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**THE BRITAIN-NEPAL SOCIETY**

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*Journal*

Number 29

2005

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# ACORN Nepal Trust

(Aid for Children of Rural Nepal  
and Educational Trust)

Charitable Society Regd. No. 701/1999



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## **THE BRITAIN-NEPAL SOCIETY**

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### **Journal**

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## EDITORIAL

Readers will note this issue has a distinct wildlife flavour to it, perhaps mirroring the editor's interest. To some extent this is true but it also derives from the contributors and what is either submitted for publication or comes across the editor's desk which he considers may be of interest to the readership. Some members may not have access to the information or may be interested if it is presented to them but would not necessarily bother to trawl for it or even be aware of it. I am grateful to all the contributors for their time which I know, only too well, is needed to produce quality articles. I must also thank those who support the journal by their advertisements. The opening piece, which came to the attention of Lt Col Swindale, describes the journey to Kathmandu from India as it was in 1890. The 'Sorrow of Bihar' by Dr Hem Sagar Baral outlines the formation of the wildlife reserve above the Koshi barrage, the latter being visited by the chairman / editor as part of a trip which took place in January and February. As a member of the Oriental Bird Club, an article from their bulletin on conservation awareness training in Chitwan, seemed appropriate for inclusion. Those who have visited Nepal are only too well aware of the need for conservation and education, vital to sustain wildlife tourism and for the general well-being of the country. Despite the continuing insurgency, which gives concern to all Nepal watchers, if such matters are not properly sustained and monitored then long term damage will result. Following her lecture to the Society, Carol Inskipp has also looked at the environment and bird conservation in

Nepal as seen by a professional ornithologist. This edition also includes a good number of book reviews, some gleaned from other sources. I am particularly grateful to Mr Barney Smith, a distinguished member of the Society and formerly ambassador in Kathmandu 1995 to 1999, who has recently taken on the editorship of *Asian Affairs*, the journal of the Royal Society for Asian Affairs. Through his good offices it has been possible to include some relevant reviews from *Asian Affairs* in this journal which I hope readers will find of interest and would otherwise have remained unknown to them. I know that there are numbers of Society members who belong to both organisations and indeed the Nepal-related reviews in *Asian Affairs* have been provided by members of this Society. I am grateful to all the reviewers for their contributions. It is significant that a number of the books reviewed concern the current insurgency, reflecting the length of time, almost ten years, for which it has been in progress. If members see works that they feel may warrant inclusion in the review section they are asked to contact the editor. As both chairman as well as editor I feel I should take this opportunity, through the pages of the journal and on behalf of the members, to thank the committee for their work, often behind the scenes, helping at and preparing for meetings and events. Also a special mention must be made of the ten years of service that our last secretary, Mrs Pat Mellor, has given to the Society. She followed the tradition of her predecessor, Mrs Celia Brown who also served the Society long and hard in the role of secretary, continuing to do so

as the Society's archivist. We are fortunate to have acquired the services of Dr Neil Weir as secretary, himself no stranger to Nepal as head of the Britain - Nepal Otolaryngology Service. He is a consultant with a busy practice and we are grateful to his secretary for the extra work that she has taken on and also to Pat Mellor who has stayed on helping Dr

Weir with her wide knowledge of the membership. As I finally prepare the draft for the printers I can now report that Dr Andrew Hall, a member of the Society, is to be appointed Her Majesty's Ambassador to Nepal in June 2006 in succession to His Excellency Mr Keith Bloomfield.

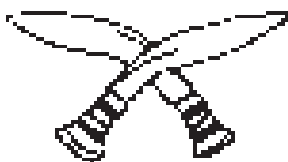
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### THE ARCHIVIST

Mrs. Celia Brown has agreed to take on the task of collecting archival material and in obtaining where possible, brief memoirs. She would like to hear from anyone who may wish to contribute. However, in the first instance she would appreciate it if members could let her know what they have available. The editor of the journal and the committee

are planning to produce a short history of the Society over the period 1960 to 2010 to commemorate the Society's fiftieth anniversary in 2010. Archival material will play an important part in the production of this publication.

Her address is: 1 Allen Mansions,  
Allen Street, London W8 6UY and  
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## THE SOCIETY'S NEWS

By Dr Neil Weir  
Honorary Secretary

This has been my first year as your Honorary Secretary. My secretary Daphne Field and I have much valued the continued help of my predecessor Mrs Pat Mellor. She has a wonderful memory and knowledge of the Society's affairs. In particular Pat has been co-opted as honorary membership secretary and I am delighted that she has agreed to remain in this role for 2005-2006.

### LECTURES

Following the November AGM, the Society held an extra meeting on Wednesday 8th December 2004 at the Royal Nepalese Embassy. Mr David Waterhouse spoke to us about the life of Brian Houghton Hodgson, the British Resident in Kathmandu 1829 -1843. His book, *The Origins of Himalayan Studies - Brian Houghton Hodgson in Nepal and Darjeeling 1820 - 1858* had recently been launched at the Royal Asiatic Society. Mr Waterhouse had been the Director of the British Council in Kathmandu 1972 - 77. A full review of this work was included in the 2004 journal. The publishers kindly granted this event a 'launch' status which gave members the opportunity to purchase this book at a very advantageous price. This event, which included a light curry supper, was very well supported. The other lectures were held at the Society of Antiquaries, Piccadilly. These were:

Tuesday 1st February: Col. Jimmy Evans: 'Kathmandu when the world was young'.

Monday 21st March: Mr Charles Allen: 'Kipling and the Gurkhas'.

Monday 6 June: Mrs Carol Inskipp: 'Bird Conservation in Nepal'.

Tuesday 4 October: Mr Anthony Wieler: 'Why Nepal needs its own economy - the work of the Britain-Nepal Chamber of Commerce'.

All the talks were well received. We are grateful to all the speakers for their time, enthusiasm and excellent illustrations. As is the custom we shall look forward to receiving them as our guests at the Annual Nepali Supper on Thursday 23 February 2006.

### CHANGE OF VENUE FOR LECTURES

The talks in 2006 will be held at a different venue. The Society of Antiquaries has been increasing its charges such that these meetings have been increasingly running at a loss. The Executive Committee is proposing that the 2006 talks will be held at the **Medical Society of London, 11 Chandos Street**, just off Cavendish Square. Here it will be possible to have supper after a talk. To help defray the costs a charge of £5 (including a glass of wine) will be made for each talk. Members will be asked to indicate their intention of attending talks in advance.

The programme for the evening will be:

6.15-6.45pm Assemble, glass of wine

6.45-7.45pm Lecture with time for questions

7.45-8.00pm Start supper (which will include wine)

9.00-9.15pm Depart

The dates for the 2006 meetings are:

Tuesday 31st January: tba (Afternote: Sandra Noel: '*Everest Pioneer*')

Wednesday 15th March: Major Gordon Corrigan: '*How it all started, the Anglo-Nepal War 1814-1816*'.

Thursday 8th June Col. David Hayes:  
*'Today's Brigade of Gurkhas'*.

Thursday 12th October: 25 William  
Dodsworth – title tba



*Mr David Jefford, Mr Ackroyd (senior)  
and Mr Ashley Adams at the Supper.*

### **ANNUAL NEPALI SUPPER**

The Supper attended by 160 was held on Thursday 17 February at St. Columba's Church of Scotland Hall in Pont Street. The principal speaker, Sir Jeffrey James, was unfortunately unable to attend but the Royal Nepalese Ambassador very kindly gave us an up to date report on the King's recent proclamation. The 2006 Annual Nepali Supper is to be held at the same venue on Thursday 23rd February.

### **AN EVENING WITH MICHAEL PALIN**

This joint Britain-Nepal Society, Britain-



*Col Amod Rana, the Defence Attache  
(right) and Mr Embahadur Gurung  
(centre right) and friends at the Supper.*



*Mr Mohan Basnet, Third Secretary and  
Capt (QGO) Harkaraj Rai, Queen's  
Gurkha Orderly Officer at the Supper.*

Nepal Chamber of Commerce and Britain-Nepal Otology Service (BRINOS) supper evening, held at the Royal Nepalese Embassy on 26th April attracted a full house. Michael Palin described in his unique way his travels in Nepal. He was presented with a silver card box from the Gurkha Museum. The proceeds of the evening have enabled BRINOS to acquire the starting up equipment for three more community ear assistants.

### **SUMMER OUTING**

The Outing was to the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew on Sunday 19th June which turned out to be the hottest day of the year. Many people came, both from the Society and the Yeti Association. A delicious Nepalese curry lunch was supplied from the Munal Restaurant's van



*Peter & Marian Donaldson with Joanna  
& Murray Thomas enjoying the picnic at  
Kew.*



*The Gilchrist family with Mr Anthony Wieler at Kew.*

parked just outside the Brentford Gate! In the afternoon we had a 'snapshot' guided tour of the Gardens. The date of the 2006 Summer Outing will be Sunday 25th June.



*Members admired the Giant Arum at Kew Gardens.*

### **WEBSITE**

We are in the process of creating a Society website. The aim is principally to co-ordinate as many of the organisations (with or without charitable status) which are involved in development work in agriculture, commerce, education, health politics or other activities in Nepal. We often find that there are a number of

organisations interested in the same subject but working quite independently without the knowledge of others. The Honorary Secretary would like to hear of any organisations which have existing websites or email addresses who would like to be linked to the Society website. Eventually the BNS would like to be in a position to provide a comprehensive list of organisations undertaking work in Nepal.

### **SOCIETY TIES**

Mr David Jefford kindly looks after the sale of the Society ties which cost £10 each including postage; they are obtainable from him at 20 Longmead, Fleet, Hants, GU52 7TR or at one of our major functions.

### **ROYAL NEPALESE EMBASSY**

Over the year we have received great support from HE the Royal Nepalese Ambassador, the Embassy staff and in particular from his PA Mrs Nilia Ranamagar, who charmingly arranges our meetings at the Embassy and through her husband's restaurant, co-ordinates the catering. We are greatly indebted to them all.

### **DEATHS**

It is with great sadness that we report the death during 2005 of following members:

Major Tom Allen  
Dr Margaret Anderson  
Dr William Brown  
Mr George Kinnear  
Lt Col M Magoris

Belatedly we have to report the death, in March 2004, of Mr Stephen Hesling, a life member of the Society and also in 2004, Major RR Hiles.



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## A TRIP TO NEPAL IN NOVEMBER 1890

By Henry Elworthy of Calcutta

*(The original papers from which this article is drawn are in the possession of Mary Terry, grand daughter of Henry Elworthy. The piece was written by Elworthy on his return to Calcutta from Nepal. It was following a chance discussion between Mary Terry and Lt Col Swindale that she passed the information to him for interest as he had travelled to Nepal on duty in 1958. Lt Col Swindale is a member of the Society. Ed.)*

Our party consisted of our Durwan, Juggurnath and two Khitmagars, Abdoul and Kureenoodu and myself. Juggurnath started a day in advance to arrange transport from Segowlie railway station to Gowal (now Birganj), the station on the Nepal frontier, where we were to be provided for by the State.

We left Calcutta on the evening of Sunday, the 9th November. We reached Segowlie in the evening of the following day and found Juggurnath on the platform, face beaming with smiles and surrounded by men who were to take us and our luggage along the road. I had a palki with twelve bearers, Juggurnath a horse and the Khitmagars an eliha, in addition to which we had an eliha and 14 bearers for our luggage. An eliha is a two wheeled springless carriage of a rough and ready sort, drawn by one horse or pony. After traveling a mile, 5 of my palki bearers deserted. I returned to the town, turned out the inspector of police, ransacked the town for men, made up the number and started afresh at 3 o'clock in the morning.

About 3 miles from Segowlie we came to a small river, through which we had to wade. At the opposite bank the water deepened and here Juggurnath's pony

sank to its flanks. Juggurnath jumped off tumbling into the muddy water up to his waist and with the assistance of the man who accompanied him for the purpose of taking the pony back Segowlie, hauled the pony out of the mire. This necessitated a halt to allow the gallant rider to scrub himself clear of his mire which turned out to be very sticky. We arrived at Gowal (Birganj) at 8.30am where we found elephants and men waiting for us. We sat under a tree, prepared and ate our breakfast, which operation lasted nearly 3 hours, necessary appliances for cooking not being ready to hand.

