

ECOWATCH

A requiem for the 'Man of the Hole'

■ BY DELORES SAVAS

“A savage is not the one who lives in the forest, but one who destroys it.”

Last week the last member of a Brazilian indigenous tribe died alone. In his last years, he stood as a symbol of indigenous resistance. He was known as the “Man of the Hole,” a name bestowed on him by explorers because of the deep holes he left across his territory for plants he cultivated and animals he caught.

On this past August 27, officials at Brazil's National Indian Foundation (FUNAI) announced that the roughly 60-year-old man had died of what looked like natural causes. The Man of the Hole had lived in isolation for 26 years after all other members of his tribe were killed by illegal loggers and miners in the mid-1990s.

His fellow tribe members most likely did not die an easy death, but possibly in agony after receiving gifts of friendship from those who wished to rape their land. Baskets of their native foods and drinks were offered to them with a smile and handshake by those who were seeking to exploit their land.

According to Marcel dos Santos, a retired explorer who monitored the wellbeing of the Man in the Hole for FUNAI, it was believed that sometime in the 1980s illegal ranchers, after leaving initial offerings of sugar, gave the tribe rat poison that killed all but the Man in the Hole. The rat poison was the true message of death, hidden expertly in the brightly colored food and drinks. Reports did not say how he avoided the poisonous gifts.

According to the nonprofit organization Survival International, he fled the area after losing everyone he knew and chose to live deep in the Tanaru Territory in Brazil's Rondonia state, refusing all contact with the outside world and surviving by hunting and raising crops.

Fiona Watson, Survival's research advocacy director, visited the territory in 2004 with a government monitoring team and wrote an account of the visit.

Watson said today that “no one outsider knew this man's name, or even very much about his tribe, and with his death the genocide of his people is complete. For this was indeed genocide, the deliberate wiping out of an entire people by cattle ranchers hungry for land and wealth. He symbolized both appalling violence and cruelty inflicted on indigenous people worldwide in the name of colonization and



profit, but also their resistance.

“We can only imagine what horrors he had witnessed in his life, and the loneliness of his existence after the rest of his tribe was killed, but he determinedly resisted all attempts at contact and made it clear he just wanted to be left alone.

“If President Bolsonaro and his agribusiness allies get their way, this story will be repeated over and over again until the country's indigenous people are wiped out. The indigenous movement in Brazil, Survival, will do everything possible to ensure this doesn't happen again.”

Bolsonaro once reportedly said Brazil had erred by not decimating native people like the U.S. Cavalry did.

Now after the death of the Man in the Hole, organizations like Survival and OPI, the Observatory for the Human Rights of Uncontacted and Recently Contacted Peoples, have demanded permanent protection of the Tanaru Indigenous Territory. They want it to stand as a memorial to indigenous genocide.

The death of the Man in the Hole was not headline news. In fact there were only tidbits of his passing, no accolades for a native who accomplished more for the rainforest with his lonely death than when he was alive. His solitary life was worth living.

Now rainforest organizations have vowed to accelerate the fight to stop the destruction of the rainforest and the indigenous tribes living there. According to reports in Science Alert, “The indigenous movement in Brazil, and Survival, will do everything possible to ensure that doesn't happen.”

Many reading this article may feel sorry for the inhabitants of the rainforest, not realizing that the continued destruction of the rainforest affects everyone on this planet. Consider the following:

- Since 1978 about one million square kilometers of Amazon rainforest have been destroyed across Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Bolivia, Venezuela, Guyana,

Suriname and French Guiana.

- In just the first half of this year, deforestation has claimed roughly 1,500 square miles of the Amazon rainforest – an area five times the size of New York City – the greatest loss since at least 2016, according to the Brazilian Space Agency.

- A new report suggests that only one-third of the world's tropical rainforest remains intact.

- Some 17 million animals died in Brazilian wildfires in 2020. The estimate came from scientists who examined the remains of carcasses they found up to 48 hours after a fire event. The rate of climate change makes such wildfires inevitable.

- Once their habitat is destroyed, these animal species are on the way to extinction. According to recent estimates, the world is losing 137 species of plants, animals and insects every day to deforestation. A horrifying 50,000 species become extinct each year.

- As the rainforest species disappear, so do many possible cures for life-threatening diseases. The rainforest has been called the lungs of the planet. It generates approximately 30 percent of the world's oxygen, and its trees play a key role in reducing pollutant levels in the atmosphere.

- If the rainforest is destroyed, experts warn that global temperature increases will become irreversible.

Please consider joining the rainforest protective agencies in their efforts to save the rainforest. Make the solitary life of the Man in the Hole mean something.

SOURCES

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