenal, and the students and children whom he spoke to when they came on a field trip. Most amazing was that every year from 2005 to 2020 he took several days from his busy schedule to ride the bus with 50+ sixth graders from Bullis Charter School in California to see Costa Rica’s national parks and learn about conservation and ecology.

Don Mario had a brilliant mind and a big heart, a loving family and many, many friends. He made the world a better place and we miss him dearly. Two messages from members of our Board say it best:

“My family and I saw Mario most often in the company of his wife, Marta, and the sixth graders of Bullis Charter school. He was always engaged, had a wonderful sense of humor, and was

defined by his loyalty, his humanity, his dedication. A giant on the Costa Rican national stage, he happily returned year after year to carefully answer questions on Costa Rican ecology and sea turtles posed by young California students. We will miss him immeasurably. He endures in the forests and beaches of his country, in his writings, in the many children he quietly inspired.

Vaya con Dios Don Mario”

Mason Hersey

“The pain that overwhelms us for his departure is very deep. We as Costa Ricans value Don Mario as a brave man, consistent with his struggles for nature and protected areas. Without a doubt, Costa Rica (and the world) benefited from a very special person, concerned with defending the most precious thing we have: the planet we live on and its resources. Our pain for the departure of Don Mario is very deep, but we know that he fulfilled his mission on the planet, beyond what is expected of each one. Rest in peace our dear Don Mario, we will miss him deeply. A hug to all.”

Eduardo Carrillo

My wife and fellow Board member, Maggie Kruesi, and I last saw Don Mario when he walked away down the street in La Fortuna to catch a bus back to San Jose after leading the children from Bullis School to see the national parks in February 2020, just before the pandemic. He had to get home to work on some legislation, but he would not take a ride in a special car, he rode with the people.

No one can replace Don Mario, but many of us working together can try to continue his work to save the turtles and the national parks. It is the least that we can do.

I miss my dear friend Don Mario more than I can express. He taught me so much and inspired me to keep fighting for the turtles and the planet. God has called him home because his work was done. My tears cloud my eyes, my lips tremble, but my heart keeps beating and I will carry on his fight as long as I am able.

Thank you Don Mario!!

Jim Spotila