As the elephants had no Howdahs I stuck to my Palline, handing the elephants over to the servants and the luggage. A Howdah is an arrangement for sitting in, fastened to the back of the elephant. The ordinary Howdah is a square shaped flat seat made of wood and cane. Not having sufficient men we spent three hours trying to find more; we succeeded in finding one!! We had to leave some of the luggage behind to be forwarded independently.

Gowal (Birganj) is a depot for timber, which forms a material part of the export trade from Nepal. Here I found gathered an immense number of water pipes for the Kathmandu water works. They were waiting for the opening of the road to Nepal, which was stopped by the rainy season, during which no goods are forwarded that are at all heavy. Having loaded the elephants we started, the two Khitmagars looking very insecure on one and Juggurnath more at ease on the other. We left Gowal (Birganj) at 2pm and reached the next town Semrabasa at 6pm where we halted for half an hour to allow the bearers to feed. The road from Gowal

(Birganj) to Semrabasa is fairly good but not metalled. Quite an army of men were engaged in putting it in order after the devastation caused by the rains. We left again at 6.30pm and made our way through the terai forest to Bichakoh, where we arrived at 10.30pm. We were then clear of the plains. After this the road lay through ravines and river beds. The river had very little water in it so our road was not very difficult.

At 9 the next morning we took our breakfast on a sandbank in the bed of the river. The last town before ascending the mountains is Bhimphedi where we arrived at 4pm. The latter part of the river journey is very picturesque, the road being on the banks of the river, which flows through the ravine, bubbling, rushing foaming winding its course from side to side of the bed through and over big boulders and stones. The hills are high and well wooded. Here and there are quaint rustic bridges built years ago by Sir Jung Bahadur, but now rather shaky.

Bhimphedi is at the foot of the Bhimgiri Hill, the first real barrier to the Nepal capital. At Bhimphedi we changed our transport. I got into a Dardy, a canoe shaped arrangement made of canvas, suspended from poles, borne by men on their shoulders. The servants took to Mr Shank's ponies. Having started everybody and everything off, I left for the journey up the hill at 6 o'clock. About 200 yards from Bhimphedi I found a box deserted which necessitated a return for substitutes. I reached the cantonment of Sisagarhi near the top of the hill at 7.30pm. Here I found Kureenoodu broken down, exhausted and crying with fatigue, saying he would not have come had he known what he was in for, Abdool on the other hand holding himself up bravely.

Sisagarhi is a small cantonment garrisoned by two companies of troops. It

has been improved since my previous visit, new buildings having been erected with corrugated roofs. From the bungalow which I occupied, I had a splendid view of the hills between which I had passed. I was visited by the Subadar of the Detachment forming the Garrison, who helped me until I left in procuring supplies and men.

Juggernath, whom I left to bring up the rear, arrived at 10pm carrying his own luggage and bringing with him two men who replaced the deserters. He was thoroughly done up, threw himself on the ground and was soon fast asleep. The ascent of the hill is difficult and fatiguing, the road being steep and the stones loose. One of my Dardy bearers slipped and cut himself. He said he was 'playing the old soldier'. He made a great fuss saying the Sahib was heavy (1) so I got out and walked the remaining half of the distance.

Abdool gave Kureenoodu a reviver in the shape of a cup of tea and both of them set to and prepared supper which we had ready by 11pm. We then slept until 5 the next morning. We did not leave Sisagarhi till 8am, having met with some difficulty in finding men to replace more deserters who had cleared out during the night. We soon completed the ascent of the hill and were rewarded by our first view of the snowy range of the Himalayas. The sky was clear of clouds and the view was unbroken. Then followed the descent to another river along the course of which we tramped for some miles crossing and recrossing several times. Abdool was carried off his legs on one occasion and had a ducking. We reached the next big hill at 2.18pm. After a halt of half an hour for feeding, the ascent of this hill, Chandragiri, took an hour, the top being reached at 3.18. Here we had two fine views, one looking backwards at the road we had come and the other looking into

the valley of Nepal.

The sight of the Valley and its background is inspired. The valley itself has some rivers flowing through it, the courses of which were traced out to the eye. There are towns and palaces also visible. All this is fenced in by hills, which again have a background of the snowy range of the Himalayas with the peaks of Everest and Dhaulagiri which rise high up in magnificent grandeur, high into the sky.

The descent of Chandragiri is the stiffest part of the journey, as it is a long and very fatiguing descent inasmuch as the road is made up of the big stones which make the pace from stone to stone rather trying to the muscles. It is like an intensely rough stone staircase, the stones being uneven and the distances from each other unequal. At the foot of the hill I found a carriage waiting for us. After collecting men and luggage and taking with us such things as we required for the night we drove into Kathmandu, where we arrived at 8.30pm

It was dark when we left the foot of the hill for Kathmandu. As it was the evening of the Dewali Festival, the time when Hindus illuminate their houses, the Palaces at Kathmandu were ablaze with lamps and small earthen lights. The Maharajah's new Palace was a mass of lights. The road being stony and out of repair we had a tedious drive. The horses jibbed constantly and we had to help them up the incline by getting out and pushing behind. We found a house ready for us on our arrival. The Maharajah had sent some fruit, two sheep and two fowls, some flour etc. All this we left till morning.

As the house was not to our liking we managed to get tents, in which we were more comfortable. The weather was cold and there was frost on the ground in the

morning. The days were pleasant and sunny.

Our stay lasted 16 days. All the time we were there we saw the troops constantly at drill. Drill in all stages. The bands, under the fostering care of Mr Gage, the Director of Music, were at practice close to us and patriotic pieces 'Ready boys ready, we will fight and we will conquer, again and again', 'Rule Britannia' etc. were the order of the day.

We left on the 1st December reaching Bhimphedi the same evening and after a halt of an hour we mounted our elephants and rode for 33 hours to Sezordie (Segowlie?), halting 3 hours of that time at Bichakoh where we had breakfast. We reached Calcutta on the morning of the 4th, all glad to have got over the journey so well. The Khitmagars vow they will never go again, but Juggurna was jubilant thanking providence that he was built better than other men.

HE

Calcutta, 12th December 1890

Note (1) by Mary Terry. "And well he might as my Grandfather was 6ft 4inches tall and correspondingly broad".

Notes by Lieutenant Colonel (Retd) A.V. Swindale. Queen's Gurkha Signals

From mid 19th century until 1951, Nepal was governed by a hereditary line of Rana Prime Ministers, the King being a mere figurehead. At the turn of the Century the Prime Minister was Bir Shamshere Jung Bahadur Rana, known as the "great builder."

He built hospitals and schools, one, the Durbar High School on the west side of the Rani Pokhari, is still in use today. In about 1890 he had built two Palaces, the Lal Durbar and the Seto Durbar, both of which have survived to the present day. They were designed by British architects



*The Seto Durbar.*

from India, so I think it may be assumed that Henry Elworthy was one of these architects and that his journey to Nepal in 1890 (his second) was to advise on their construction. The interior decorations were by F & C Osler of London and



*The Lal Durbar.*

C.Lazarus & Co of Calcutta.

The Seto Durbar was partially destroyed by fire in the 1920's. What remains is now used as offices. The Lal Durbar stands behind the recently built Yak and Yeti Hotel, where it houses a Casino with the state rooms being used for major social functions.

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## BIRD CONSERVATION IN NEPAL

By Carol Inskipp

*(Carol Inskipp lectured to the Society on 6th June 2005. She has previously addressed the Society at the Zoological Society of London in May 2003 on the work of Brian Houghton Hodgson – see the 2003 Journal No 27.)*

### Nepal's birds

Nepal's birdlife is among the richest in Asia, particularly considering the small size of the country. So far a total of 862 species has been recorded, including nearly 600 breeding species. Nepal has a remarkable diversity of habitats, ranging from bare rock and scrub in the alpine zone to tropical rainforests in the lowlands. As well as having a wide range of forest types, the country has internationally important wetlands and grasslands.

It is essential to conserve Nepal's birds for many reasons. Birds deserve respect on moral and religious grounds and are of high cultural significance. They are of invaluable economic importance by eating crop pests, pollinating flowers, dispersing seeds and by clearing up waste by scavenging. Birds are good indicators of environmental health as they are sensitive to change. Last but not least most people enjoy seeing and hearing birds around them. In 2004 BirdLife International identified 31 globally threatened bird species in Nepal. In addition an alarming number of 133 bird species (15%) of Nepal's birds is considered to be nationally threatened. As many as 72 species are thought to be critically threatened or endangered which means that there is an extremely high or very high risk of their becoming extinct within Nepal in the near future.

### Threats

Nepal's birds face many threats. Habitat loss and damage are the major threats to some 119 species (89%) of the birds at risk. The largest number of threatened birds depends upon the forests, totalling some 78 species (59% of those threatened). Birds are at risk from both forest losses and deterioration, with the majority of threatened forest birds inhabiting the tropical, subtropical and lower temperate zones where the forests have been most depleted.

The remaining threatened species inhabit wetlands (44), grasslands (17), scrub (3), open country (6), near human habitation (3) and stony ground (1).

Almost two-thirds of wetland birds at risk are considered to be critically threatened or endangered, and face a wide range of threats in Nepal. Such threats are: habitat loss and damage, water pollution, fish poisoning, hunting and trapping, food shortages due to over-fishing, and disturbance and destruction of nesting and feeding sites.

The spread of cultivation in Nepal's lowlands has led to the once extensive grassland becoming greatly reduced and fragmented until nowadays this habitat is mainly confined to the protected areas, hence Nepal's specialist grassland birds are almost only found in those areas where their populations are isolated. Within the protected areas however these species and other grassland birds are suffering from inappropriate grassland management including untimely and intensive annual cutting, burning and ploughing.

Twenty nationally threatened birds, especially wetland species, are threatened



by hunting and trapping and over-fishing.

Poisoning by diclofenac, a drug used to treat livestock ailments, has been identified as responsible for the plummeting numbers of White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis* and Slender-billed Vulture *Gyps tenuirostris* which were both common and widespread in Nepal only ten years ago. Pesticides and other agrochemicals are widely used in agriculture in the terai and lower and middle hills and could be a significant threat to many species, especially birds of prey.

Serious threats are posed by some invasive weeds, for instance Water Hyacinth *Eichhornia crassipes* in wetlands and recently the climber *Mikania micrantha* which can cover trees, shrubs and the entire forest floor. (*This can be seen very clearly in the Koshi Tappu reserve. Ed*). The impacts of climate change on Nepal's birds have not been studied and are very poorly understood, but are likely to be significant. The Ibisbill *Ibidorhyncha struthersii*, a striking wader, is one of the many likely species to be directly threatened due to loss of its breeding habitat.

Over half (73 species) of the nationally threatened birds are lowland species which occur at altitudes varying from 75 to 1000 metres, reflecting the great pressure on lowland habitats.

Nepal has an extensive system of protected areas covering 18.6% of the country's land area, more than many countries in Asia. Sadly even this is insufficient to conserve Nepal's biodiversity. Many protected areas face serious conservation problems despite their status. In fact none of Nepal's protected areas were selected primarily to conserve birds. All were selected on the

basis of good populations of large, charismatic mammal species, especially across the lowland terai. Other areas have been designated largely for landscape reasons and a high proportion of these are designed to protect the high Himalayas and hence conserve large areas above the tree line which are of relatively low importance in respect of biodiversity.

### **Important Bird Areas (IBAs)**

In 2005 key sites for the conservation of Nepal's birds and biodiversity were identified as part of BirdLife International's Important Bird Areas (IBA) programme. This programme is a worldwide initiative aimed at identifying, documenting and working towards the conservation and sustainable development of a network of critical sites for the world's birds. Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN) is leading this initiative in Nepal, aided by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and BirdLife International.

A total of twenty-seven IBAs have been identified in Nepal covering about 18% of its land area. Fourteen out of twenty-seven sites are located at low altitude ie 75 to 1000 metres, including three of the four most important IBAs – Royal Sukla Phanta Wildlife Reserve, Royal Chitwan National Park and Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve.

Nearly half of Nepal's IBAs lie wholly within protected areas, two are partially protected and the rest are unprotected. However, the protected areas are mainly large and in terms of area about 81% of the IBAs are included within existing protected areas.

### **Recommendations**

Long term efforts are vital to protect

areas important for Nepal's birds and to tackle the underlying causes of threats to these areas. The problems are a combination of poverty, lack of education, population pressure, scarcity of natural resources and the unfair sharing of these resources, compounded by chronic political instability.

Complete coverage of all IBAs through the recognition of new protected areas and the expansion of existing protected areas is an urgent step for His Majesty's Government (HMGN) to take. There are gaps in protected area coverage, especially in the middle hills, e.g. Phulchoki Mountain on the edge of the Kathmandu Valley (See *'From the Editor's In-tray' – Dr Baral's Whitley award of funding for the protection of the Phulchowki area. Ed.*), in the tropical evergreen forests of the east, including Dharan, Tamur and Mai valley forests and of the newly designated Ramsar sites of Jagdishpur, Ghodaghodi Tal and Bees Hazari Tal.

Protection, management and conservation of IBAs should be included in the Nepal Biodiversity Strategy and the follow-up implementation plan for Nepal.

Some protected IBAs require urgent management interventions – for example to address the problems caused by eutrophication and alien invasive species in Koshi Tappu, Chitwan and Sukla Phanta.

Not all IBAs can be conserved simply by declaring them as strictly protected. Long-term conservation of most IBAs will be possible only through community stewardship and involvement. Currently this is not feasible across most of the country due to the current insurgency.

Efforts should be made to extend the successful new models of protected area

management that have already been developed in the Annapurna, Kanchenjunga and Manaslu Conservation Areas and involve the direct participation of communities.

Expansion of the community forestry model to other habitats such as wetlands and grasslands is needed to ensure the local people benefit economically from these habitats. The training of National Parks Department and Wildlife Conservation staff and local communities in integrated landscape conservation and management is vital if IBAs are to succeed. The development of an integrated tourism management plan will be highly beneficial as tourist numbers are almost certain to increase significantly when political problems have been settled.

The provision of more resources to park and forestry field staff should help improve their monitoring of forest exploitation, but again political instability and a safe working environment are needed to enable them to work properly.

There is enormous potential for improved management and enrichment planting in existing low density and depleted forests. Communities throughout Nepal have demonstrated that they can effectively protect and sustain the use of forests under their care. The community forestry programmes should therefore be extended and strengthened.

The involvement of biodiversity experts in community-managed forests is needed to avoid some management practices that have negative impacts on biodiversity, such as the removal of all dead trees and the collecting of all leaf litter from the forest floor.

The provision of technical knowledge in sustainable harvesting of forest resources may help some communities.

The involvement of disadvantaged groups and women in community forestry should be ensured.

A national biodiversity inventory and implementation of a management plan for religious forests and sacred groves would be valuable.

Including a conservation awareness programme for tourists in the forthcoming integrated management tourist plan should be helpful. Tourists need to be informed about the extensive environmental damage caused by over-exploitation of forests to meet their demands for heating and hot showers, and how they can help.

The effective implementation of Nepal's National Wetland Policy, which was formulated in 2003, and full implementation of The World Conservation Union's Nepal project, 'The Conservation and Sustainable Use of Wetlands in Nepal', are urgently needed.

The participation of user groups and community-based organisations in management of wetland resources is key to achieving sustainable resource use.

Reducing pollution of wetlands is very important, especially in the rivers of Royal Chitwan National Park. Pollution of the Narayani River (the worst affected) could be drastically reduced by the installation of sewage treatment works for Bharatpur and Narayanghat towns, and by the effective treatment of industrial waste water from the Bhrikuti paper mill.

The use of Integrated Pest Management and Effective Micro-organisms Technology can provide effective, safe and environmentally friendly alternatives to synthetic pesticides and fertilisers. Their use could be promoted and encouraged through the running of a number of training camps

for farmers, such as those already carried out in Chitwan by the Bird Education Society, based in Sauraha. (*See the article from the Oriental Bird Club elsewhere in the journal. Ed.*) This should help to reduce diffuse pollution from pesticides and fertilisers from agricultural land.

Raising awareness in wetland conservation, particularly among communities living close to wetlands, is vital to ensure their better management, and to reduce hunting and disturbance.

Active management is vital for maintaining grassland habitats. Management should aim to maintain areas of intact grassland on a rotational basis, which are not cut or burnt, while allowing areas to be harvested by local people who depend on grasses for building and thatching.

Grassland management should seek to maintain the existing diversity of grassland plant communities in protected areas. The physical structure of grasslands, together with a complex mosaic of various grass species, is important for maintaining bird diversity.

Areas of short grassland dominated by *Imperata cylindrica* which is important for the globally threatened bustard Bengal Florican *Houbaropsis bengalensis* have become rare in recent years. Efforts should be made to protect and extend these areas.

There is an urgent need to reduce grazing pressure from domestic livestock that is currently causing overgrazing on some grassland in protected areas, such as that found at the Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve.

The alteration of flooding regimes by dam projects and irrigation projects would have catastrophic consequences for these grasslands and any such

schemes that could impact on important grasslands should be vigorously opposed.

Ploughing of grasslands has been found to be counter-productive and should be avoided.

Some common predatory mammals such as Golden Jackals *Canis aureus* should be controlled to minimise predation of threatened ground nesting species such as Swamp Francolin *Francolinus gularis* and Bengal Florican.

The creation and maintenance of grassland corridors are vital to maintain sustainable bird populations in the long term, and the expansion and conservation of new grassland areas are recommended.

Alternatives to grass harvesting should be promoted in communities currently dependent on grassland resources. An experimental approach to community managed grassland working along similar lines to community forestry is recommended. Communities would be

encouraged to manage grasslands sustainably, while at the same time fulfilling their needs for cattle fodder and thatch grasses.

Finally raising conservation awareness of the importance of the conservation of birds and IBAs is most important. A radio/TV and print media campaign would really help to communicate the importance of conserving Nepal's birds.

*(This article has been adapted from 'Important Bird Areas in Nepal. Key Sites for Conservation' written by Dr Hem Sagar Baral and Carol Inskipp and published by Bird Conservation Nepal, Kathmandu, 2005 and from 'The State of Nepal's Birds 2004' also by Baral and Inskipp, 2004 published by the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, Bird Conservation Nepal and IUCN-Nepal, Kathmandu.)*

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## THE 'SORROW OF BIHAR' TURNED INTO A HAVEN FOR BIRDS - KOSHI TAPPU

Dr Hem Sagar Baral

My early childhood was spent at a village and the area near the banks of the Koshi River. The Barrage had already been built but I still remember hundreds of people carrying stones, making the high earthen embankment on the eastern bank of Koshi. As a little child, on every Saraswati Puja, I used to follow senior schoolmates all the way to Lalbhitti, which was the effective western bank of the river at that time. Here a statue of Saraswati was finally put in the water to mark the end of the special occasion. At this very spot I recall at least half a dozen dolphins coming to the surface of the water to breathe. Every time they came to the surface I could hear a unique sound and this still rings in my ears. Memories come alive though now they are faint. Today there are less than 10 freshwater dolphins left in the area and their conservation is an urgent priority.

The "Sorrow of Bihar" as it was often referred to in the past, is the mighty Koshi River, the largest of the rivers in Nepal. Arthur Holmes, a famous English geologist, stated that the Koshi River had shifted nearly 100 km to the west within the last 200 years. It is the largest tributary of the holy Ganges (known as the Ganga to the residents of the Subcontinent) and is regarded as one of the most dynamic rivers in the world.

In the early 1960s the Barrage, constructed by the Indian government in Nepal, has stopped the annual loss of lives and property in the Indian State of Bihar. Time has flown by as does the Koshi River; perhaps now there is only a weakening memory of flood disasters that once it brought to the eastern lowlands. May be the tales of the 'Sorrow of Bihar'

are slowly fading with time.

The wetlands, created by the Koshi River Barrage, have attracted thousands of migrating birds from northern Asia from as far away as Siberia. A stretch, nearly 17 km long, of the Koshi River to the north of the barrage has been declared as the Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve by His Majesty's Government of Nepal. This Reserve was set up primarily to save the last remaining population of Wild Buffalo in the country. Today, Koshi represents the most important wetland system in Nepal and is significant in the context of South Asia as a whole. In recognition of this, in 1987, Koshi was designated a RAMSAR site, ie a wetland site of international importance.

Birdlife is certainly the best known of all the wildlife present at Koshi. However Koshi's recorded birdwatching history is relatively short when compared with places like Chitwan and Sukla Phanta. However, what is found here is something really extra special. The bird species list currently stands at 476, representing some 55% of Nepal's current total bird species. The list rivals those of the other protected areas in the Terai lowlands of Nepal. Among all these protected areas, this is the smallest with an area of only 175 sq km. Chitwan and Bardia are each five times larger than Koshi Tappu. Of all the Koshi birds, as many as 19 species are currently regarded as 'globally threatened' species. This also makes Koshi very important, as it has the highest number of globally threatened species compared with any other place in the country. These globally threatened species are: Swamp Francolin, Baer's Pochard, Indian Skimmer, Spot-billed Pelican,

White-rumped and Slender-billed Vultures, Imperial Eagle and Greater Spotted Eagles, Pallas' Fish Eagle, Lesser Kestrel, Bengal and Lesser Floricans, Lesser and Greater Adjutant Storks, Bristled Grassbird, Grey-crowned Prinia, Hodgson's Bushchat, Kashmir Flycatcher and Finn's Weaver. Besides these, this is the only site where the magnificent and threatened Black-necked Stork breeds in Nepal. Koshi also has the largest heronry (a breeding colony of herons, egrets and allies) in the country with numbers reaching over 50,000. Ornithologically, it is important for resident species as well as summer and winter visitors. In addition, the Reserve serves as a migration corridor and staging point for vast numbers of wetland species, especially waders and wildfowl, as well as for birds of prey and passerines.

Almost every year, some exciting bird news comes from Koshi; that may be a new species recorded for Nepal or an unusual bird sighting. Since the first complete checklist of birds at for Koshi Tappu and Koshi Barrage was compiled in 2000, more than 20 additional species have been added to the list. These include:

- Oriental Pied Hornbill
- Finn's Weaver
- Yellow-browed Warbler
- Himalayan Bulbul
- Ultramarine Flycatcher
- Asian Glossy Starling
- Yellow-eyed Babbler
- Common Wood Pigeon
- Rusty-rumped Warbler
- Goldcrest
- Russet Sparrow
- White-browed Bush Robin
- Wedge-tailed Green Pigeon
- Black Bulbul
- Purple-backed Starling

- Greater White-fronted Goose
- Asian House Martin
- Dark-sided Thrush
- Red-throated Loon
- Grey-bellied Tesia
- Red-headed Bunting
- Rufous-bellied Niltava
- Grass Owl
- Desert Wheatear

At Koshi, the best option for bird watching is either to walk along the bund, or if you wish to cover greater distances, a bicycle is a good idea or tourists may use a jeep. There are well-established camps at the edge of the Reserve and some, which are run by birdwatchers themselves, offer excellent opportunities for bird watching. A raft ride along the vast calm waters of the Koshi will give you better opportunities to see some of the large magnificent eagles and storks. Birders have seen nearly 200 species just in one day of dawn to dusk birdwatching. One hundred species a day would be regarded as quite normal. Birdwatching is equally good be you a novice or an expert twitcher! Bird naturalists have been able to turn many 'uninterested' and 'plainly interested' people to keen bird watchers and conservationists. This is a success story for us.

Perhaps the better known of the mammals at Koshi is the Wild Buffalo or *Arna*. It is a majestic beast and the sight of a bull is a thrilling experience. Arnas have been known to very aggressive with intruders or strangers; hence they are best viewed whilst keeping a safe distance from them. There have been a few cases in the past when Arna bulls have been known to knock down even an elephant!

Another interesting mammal in the reserve is the freshwater dolphin. The numbers are at a low and alarming level.

However some relict individuals can still be found. Other mammals include Leopard, Fishing Cat, Jungle Cat, Spotted and Hog Deer, Mongoose, Otters, Civet Cats and various species of bats. Previously the area acted as a corridor for Asiatic Wild Elephants and Gaur (also called Indian Bison and *Gauri Gai*) but the habitat is fragmented; this factor, combined with increased human disturbance, means that these animals are much rarer nowadays. Occasionally these animals still visit the reserve and the peripheral area.



*The tented accommodation at the Koshi Camp.*

Koshi Barrage itself is a popular destination for many birders. Several species of birds that may be difficult to see elsewhere in the reserve are easily seen here; these include Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Cotton Pygmy Goose, Grey-headed Lapwings etc. Half a day can be spent looking for several other rarer and more elusive species at this place.

For those who would like to explore a bit of eastern lowland forest, the nearby Dharan forest has been considered an important destination. Birds such as Blue-eared Barbet and Abbott's Babbler could be seen here as well as the rare Giant Black Squirrel. This unprotected forest has been a haven for many forest birds and is an important national forest that

merits protection on several grounds. This forest should be visited strictly and only with an experienced bird guide.

Today, Koshi receives nearly 300 visitors (excluding SAARC nationals) annually and 80% of this number is primarily interested in seeing its exceptionally rich avifauna. With a good management scheme in the place, Koshi Tappu could easily attract and sustain a ten fold increase over the current visitor numbers. A good conservation planner with a long-term vision for bird eco-tourism could make Koshi Tappu equal to the famous Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary in India. Such is the potential of the area. Some basic suggestions to help achieve this are outlined below.

Koshi Tappu should be given proper protection. Cattle grazing and collection of grasses should be allowed only in the designated area. Alien invasive species should be removed and managed. Hunting should be eliminated and disturbance should be reduced. A close coordination should be established with the Barrage authorities to maintain the water at a suitable level for birds and other wildlife. The entrance fee should be reduced to encourage visitors. Places of cultural interest and other attractive destinations close to Koshi Tappu should be explored and marketed. Funds should be provided for education and awareness activities to encourage the local population, particularly the coming generation, to protect their wildlife and to explain the advantages of so doing and show how this could promote tourism and improve their quality of life. Activities for example, the annual Bird Festival, should be continued at the local level initiative within an environment which all stakeholders can participate.

## GIVING NEPALESE CHILDREN A CHILDHOOD

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The Trust works through its twin partner organisation, the Nepal Child Welfare Foundation, which is unique in being run by former British Army Gurkha officers. Since its inception, the Trust has given freedom and a loving home to innocent children imprisoned in adult jails alongside parents (the two youngest are pictured), and street children escaping domestic abuse. We fund education for deaf children and we are rescuing and rehabilitating some of the hundreds of Nepalese girls who have been trafficked into India to work as circus performers. Held on long contracts in grim conditions, these girls are subject to frequent physical and sexual abuse. We bring them back to Nepal to their families and communities. We offer education to younger ones to prepare them for mainstream school, and training and employment to older ones at a range of farming and business initiatives that we are developing.

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## FARMERS' CONSERVATION AWARENESS CAMPS

By Monoj Kumar Chaudhary

*(I am grateful to the Oriental Bird Club (OBC) for permission to print this article which appeared in BirdingASIA, the bulletin of the OBC, in June 2005. The OBC supports projects throughout Asia including several in Nepal. Outline details of some of these are described elsewhere in the journal. Ed.)*

In May 2004, the Bird Education Society Nepal carried out one of the most unusual and potentially most valuable conservation awareness projects that the OBC Conservation Fund has supported to date. Farmers from four villages in the buffer zone areas around the Royal Chitwan National Park in Nepal participated in a project to teach them about the environment, introduce them to organic farming, make them aware of the dangers of overuse of chemicals and pesticides, and suggest alternative methods of control. This is the project report.

### Introduction

Bird Education Society (BES), with financial support from Oriental Bird Club (OBC), organised a Bird Conservation Awareness Camp for local farmers at Sauraha, Chitwan, Nepal, 5-12 May 2004, to generate conservation awareness and to encourage them to practise organic farming. A total of 35 participants from four buffer-zone community forest user-groups—Baghmara, Janakauli, Chitrasen and Kumroj—attended, with equal numbers of male and female participants from each community forest user-group taking part. All the participants were local farmers whose land is close to rivers and/or the national park. Participants were provided with information related to their farming practices and nature

conservation. Seven days of intensive training were held on relevant topics with extensive use of visual aids, video presentations, games, practical and fieldwork, group sharing and entertainment activities. A poster demonstrating the benefits of organic farming was also published and distributed.

### Project objectives

The specific objectives of the project were to generate bird conservation awareness, to educate participants about the effects of chemical pesticides and fertilisers on wildlife and the environment, to educate them about natural pesticides, and to encourage their use.

### Scope of project and programme

Om Bahadur Rijal, President of BES, welcomed the participants and briefly introduced the organisation and its activities. He stressed the importance of birds, wildlife and the environment, and the significance of the training. Yogesh Adhikari, BES programme coordinator, introduced all the participants and then gave a brief outline of the training programme and the provisional schedule. Participants were split into four working groups for the duration of the course.

In the first working session of the programme, Bhagawan Dahal (Biologist) of King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation, explained different ecosystems with special focus on farmland. The effects of chemicals in our environment was also discussed. Ramji Siwakoti, Warden of Royal Chitwan National Park, gave an introduction to the park and its buffer zone and emphasised

the importance of the participation and support of the local community. He explained the benefits of conservation to the local economy through the growth of tourism. He was followed by Monoj Chaudhary of Baghmara Buffer Zone Community Forest who described the development of the community forest concept and used his own community forest as a model for conservation initiatives with its rich biodiversity, the implementation of tourism initiatives and local development.

During the first session of day two, Basanta Ranabhat of Organino Nepal lectured on agricultural practices. He discussed the old and modern ways, and the natural system, giving examples of positive and negative aspects of each system. He described the "Improved Agricultural System", which is a combination of all three systems, although based mainly on the last. The IAS relies on the use of natural microorganisms in the soil to fix the essential nitrogen for plant growth, as it is important that soil should be chemical-free to ensure the survival of these microorganisms. The process is known as "Effective Microorganism" (EM) technology and its use in different



*Course members collecting elephant dung and other waste to make EM organic compost* Photo: Hem Subedi

countries was demonstrated in a video presentation.

Bishnu Prasad Pokhrel of Paryabarniya Sewa Kendra (Environmental Service Centre) conducted the sessions on EM technology, outlining its technical background and reviewing the processes by which it benefits soil composition and structure through an increase in humus content and the capacity to sustain high-quality food production. Derivatives of the basic technology may be used for different purposes using different, locally available ingredients, some of which are waste products such as rice husks. The next session was "hands-on" with Bishnu Prasad Pokhrel showing how to make the EM derivatives, with help from the participants. The EM "pest control" derivative was applied in nearby fields. Soil fertility tests were made and compost manure prepared. Seed treatment was demonstrated and the different types of bio-pesticides and bio-fertilisers introduced and their use explained.

Krishna Hari Devkota, lecturer and entomologist at Rampur Agricultural Campus, introduced "Integrated Pest Management". He said that 98% insects are beneficial and only 2% insects are harmful to crops, but owing to lack of awareness farmers kill many species of useful insects by using chemical pesticides. He used his insect collection to demonstrate both beneficial and harmful insects to help the participants identify them, explained their life cycle and natural pest control by beneficial insects. He explained that excessive use of chemicals on crops not only destroys the useful insects and damages our environment, but also affects human health. He discussed effective ways to control harmful insects. While emphasising the use of bio-pesticides and bio-fertilisers he also explained to

participants the safe use of chemicals. Later, he continued with a question-and-answer session. Participants had many questions regarding insect ID. This was followed by a practical ID session in the field. Participants then joined in a practical demonstration of how to prepare bio-pesticides (using some 30 local organic materials) and how to use them on different crops to control different pests.

In the final session, Rupendra Karmacharya (BES) explained the nitrogen cycle, ecosystem and food chain using different participative games and posters. He explained the roles of birds in maintaining the ecological balance and the importance of birds in agriculture. He then took the participants into the farmland for a short birdwatching tour.

Yogesh Adhikari reviewed the overall programme activities, discussed its usefulness and effectiveness, and asked participants to complete an evaluation sheet. He asked them if they were prepared to work together to foster organic farming in large area. It was unanimously agreed to set up a committee with the objective of creating awareness and fostering organic farming in the Chitwan District. With the agreement of all participants, the organisation was



*Participants prepare dilute EM solutions for bio-fertilisers and bio-pesticides*

Photo: Hem Subedi

named Paryabaraniya Krisak Manch (Environmental Farmers' Forum) and a committee with members from each community forest user-group was formed. Meetings will be held at the BES office in Sauraha and BES agreed to provide initial secretarial support work and assist with drawing up a constitution, objectives and plans.

Om Bahadur Rijal chaired the formal closing ceremony. Certificates were distributed to all participants and facilitators. Gokarna Prasad Adhikari and Sunita Bartaula spoke on behalf of the participants about the benefit of the course and urged all the concerned organisations to help the newly formed Farmers' Forum. Other speakers included Giridhari Chaudhary (President, Hotel Association Nepal Chitwan Chapter), Dr Krishan Prasad Oli (Director of the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation), and Ramji Siwakoti (Warden, Royal Chitwan National Park). Summing up, Om Bahadur Rijal said that BES is willing to continue this sort of training and support the Forum's efforts.

### **Poster publication**

Some 1,500 copies of a poster on organic farming produced by local artist, Man Kumar Chaudhary, from a BES concept design were printed. The title of the Nepali-script poster is "Encourage organic farming—protect the balance of the ecosystem". The posters have been widely distributed to schools, green clubs, green organisations, Paryabaraniya Krisak Manch, King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation, Royal Chitwan National Park, community forest organisations, Chitwan District Forest Office, Aama Samuha (women's group), Bachat Samuha (savings group). The posters have been displayed in local teashops, national park offices, health clinics and shops.

### Budget breakdown

A budget of UK £750 was granted by OBC, with BES contributing the equivalent of UK £240. Expenditure was as follows: classroom materials/stationery £40, meals etc for participants £390, remuneration for seven trainers £110, costs of field trips £60 and poster design and production £390.

### Feedback from participants

All the participants felt that the training was helpful and productive, particularly because there were practical and hands-on activities as well as theory. The information about the role of insects and birds, how to reduce use of chemicals and use of “bio-pesticides” as well as the role of microorganisms and how to prepare and use natural materials was seen to be very useful.

They felt that future courses might be extended to allow for more practical work and field visits to existing organic farms, and could be improved through more use of the Nepali language, more information about the park, forest, wildlife and birds and their importance and how to protect them. They would welcome training on livestock raising and fruit plantation, information on herbal plants, how to market organic produce and the issue of drinking water pollution.

All the participants were willing to implement the knowledge they gained from this training in the field and also to inform their neighbours about the new technology. Two participants said they would first try out the methods in separate plots and extend their use when they were satisfied they were successful. Participants also suggested that they could first try the technology and then explain it to others by practical demonstrations;



*Group photograph of course participants*

Photo: Hem Subedi

they thought more awareness programmes were needed and that it would be beneficial to set up environmental groups in every village. They also thought that schools should be involved and that the information should be spread via participation of the media, distribution of pamphlets, posters and street drama. They also suggested that an awards system would encourage people to become actively involved in organic farming.

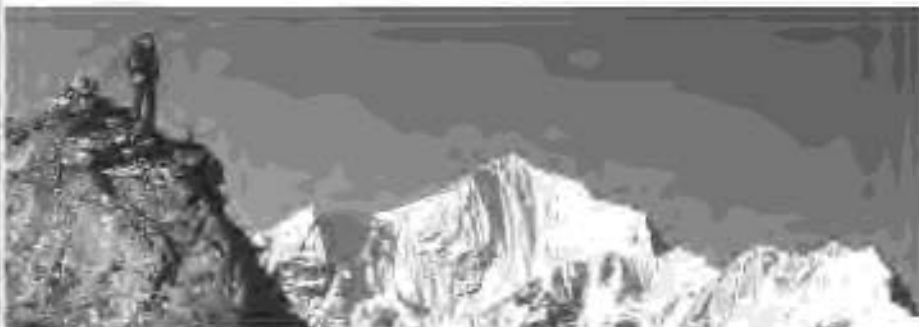
### Acknowledgements

BES would like to thank the Oriental Bird Club for providing the financial assistance for this training course, King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation's Biodiversity Conservation Centre for providing the training hall and training staff, Royal Chitwan National Park, Baghmara Community Forest, Organico Nepal, Paryabarniya Sewa Kendra, Rampur Agricultural Campus for providing training staff. BES would like to thank all its members and nature guides who were very supportive during the training programme.

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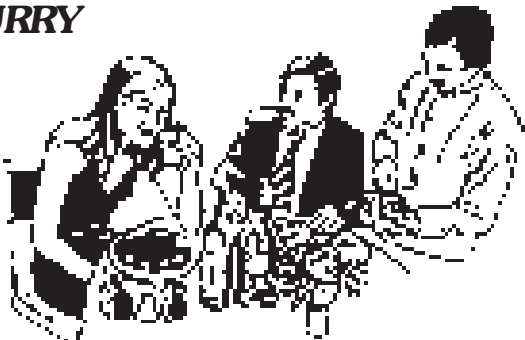


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## TWO WEDDINGS, A 'COUP' AND LOTS OF 'BIRDS'

By Gerry Birch

The catalyst for our trip to Nepal was the invitation to a rather grand wedding in Kathmandu. The very kind invitation came from the Patron of the Society, HRH Princess Jotshana Shah and Dr Basnyat to attend the wedding of their son, Vivek to Ayushma Rana. Princess Jotshana had invited a number of friends from the Society and both Pat Mellor and Jane Loveless had also accepted and helped to represent the Society at the occasion. As chairman I felt that it was about time I returned to Nepal and experience the situation there for myself, and Sheila had not been back since the Queen's Gurkha Signals reunion in 1999, and my last visit had been with the Army birdwatchers in February 2001. This provided us therefore with the ideal opportunity to meet some of our Nepali friends that we had known over the last 10 - 15 years, and as a trustee of the King Mahendra (UK) Trust for Nature Conservation, there would also be a chance to be updated on their projects and the situation in general.



*The Wedding procession.*

We planned a three week trip to cover the wedding in Kathmandu with visits to two good birding areas, Chitwan and Koshi Tappu. The 'winter rains' came

late, ie mid January, and there was a cold front sitting over the northern part of the Sub-continent throughout our stay. We only saw the mountains clearly on two days. Weddings are held at houses of the bride and the groom and go on for several days. This entails a good deal of standing around drinking whisky, in my case, and devouring quantities of curry, usually in the garden, over which 'shamianas' have been pitched, trying to keep warm around portable gas fires or charcoal braziers. Due to the continuing cold weather thermal underwear was essential and for most of the rest of the trip Sheila was hardly ever out of her down jacket. At both houses Damai bands and elements of the Royal Nepalese Army band were keeping up a background cacophony of traditional music. We went in procession between the houses in cars and minibuses accompanied by the assorted musicians often through the narrow streets of the bazaar. Weddings are very 'seasonal' in Nepal and we were not the only such party on the road! It was all very jolly and we were able to catch up with old contacts. Sadly the death of HM Queen Komol's mother, just prior to the festivities, meant that both HM King Gyanendra and HM Queen Komol were



*The Groom (with garland) with the Bride's Father and the Pundit.*

unable to attend as they were performing the required family mourning ceremonies. Despite the number of guests at the sequence of parties and ceremonies, Dr Basnyat ensured that the 'foreign' guests were both informed and entertained. We did appreciate the time he took to explain the ceremony. We felt very honoured to have been invited to participate in this important family event, something that we shall remember for a long time.



*The Bride arriving at the Groom's family home.*

After the wedding and a two day delay due to a *bandh* ie a two day general strike, we set off for Chitwan for a four night stay at Tiger Tops Jungle Lodge. These *bandhs* have plagued the country throughout the period of the Maoist insurgency, causing a great deal of inconvenience, not only to tourists but the general population trying to go about their lawful business. They were to strike (sorry!) again and cause further disruption to our planned itinerary. We were warmly welcomed at Tiger Tops but it was sad to note that for three nights we were the only occupants. The ongoing Maoist insurgency has put off so many tourists. The lodge, sited in the jungle, gives access to the surrounding grasslands.

Each morning at 0700 we set off on elephant-back to look for game. Use of elephants is the only practical way to get about in this terrain. Grass is 12 feet or more high and visibility on foot is about 3 feet! You do not wish to meet a rhino, tiger or wild elephant in such circumstances unless elephant-mounted! I have to say that an elephant is not the most stable platform for birdwatching, but is the only way to reach certain areas. Apart from spotting all the various types of deer, Sloth Bear, Gaur (a type of wild cattle), wild boar, monkeys, crocodiles and a tiger, we did see some very good birds. These included the globally threatened Slender-billed Babbler, the Chestnut-capped Babbler and the also locally threatened Grey-crowned Prinia which all inhabit tall grassland and, without elephant transport, it would have been difficult or impossible to locate these species. The first full day was given over to a visit to the KMT Biodiversity Conservation Centre (BCC) at Sauraha. From the centre Trust runs its Rhino/Tiger conservation project. To reach it necessitated a 35 km drive on rough tracks through the jungle, but would give us a chance to travel through an area not often visited by tourists. The highlight of the outward journey was the discovery of a colony of nesting Lesser Adjutant Storks. We counted 11 nests; all appeared to be occupied and, with juveniles, around 30 storks were counted. Our accompanying naturalist would be keeping a future check of these over the coming months. On our return in the late afternoon we had an excellent sighting of a Sloth Bear on the track, and then made a detour to an old oxbow lake which was hosting around 30 Marsh Muggger Crocodiles around the edge with more than 100 Night Herons roosting in the reeds.



The next day involved a post breakfast river trip to another site known as the Tharu Village. It is a lodge built in the local tribal style which is surrounded by a farm which provides food for all the Tiger Tops sites. In addition there is a school sponsored by Tiger Tops for the local population. The river trip is an excellent way to watch birds and animals as the boat drifts silently down stream. The fish-eating Gharial crocodiles were clearly visible on the bank, once you had sorted them out from the logs washed down in the previous monsoon. Ospreys and Pied Kingfishers were a delight to watch with the occasional Small Pratincole skimming the surface. The late evening return by Landrover gave us our tiger sighting as it walked down the track ahead of us before turning off into the jungle with a disdainful look over its shoulder!

Hornbills are spectacular birds and were among the 'targets' for the trip. The Indian Grey Hornbill is relatively common and can be seen around the edges of villages and woods; the other two species are more difficult to track. We did see a pair of Pied Hornbills in flight over the lodge. This left the most difficult species, the Great Hornbill, to be located. It was planned to do a jungle walk to the tented camp for lunch and from there return to the lodge by elephant. We were escorted by our naturalist and two other staff; it is inadvisable to go alone just in case! On the way we had good views of Sharp-tailed Munias in flocks of up to 30 in the undergrowth, a pair of Black-crested Bulbuls and several species of woodpecker, including Grey-crowned Pygmy, Himalayan Flame-backed and Fulvous-breasted. After lunch we went in search of the Great Hornbills and discovered a pair eating fruit in a very tall tree which made viewing quite difficult

until they took off over the grassland towards a more open area. We had a close view of a male Gaur, from our elephant, on the return trip to the lodge, a first for us as we had never seen these on any of our previous visits. That afternoon as we sat outside having a late cup of tea, we were treated to a flypast of twenty-five Great Hornbills at a range of half a mile, making their way to a roosting site. They came in small groups settling on the tops of the Bombax (kapok) trees and gave plenty of time for observation. Over a cup of tea we met the local Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) company commander. He was a little surprised to meet another soldier, albeit a retired one and he was able to explain some of the problems that units like his face on a daily basis.

On return to Kathmandu we sorted out the laundry in the calm atmosphere of our hotel, the Hotel Malla, and planned the next phase. The next lot of Maoist inspired *bandhs* would, we learnt, prolong our stay in Koshi Tappu by two days. There are worse things that can happen on a trip, but this had the effect of shortening our final time in Kathmandu during which we had planned to visit friends. The 45 minute flight to the east, parallel to the Himalayas was uneventful but the mountains remained firmly behind clouds. It had been raining and it was warmer than in Chitwan and we could divest ourselves of down clothing, but not for long!

The camp at Koshi Tappu consists of a series of tents pitched under thatched roofs, with separate ablution blocks. Since my last visit in 2001 a dining room with a bar had been built, complete with veranda overlooking the camp from where the local species can be watched in comfort and shade with drink and binos in hand. The trees had grown



*Villagers arriving at the Koshi Tappu bird festival on international World Wetlands Day 02 Feb 05.*

considerably since 2001 and the whole camp had a much greener and a more mature feel about it. Dr Baral had also had a separate room built to provide a classroom for visiting local children. Both buildings were made from local and recycled materials and built in the vernacular style.

Over the last 200 years the course of the Koshi river has moved westwards by around 100 km. The Koshi drains a good part of the eastern Nepal Himalayas, and only some 35 miles upstream three rivers come together to form the Koshi which bursts through the hills and the Terai jungle strip to the plains of India. In the 1960s the Indian government built a barrage to reduce the annual inundation of the state of Bihar resulting from the monsoon and the melt waters from the high Himalayas and to improve irrigation for both Nepal and Bihar. (See *'The Sorrow of Bihar' elsewhere in the journal. Ed.*) The reserve consists of 175 sq km of the resulting marshes, wet grasslands, scrub and riverine forest. It is the home of the only remaining herd of wild Water Buffalo and a decreasing number of Gangetic Dolphin, both of which we were able to see.

The pattern of the next few days was an early morning walk in the immediate area, followed by cooked breakfast on the veranda, if warm enough, and then a long

morning returning for lunch and a short rest before setting out again in the late afternoon. On the first day we had the river trip which entailed transporting an inflatable Avon dinghy up river by vehicle to permit us to drift downstream. Drifting down, we pulled into one of the many sandy islands that form and change every year, to find Great Stone Plovers, and also, the familiar Eurasian Thick Knees (Stone Curlews). Otters and a large Python were also seen on the bank. However the highlight of this trip was the large number of raptors spotted, 16 species in all, including 4 species of vulture, Pallas's Fish Eagle, White-tailed Eagle, Short-toed Eagle, Pied Harrier, Shikra, Common Buzzard, Steppe Eagle, Imperial Eagle, Booted Eagle and Bonelli's Eagle, Osprey and Kestrel.

That evening on our return to camp we



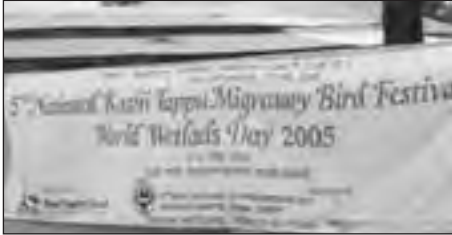
*National Parks Dept elephants arrive at the Reserve HQ.*

discovered that the King had taken over direct rule and declared a state of emergency. We listened on the radio to the King's broadcast where he set out a 21 point agenda and his proposal for a Council of Ministers. As he was speaking so the phones went off! The airports were closed and all news was censored.

Communications gradually returned over the next few days but mobiles were still not back by the time we left Nepal on 9 Feb. The idea had been to prevent

political leaders escaping to India (some 150 were put into house arrest/custody) and to deny communications to the Maoists in an attempt to prevent them ordering *bhanda*s. We carried on birdwatching!

The next day was 'World Wetlands Day



*Banner outside the reserve HQ.*

2005', and a programme of events over the coming days to emphasise the importance of the area to Nepal and the locals had been arranged. Dr Baral was the 'guest of honour' at the opening ceremony. The local authorities had obtained clearance for the event to go ahead, 'coup' notwithstanding. As we arrived at the Reserve HQ, close to the RNA Company HQ, so the locals and the school children were gathering including floats and decorated National Parks Department elephants. There were the inevitable speeches made by the dignitaries and then I was called upon to make a speech to the assembled 500 plus Tharus et al! It stretched my vocabulary but I was able to point out that I had been there over 40 years before when the barrage was under construction and at that time there was considerably more wildlife! I omitted to say that the then Brigadier was something of a shikari! It did however give me the chance to point out that wildlife conservation would help them by attracting tourists. I think the message got across as the District Officer in his following remarks referred directly

to what I had said and doubtless emphasised this aspect in terms that they could better understand. Afterwards the RNA Company Commander, Dr Baral, the Nepal Tourist Board representative and I were each issued with a brace of feral doves (of peace!) to launch. They just about made it to the roof of the shamiana! Other highlights of our stay at Koshi included very clear views the many warblers, wild fowl, bitterns and the first sighting in Koshi Tappu of a male Rufous-bellied Niltava (formerly Beautiful Niltava) *Niltava sundara*.

Life in Kathmandu was normal on our return. Tourists were few and hotels and camps were at very low occupancy. However at our hotel (the Malla) the Saga groups kept coming. That company had provided the manger with a satellite phone so that they could keep in touch. I was asked if I was part of the Saga group - a bit miffed until I looked in the mirror!

On the first evening after our return we were invited to a regimental wedding. It turned out that the daughter of our old Pipe Major was marrying the son of one of our Gurkha Captains. I had not seen either of the fathers for over twelve years. I was particularly glad to see the old Pipe



*Gerry Birch with a representative of the Tourist Board, Dr Hem Sagar Baral and Maj Shrestha - RNA Coy Comd - releasing doves of 'peace' at the formal opening of the week-long festival!*



*Fishing at the nearby ponds.*

Major since the last I had seen or heard of him was when, during my time in the British embassy, I had selected him for post with the embassy guard in Kabul in 1991. I did wonder if I had sent him to his death as the embassy had been subjected to attack by the Taliban and the usual disaffected local population! In fact the whole thing was somewhat 'Kiplingesque'. Thankfully he had survived and had been employed at other missions in Africa, possibly equally dangerous! The party was held in the new (four/five star?) Radisson Hotel in Maharajganj. Much of the talk was, quite naturally, about the recent 'coup' and the world reaction to it. There was an element of relief on the one hand but also apprehension on the other.

Our last three days were mainly taken

up with KM(UK)T and other liaison visits, shopping and visits to friends. Time prevented a return to Phulchowki, the 9000 ft peak to the south of the Kathmandu valley. In any event due to the security situation it is not now possible to drive all the way to the top. Nevertheless I did have final walk around the botanical garden at Godaveri. This visit produced Little Forktail, White-capped River Chat, Blue Rockthrush and another Beautiful Niltava.

So ended the birdwatching aspects to the trip with more than 200 species seen.



*National Parks Dept elephants carrying fodder with 15 month old baby.*

We had been there at a very interesting and, for us, an opportune time and we hope to return again.

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## FROM THE EDITOR'S IN-TRAY

### Honours and Awards

Major Nigel Wylie Carrick was made an MBE in recognition of his work as the Brigade Welfare Officer in administering the Gurkha Welfare Scheme work and projects during his recent tour of duty in British Gurkhas Pokhara. It is a tribute to his efforts and those of the GWS staff that they have been able to carry on this work despite the current political situation.

Mr Roger Potter was made an MBE in the last Queen's Birthday Honours List for his work in establishing the charity WorldWide Volunteering. This charity aims to help those wanting to find volunteering placements abroad. He has said that the original idea for this charity came to him whilst trekking in the Langtang Valley. Roger has served on the Society's committee and was for a time the vice-chairman.

### The Zoological Society of London (ZSL)

The ZSL has awarded Sir John Chapple the Society's Silver Medal. This award is given very sparingly and is in recognition of Sir John's huge contribution to the work of ZSL for wildlife and conservation.

### The National Sagarmatha Award

The National Sagarmatha Award by His Majesty's Government of Nepal to the late Lt Col JOM Roberts was announced in the spring. This award was instituted in 2003, the Golden Jubilee of the first recorded ascent of Mount Everest by Hillary and Tenzing Norgay. The nomination for this award was put forward by one the senior expedition leaders from the tourism sector in Nepal, and received the support of the Government, recognising the huge contribution that Jimmy Roberts made to the tourism industry which is so important for Nepal. It was Jimmy who started the first trekking company, Mountain Travel, in

Nepal in the 1960s. The successor company still continues under the Tiger Mountain Group.

### Environmental awards

#### Whitley Award

Dr Hem Sagar Baral, Chief Executive Officer of Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN), was granted the prestigious Whitley Award for Conservation administered by the Whitley Fund for Nature, one of the well known conservation organisations based in the UK. The Award was presented to Dr Baral by HRH Princess Anne at the Royal Geographical Society in London on 20th April 2005. The award provides a sum of £30K. Dr Baral will use the funds for a project to demonstrate how one of Nepal's Important Bird Areas (IBAs) at Phulchowki Mountain Forest can be conserved by generating sustainable incomes through ecotourism.



Phulchoki is one of just five mid-hill forests in Nepal that is classified as an Important Bird Area by BirdLife International. Mid-hill forests throughout Nepal have been particularly affected by deforestation for fodder and firewood by an ever-expanding human population. It supports a rich bird community comprising nearly 300 species and is regarded as one of the finest places for hill forest birdwatching in the central Himalayas. Lying on the rim of the Kathmandu valley, it is much visited

by foreign birdwatchers.

Dr Baral has studied this forest for the last 15 years. He has long understood its unique potential for education and income generation through ecotourism and sustainable conservation. This novel project aims to establish a clear understanding of how local communities use the forest, and subsequently to promote the sustainable use of forest resources. It will also help local communities derive benefits from forest biodiversity principally through ecotourism. Bird populations will be assessed as an indicator of biodiversity using a participatory monitoring programme successfully developed in the Terai region of Nepal. In parallel with this, BCN will work to promote Phulchoki as a site for environmental education because of its proximity to Kathmandu.

#### **Ashden Award**

This has been awarded to Sundar Bajgain, Executive Director of BSP Nepal for a biogas project. This award is also worth £30K. BSP Nepal aims to widen the use of this technology across Nepal. Amongst its aims it hopes to reduce the use of fuelwood and the reliance on kerosene as well as lightening the load of household work and indoor pollution of houses that results from the use of other fuels. I am sure that those members that have trekked in the hills are only too aware of the smoky atmosphere that can develop in houses and 'hotels' that are reliant on traditional fuels. This award clearly recognises all the many advantages that flow from the use of this 'low tech' solution.

#### **The Princess Jayanti Memorial Trust**

The Trust was set up following the tragic events of June 2001 in memory of Princess Jayanti Shah. Our Patron, HRH Princess Jotshana, was responsible for raising funds for the Trust in UK. The Society helped by providing administrative and secretarial support.

The sum of around £5000 was collected, most of which was subsequently remitted to Nepal for the purchase of medical equipment. This followed advice from medical authorities here as equipment could be purchased more cheaply there than in UK.

A small residue remains in UK, administered by the Society, and is at the disposal of the Trust and can be used as when requested. Princess Jayanti established the Nepal Cancer Relief Society in 1982 and her efforts led to a tax on sales of cigarettes, funds from which helped to towards Nepal's first cancer hospital. She was also aware of the pain of cardiac illness, not least due to such problems experienced amongst her own family.

#### **The Tom Hughes Family Trust**

Members who attended the Supper on the 17th February will be aware of Tom's death earlier that month in Dharan when the Chairman was able to inform them, having just returned from Nepal.

To accede to the interest generated locally in Nepal, Tom 'lay in' at the entrance to his home in Dharan throughout the morning of Thursday, 10th February to allow his many ex-service and civilian friends in Dharan and the surrounding area the opportunity to pay their last respects. Tom was afforded a military funeral with his coffin draped with the Union Flag and his Medals displayed. He was interred in the grounds of his home, within a small cemetery and garden of remembrance that he had established following the deaths of a number of his adopted sons. A member of the Society, Mr Martyn Powell, was in Nepal at the time and was able to attend the funeral. A full obituary appears elsewhere in the journal.

The initial problem was the short term provision of funds. Tom's UK bank accounts were immediately frozen which meant that the flow of funds to the account in Dharan from which withdrawals were

made was interrupted. In order to keep the show on the road a short term loan was made by HQ British Gurkhas Nepal in Kathmandu. Supporters of the orphanage were alerted to this problem and funds from them, including the Society, have kept things going and ensured that the home can continue in the immediate future. The newsletter from Major Bannister tells how the Tom's family are coping without his guiding presence. There are some 26 boys living in the house ranging from 2 to 20 years of age. The house is under the stewardship of Meharman, a hard working and conscientious young man whom Tom had hoped would one day take on the task of running the home. He is helped by his wife, and with a number of other nearby helpers, originally some of Tom's boys and now plus their wives, is continuing the work of the home. However there has been some further sadness as two of the 'old boys' died under tragic circumstances during the summer. One, who had had a shop in the bazaar, moved to Kathmandu and following a depression and minor business worries committed suicide. A second 'old boy' was the victim of stabbing incident in Dharan and died in hospital. These incidents cast a gloom over all those at the home. However it is not all bad news as other boys have prospered and gone to good secure jobs, some overseas and some 'weekly borders', having completed their education, have returned to their families. The good work that Tom started is continuing. If any member of the Society wishes to give some financial support, cheques payable to 'The Tom Hughes Family Trust' should be sent to Major Bannister, Venn Cottage, Woolsery, Bideford, EX39 5RQ.

### **Himal Magazine**

Those members who have lived and/or worked in Nepal since 1989 are likely to be familiar with *Himal* magazine. It started as a 'Himalayan' periodical, concentrating on

Himalayan states and issues and converted into covering the whole of South Asia in 1996. This continued until May 2004 when it ceased publication. I suddenly realised that I had not received my subscription copy and wondered what had happened, especially since I received no reply to an email query. A bookshop in Thamel in February also confirmed publication had ceased but had no other information. The reason given by the editor in the first of the new issues was that it was due to 'the economics of publishing a regional review magazine was not keeping pace with the ideas we were pioneering.' The magazine is now back entitled *Himal Southasian* (sic). The house style uses 'Southasia / Southasian' rather than the more conventional 'South Asia'. I was originally drawn to *Himal* because of its coverage of the Himalayan area but felt that it lost something when it expanded its coverage. However the first of the new issues seems quite impressive with plenty of articles on Nepal and of immediate interest to a 'Nepal watcher'. Members interested in *Himal Southasian* should visit their web site: [www.himalmag.com](http://www.himalmag.com).

### **The Gurkha Memorial Museum – Pokhara**

Major Yambahadur Gurung has sent a report on the development of this museum set up by ex Gurkha servicemen in Nepal. The museum is currently situated about 100 meters below Nepal Rashtra Bank in Pardi in Pokhara close to the famous Phewa Lake. The museum is in a two storey old Nepali house co-located with Hotel Nature Land. There are four galleries. The first one is dedicated to the Infantry Regiments; 2nd Gurkha Rifles, 6th Gurkha Rifles, 7th Gurkha Rifles, 10th Gurkha Rifles and the Royal Gurkha Rifles displaying proudly their uniforms, hats, badges of rank, photographs, books and regimental magazines. There is also a collection of Gurkha Contingent of the Singapore Police

Force (GCSPF) uniforms on display. Next, there are the uniforms, flags and photographs of the Queen's Gurkha Engineers, Queen's Gurkha Signals and the Gurkha Transport Regiment (now re-titled The Queen's Own Gurkha Logistic Regiment). The third gallery has a small collection of medals some of which were presented by old Gurkha soldiers. There are many original campaign medals and the Military Medal. The last gallery is on the first floor and is dedicated to the thirteen Gurkha Victoria Cross winners. Their photographs, taken later in Nepal with individual citations, are displayed. In addition, there are photographs of the two George Cross winners and one of Subedar Nagarkoti who won the Indian Order of Merit (awarded before the VC) on four occasions. The museum is open seven days a week from 10 am to 5 pm. The entrance fee is NCRs 50 for non-Nepalese, NCRs 20 for members of SAARC countries and NCRs 10 for Nepalese.

As the place is temporary and quite crowded when items are displayed, there is a plan to move the museum to a new site just outside the British Camp at Pokhara. Once the land is leased to us by UK MOD, we plan to construct a permanent building to house the Gurkha Memorial Museum. Fund raising is well in hand. The museum is financed by the Gurkha Memorial Trust that was set up in 1994 in Kathmandu. One of its objectives was to build the museum. The museum, previously located in Kathmandu, was moved to Pokhara in August 2001.

*(Members travelling in the Pokhara area may wish to visit and support this venture. Ed.)*

### **The late Mr Robin Needham**

Robin Needham, aged 51, the British head of CARE Nepal since 1998 was tragically killed by the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami. CARE is an American-based charity which was originally founded to help survivors of

World War II. Needham had a home in Thailand and it was whilst there on holiday that he lost his life. He worked very hard, undertaking projects in rural Nepal, in spite of the Maoist insurgency. He was chairman of the Association of International NGOs in Nepal which helped to coordinate the work of over 50 aid agencies there. Although not a member of the Society, a number of members will have known him and met him in Nepal. A report in the *Daily Telegraph* stated that with his experience in Nepal of earth tremors he had realised the significance of tremors that he had felt earlier that day on the beach and died urging others to leave before the waves came.

### **Mrs Tenduff La and the Windamere Hotel – Darjeeling**

A report in the *Darjeeling Mail* recorded the death of Mrs Tenduff La in November 2004 at the age of 99. Mrs Tenduff La was the owner of the Windamere Hotel and was known as 'Mary' to her close friends. She was cremated at the Ghoom monastery. I am sure that quite a few members will have stayed at the Windamere and experienced its unique atmosphere and hospitality.

### **The Oriental Bird Club**

The Club's conservation fund makes small grants for fieldwork for projects in Asia, some of those recently awarded for work in Nepal are listed below:

Conservation awareness camps in Chitwan (*See article elsewhere .Ed*). Similar programmes have been funded for schools in the Madi Khola area and for students living in the Pokhara valley.

A survey of Lesser Adjutant Storks, *Leptoptilus javanicus*, in the Bardia and Kanchanpur area in western Nepal.

A bird survey of the Raja Rani Community forest in Morang, east Nepal.

A survey of vultures in the Royal Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve





Images from 2005 BRINOS ear surgery camps - Rautahat, March 2005

Richard Oliver - photographer - 020 8547 5028



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### The Britain-Nepal Otology Service

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 BOOK REVIEWS
 

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**The Heart of the World: A Journey to the Last Secret Place.** *Ian Baker. Penguin Press, New York, 2004. Pp xxiv + 511. Preface. Introduction by the Dalai Lama. Illus, Maps, Glossary. Notes. Bibliog. Index. Hb. US\$ 27.95. ISBN 1-59420-0*

For almost 50 years, beginning in 1878 with the famous “Pundits” of the Survey of India and followed most notably by Capt FM (‘Eric’) Bailey (later Lt Col FM Bailey, Envoy Extraordinary & Minister Plenipotentiary in Kathmandu 1935 – 38) with Capt Henry Morshead and the plant hunters Frank Kingdon Ward and Lord Cawdor, the British attempted to “discover” the high falls which many thought would explain the descent of the Tsang Po from the highlands of Tibet to the plains of Bengal, where it became the Brahmaputra. However, in 1924 Kingdon Ward and Cawdor returned from their expedition to the area convinced that the high falls did not exist – even though there was a stretch of the river, the “5 mile gap”, which they had not penetrated. The same conclusion was drawn from the explorations of Bailey and Morshead. In 1998 Ian Baker and his companions under the aegis of the American National Geographic Society succeeded in penetrating the “5 mile gap” which confirmed the existence of the 108 foot waterfall it contained, thereby providing an example of how very different motivations can lead to the same goal.

The Tsang Po gorges and its water falls have not only been objects of fascination for the British of the Raj, but also the location in which Tibetans have long sought entry into a spiritual paradisiacal realm or *beyul*: the “Heart of the World” of the title. In their quest, Tibetans made pilgrimages to the area which they call Pemako. There is a sizable body of Tibetan

secret writings on Pemako and it was, initially, his interest in their religious content that led Ian Baker to his five-year long search for the enlightenment to be found there.

Baker, a Tibetan-speaking American, the author of several books on Tibetan religion, has lived in Kathmandu for over twenty years, combining a taste for extreme physical activities with the serious pursuit of the knowledge to be found in Tantric Buddhist practices.

Inspired by his Tibetan mentors as well as by his reading of the secret texts, Baker began in 1993 to travel to Pemako. *The Heart of the World* is a detailed and highly personal story of these journeys using the efforts of the earlier explorers as benchmarks, intertwined with an exposition of Tantric beliefs surrounding the *beyul* and a sympathetic account of the life of the ordinary inhabitants of the Pemako and their intimate relationship with the gods and spirits with whom they share their world. The connection of the gorges with the fictional Shangri-La of *Lost Horizon* is also discussed.

Told in a matter-of-fact conversational tone, which serves to heighten the effect of the harrowing accounts of the dangers and extreme discomforts encountered (continuous rain and furiously aggressive leeches, among others), *The Heart of the World* at times goes into the arcana of Tibetan religion at considerable length. This, however, is necessary to appreciate fully the mass of knowledge required to obtain and hold the trust of the local inhabitants, which lies at the heart of Baker’s eventual success.

In the course of seven journeys over a period of almost five years, Baker was able to reach, and at times exceed, the limits reached by his predecessors. However, the

legendary “5 mile gap” remained outside his grasp. The Tibetans had consistently denied any knowledge of the route to the gap. In 1998, by which time Baker had become accepted as a *nanpa*, or Buddhist insider, a local hunter voluntarily offered to show Baker a way to the gap, which had long been used by hunters to follow migrating *takin* – a species of Himalayan goat-antelope.

With this breakthrough, albeit with some trepidation, as he feared the emphasis would be on the physical rather than the spiritual aspects of the endeavour, Baker secured the sponsorship of The National Geographic Society, which provided funds and a cameraman. The final push through the gap proved to be a race with a Chinese government expedition – which Baker won.

The future of the Tsang Po gorges remains in doubt. The Chinese have been reported to be considering a dam to produce hydroelectric power as well as developing the tourist potential of the area. What ever the future may hold, Ian Baker has given us a remarkable record of exploration, both physical and spiritual, as well as a perceptive account of part of Tibet that still remains rooted in the traditions of that unique culture.

If, as this reviewer expects, a second, and perhaps, further editions of *The Heart of the World*, are produced, it is hoped that accurate maps, rather than the current artistic ones of the “here be dragons” genre be provided, preferably tracing the routes of all Baker’s journeys, as well as those of the other expeditions. Furthermore, the placing of the captions for all of the illustrations at the very end of the book instead of under each image is extremely annoying as it requires breaking off the narrative in order to find out who or what one is looking at. As there is no apparent logical reason for this arrangement, one can only assume that is the result of a misguided attempt at economy on the part

of the publisher. These faults aside, this work is highly recommended and will undoubtedly become a classic of Tibetan exploration.

RF Rosner

*(Bailey’s travels on the north-eastern frontier of India with Tibet and the area of the Tsang Po are well described in two of his books: ‘China, Tibet, Assam’ (Cape, 1945) and ‘No Passport to Tibet’ (Rupert Hart-Davis, 1957). Also the ‘Life and Death of Henry Morshead’ (Oleander Press, 1982) includes a chapter on their attempt to find the falls. This review is based on one that appeared in ‘Asian Affairs’, the journal of the Royal Society for Asian Affairs. I am grateful to the editor and publishers of that journal for permission to reproduce it here. Ed.)*

**Everest Pioneer – the photographs of Captain John Noel.** By Sandra Noel. Sutton Publishing. Stroud, Glos. 2003. Pp xvi + 176. B&W & Colour plates. Hb. ISBN 0-7509-3278-3. £25.

John Noel, the son of an Army officer, was to become fascinated with the Himalayas and with photography. As a child, born in 1890, he and his brothers had accompanied their parents on tours of duty abroad to India and the Far East. They proved to be good linguists and relished the opportunities of travel and adventure. For a time, Noel went to school in Lausanne, Switzerland, and met Eric Smythe, an accomplished climber. The two of them made many unguided ascents of major Alpine peaks. Later Noel went to art school in Florence where he became interested in the then new art form of photography. Thus he had an early grounding in the skills and knowledge needed for his part in events which would play a significant part in his life. He followed his father into the Army and after Sandhurst was commissioned into the East Yorkshire Regiment in 1908. His choice of

regiment was founded entirely on the fact that they were then in India and this would give him the opportunity to travel in the mountains to the north and learn the languages of the hill tribes. He had already set his mind on the task of finding a route to Everest. Noel spent the next four years in Fyzabad and during this period used all his leaves (at that time four months every year) to recce potential routes through unguarded passes into Tibet. On his third attempt in 1913 he found that the Choten Nyima La at 18500 feet was unguarded. He crossed into Tibet with a group of Sherpas, whose language he had studied. Unfortunately they were eventually caught by the Tibetan authorities and forced to leave. He calculated that he had got to within forty miles of Everest and the return to Fyzabad took six weeks. Being absent without leave and entering a closed country was not formally approved although it seems that his CO was not without some sympathy for this adventurous young officer. Nevertheless there was a distinct possibility of court martial. Noel was due for home leave after his first five years in India and left for England in late 1913 for a one year inter-tour leave. World War I intervened before he could return to India. He was posted to the Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry. He survived the war, not without incident, serving on the Western front and in Persia in 1918. In 1919 he with another officer were sent to map the southern shores of the Caspian Sea. Whilst undertaking that mission he made a film of the caviar industry. On return to England he was posted to the Small Arms School at Hythe in Kent. This gave him the opportunity to meet the hierarchy of the Royal Geographical Society whose president at that time was Sir Francis Younghusband. In 1919 Noel had presented a paper to the RGS on his pre-war explorations in Tibet and Younghusband was keen to launch an

attempt upon Everest. To this end Sir Charles Bell, the Political Officer for Tibetan Affairs and Resident in Sikkim, went to Lhasa and obtained permission for an expedition to Everest. Plans were made and it was at this time Noel met Dr Alexander Kellas who had studied the effect of altitude on humans and had himself been to remote areas of the Himalayas using Sherpas on his climbs. (*See the 2003 edition of the journal p17 et seq. Ed.*) Noel was not granted leave for the 1921 attempt. On the return of this expedition plans were set in train for 1922. Noel resigned his commission to ensure that he would at last be able to take part. The book then concentrates on his part in both the 1922 expedition and that in 1924 when Mallory and Irvine lost their lives. The photographs, many previously unpublished, taken under the most severe weather conditions with early equipment, capture the atmosphere of not only the climbing but also the people and places they encountered. It is hard to understand how such results were achieved with the equipment and clothing used then when compared to those considered necessary today. Some material was developed at very high altitude. The glass plates were hand painted. On the 1924 expedition Noel remained at 22,000 feet for nine and a half days, in a position from where he had a clear view of the summit. After these expeditions Noel continued his work and interest in photography and his skills were used again in World War II working in photographic intelligence. Noel lived on until 1989, the last of the original 'Everest Pioneers'. Sandra Noel, his daughter, has put together a unique and very evocative collection of some of the most compelling and dramatic photographs of the early exploration of Everest. It is a fitting tribute to the work of her father. The book is in the 'medium sized' coffee-table format and has been well produced and presented. It is

more than worthy of a place in library of anyone who has an interest in Everest and its surroundings or in early photography.

*GDB*

*(Sandra Noel lectured to the Society about Captain Noel on 31st January 2006. Ed.)*

**The Kingdom of Lo (Mustang) – An Historical Study.** *By Ramesh K Dhungel. Jigme SP Bista. Kathmandu. 2002. Pp xv + 339. Maps. Colour & B&W plates. Bibliog. Appx. Index. Pb. ISBN 99933-57-93-6.*

Dr Dhungel specialised in Himalayan and South Asian studies, initially studying in Tribhuvan University before obtaining his Ph.D and M.Phil at Columbia University, New York. He is currently a research fellow with the Hodgson Project at SOAS.

This book is the result of a detailed historical study carried out by Dr Ramesh Dhungel into the Mustang area of north-western Nepal. Mustang was largely a remote kingdom in the trans-Himalayan region, known as the 'Kingdom of Lo', inhabited by the local population called 'Lobas'. Today it is an integral part of Nepal although the area is very much Tibetan in all respects of language, religion and culture. Dhungel's initial field work took place in 1982-84 and again in 1995. For a while he lived in the capital of Mustang, working in the Mustang Raja's palace where he was able to read copy and photograph many ancient documents relating to Nepal, Tibet and Mustang itself. Later he visited over a four month period many of the old forts, temples, monasteries, smaller palaces and caves and carried out interviews and examined historical documents and objects. The introductory chapter covers the field work and primary sources and then goes on to outline the physical aspects of climate and vegetation, settlement and the people and their occupations. The main part of the book in the next three chapters deals with

the political and cultural affiliation with Tibet, the emergence of Mustang as a separate kingdom in the 14th and 15th centuries and its subsequent inclusion in Nepal from the 18th century. This is very much an academic work with many detailed references, the result of careful sifting of a host documents in both Tibetan and Nepali.

Through this work he has achieved a continuous narrative of Mustang's history as it has developed through the centuries. Two of the annexes are in Nepali and Tibetan scripts. Nevertheless, although not a light read, it covers the detailed history of Mustang which has been well researched and presented. Anyone with more than a passing interest in Mustang will find much of interest in this book.

*GDB*

*(Dr Dhungel lectured to the Society on 5th October 2004 on this topic. Ed)*

**A Kingdom under Seige.** *By Deepak Thapa. The Printhouse, Kathmandu, 2003. Pp vii + 234. Annex. Bibliog. Index. Pb. ISBN 99955-59-07-6.*

This very balanced book gives an authoritative and comprehensive account of the origins, politics, the personalities and chronology of Nepal's Maoist insurgency. It is essential reading for anyone who wishes to understand how it came about and its impact on Nepal. Whilst this work concludes after the first cease fire of January 2003, it still remains highly relevant, as little has changed in the conduct of the insurgency since that date.

*MG Allen*

**History of Nepal.** *By John Whelpton. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 2005. Pp xxiii + 296. B&W photos. Tables. Maps. Gloss. Bibliog. Index. Hb. £40. Pb. £15.99. ISBN 0-521-80470-1.*

John Whelpton was born in 1950 and

now lives in Hong Kong where he works as a teacher; he is also an historian and a linguist. He taught Nepali at SOAS, London University from where he also gained a PhD in Nepalese history. Between 1972 and 1974 he worked in Nepal as teacher with VSO, subsequently returning there on a number of occasions. He has lectured widely on Nepalese culture and history. He has written a number of books and articles about Nepal including a major work in the *World Bibliographical Series – Volume 38: Nepal*, published in 1990 which he compiled with a team of five other contributors. This work details 917 books on Nepal. *A History of Nepal* provides a very comprehensive coverage of Nepalese history. The bibliography lists some 246 books and articles including the first book ever published in English in London about Nepal in 1811, entitled *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal* ('being the Substance of Observations made during A Mission to that Country in the Year 1793'). This was written by Colonel Kirkpatrick, leader of the East India Company's mission to Kathmandu.

Whelpton's book makes reference to Nepal's beginning seventy million years ago in geological time when the Himalayan mountains were formed. However he makes the point in the introduction that "Nepal as a state emerged in its present form only in the late eighteenth century when the small hill kingdom of Gorkha, some eighty miles west of Kathmandu, brought much of the Himalayan foothills and an adjoining strip of the north Indian plain under its control, and the kingdom's Shah dynasty moved its court to the Kathmandu Valley. From 1846 to 1951, though the Shahs remained on the throne, effective political power was in the hands of the Rana family."

The largest section in the book, just over one hundred pages, covers the period 1951 to 1991, dealing with domestic politics,

foreign relations and attempts to develop the economy. The last forty six pages are devoted to 'Democracy and disillusionment: Nepal since 1991'. In this section the royal tragedy of 1<sup>st</sup> June 2001 is described when Crown Prince Dipendra shot dead HM King Birendra and other members of the royal family before shooting himself. This section also deals with the Maoist guerrilla insurgency up to the present time. Whelpton clearly explains the current problems in Nepal, commenting that, "Nepalese society has to find some way of taming the no-holds-barred struggle for supremacy that operates across the political spectrum".

This work is very well written and organised, providing an excellent one-volume up-to-date history of Nepal in addition to being an extremely good reference book.

RR Jordan

(Bob Jordan, a member of the Society, served in Kathmandu with the British Council 1965-69, see the 2003 Journal. He is himself an author; see book reviews in the 2001 edition of the journal. Ed)

**Dispatches from the People's War in Nepal.** By Li Onesto. Pluto Press, London, 2004.

Pp xvii + 256. Map. Notes. References. Index. Hb. £45. ISBN 0-7453-2341-3. Pb. £14.95. ISBN 0-7453-2340-5.

In 1999, Li Onesto, an American member of the Revolutionary Communist Party, paid her first visit to Nepal. Several of her photographs and several of the accounts that now form chapters of this book, have been posted on various pro-Maoist websites for the past few years.

Although she had never been to Nepal before, she quickly made contact with the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) and became its honoured guest. Its cadres took her through the hills where they were waging their "People's War" against the

king, the government and the foreign imperialists. At every village she and her hosts were greeted by smiling revolutionaries and “cultural shows” were staged for them at regular intervals, usually at the dead of night, and lasting until 3.30a.m. on one occasion.

Onesto recounts all of her experiences in the journalistic present tense and her book reflects a foreigner’s eye view of Nepal that can now be added to the list of other older fantasies. We already have Nepal as the mountaineer’s adventure playground, Nepal as the cannabis-smoking hippie, Nepal as the land of ‘Johnny Gurkha’, Nepal as *ersatz* Tibet. Now we have Nepal as the birthplace of a proletarian revolution that is going to sweep through the world and carry capitalism and imperialism away.

Onesto’s version of Nepal’s history is off-beam (“In 1815, the Nepalese people waged guerrilla warfare against Britain and in many places defeated the British army. But the Nepalese monarchy surrendered to England.....”) and she is vague about its geography and ethnography. But she is over-excited by her experience of the way in which Nepal’s revolutionary masses are prevailing over the reactionaries in their midst. The poor and the marginalised of rural Nepal do indeed suffer from historical injustice, and Onesto rejoices in the fact that they are turning against it. But she does not understand the context of what she is seeing and is all too ready to fit it into a highly simplistic world view in which humans come in only two shapes: revolutionaries or reactionaries. At no point does she consider it odd that several hundred peasant farmers and their families are spending most of the night outside in the freezing cold. Neither does she reflect upon the fact that village-level activists she meets are employing a political vocabulary handed down to them by yet another set of high-caste male politicians.

The most depressing aspect of Onesto’s

account is the approving way in which it reports the “annihilation” of class enemies. In 1999 these will mostly have been young men who joined the Nepal police because this was one of the very few means by which they could support their parents, wives and children who depended upon them. In most cases they were drawn from the same class and ethnic backgrounds as the Maoists who faced them in combat. Onesto has shed many tears for the widows of Maoist martyrs, but no time to consider the fate of those left behind by the Maoists’ victims. She quotes many of the people she talks to verbatim, but they do not sound like Nepalis. They all speak in exactly the same tone – about class enemies, reactionaries and snitches, new democracy, the revolution. And they all say the same thing, with the result that the book becomes repetitive and predictable. Either the People’s war has completely stripped the Nepali language in these areas of its nuance, colour, wit and flavour, or Onesto has simply written up notes taken while listening to an interpreter, in a way that reflects her manner of thought rather than the people’s manner of speech.

So an armchair Maoist from the richest nation on earth finds fuel for her revolutionary fervour in the life and death struggle of a people she of whom she knows very little. One day, someone who understands the political and historical context of these events and empathise with what ordinary people are saying must travel through these hills and write down what they hear. To date this work has been left to a tiny band of courageous journalists, writing in Nepali, who are now under heavy censorship in the aftermath of the coup of 1 February. There is an urgent need for work that explains what is going on in Nepal and offers its people some solutions. This book does neither.

*Michael Hutt*

*(This review appeared in ‘Asian Affairs’,*



*the journal of the Royal Society for Asian Affairs. I am grateful to the editor and publishers of that journal for permission to reproduce it here. Ed.)*

**Himalayan 'People's' War: Nepal's Maoist Rebellion.** Edited by Michael Hutt. Hurst & Co., London. 2004. Pp xi + 322. Map. Appx. Bibliog. Index. Pb. £16.95. ISBN 1-85065-722-X.

This work has its origins in a conference held at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London on 2-3 November 2001. Michael Hutt has put together papers presented at that conference, many of them subsequently updated. Hutt, a member of the Society, is Professor in Nepali at SOAS and is well known for his expertise in Nepali language and culture and has written extensively on his subject. The individual contributions, by a team well qualified in their own fields, cover a wide aspect of the Maoist movement from its inception to the period late 2003. In the introduction Hutt sketches out the historical background and details the events following the *jan andolan* or 'people's movement' of 1990, the subsequent elections, the Royal massacre of 1st June 2001, the early incidents of violence in the Rolpa area, the initial rounds of talks and the declaration of a state of emergency in November 2001 and subsequent government actions. The main parts of this work contain chapters under four main headings; 'The Political Context'; 'The Maoists and the People'; 'Geopolitical and comparative perspectives'; and 'Afterwards', dealing Nepal's political future and life under the Maoists and the army in rural Nepal.

Deepak Thapa, a well-known freelance journalist in Kathmandu, looks back to 1949 when the Communist Party of Nepal was formed in Calcutta, and traces the emergence of radicalism throughout the 1950s to post *jan andolan*. Sudheer

Sharma, another experienced journalist, looks in detail at the Maoist movement and how it operates. He states that: "Prior to 1995, few people were aware that the Communist party of Nepal (Maoist) was one of dozens of communist parties that existed in Nepal. Press releases issued by the Maoist leader Prachanda (a.k.a. Puspa Kamal Dahal) were largely ignored." He maintains that for so long the Government ignored the growing Maoist threat. He describes how the Maoists were able to take control of large areas of the country with little or no opposition, going on to explain how the Maoists set about controlling their areas of influence, analyses the Government's failures and examines the latent dissatisfaction of locals that are subjected to the Maoist regime. Krishna Hachhethu, reader in political science at Tribhuvan University, looks at questions raised by the insurgency; why did the insurgency start in Rolpa and not some other areas that were worse off? He maintains that the forty-point agenda submitted to the Government, days before the armed action started in February 1996, was designed purely for public consumption. He goes on to state that "the Maoist insurgency has its own multiple dynamic, and this includes social, ethnic and economic issues, but is basically an ideological and political offensive against the present political system of the country". Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, Professor in social anthropology at the University of Bielefeld, Germany, looks in detail at the politics and society after 1990; her chapter is headed 'High Expectation, Deep Disappointment'. Here she looks at the reasons why democracy has appeared to fail the electorate.

Saubhagya Shah, an assistant professor of anthropology and sociology at Tribhuvan University, looks at the Maoist insurgency in what he calls 'the shadow of the legacy raj'. He argues that the

insurgency should be seen against the wider geopolitics of the region and can be set against an historical background dating to the effects of the British Raj of the 19th and 20th centuries and the policies continued by India in respect of the Himalayan states after 1947. This whole section of over 30 pages makes for very interesting reading as Shah seeks to see the hand of the Indian Government in its policy towards Nepal and the insurgency. Sara Shneiderman and Mark Turin describe the establishment of the *jan sakar* or 'people's government' in Dolakha over the period 1998 to 2001, during which time they were resident there; both are academics associated with Cornell University. They paint a more simplistic picture of life in Dolakha, appearing to give the Maoists little criticism over their methods in dealing with schools and local culture. This contrasts strongly with the chapter by Judith Pettigrew, a lecturer at the University of Central Lancashire, on her experiences whilst living in remote village called Maurigaun. She writes graphically of how the fear the villagers have of both the Maoists and the security forces impacts on their traditional way of life. She states: "The 'culture of terror' that has developed in Maurigaun can be characterised primarily as a violation of intimate space. Neither the security forces nor the Maoists respect village distinctions between public spaces (paths, water taps, meeting places) and private space."

This book is a serious academic work, and Hutt has brought together a great deal of detailed knowledge of the complexities of the insurgency. Much is written by authors who have had personal experience of living in the affected communities as well as those who have a broader perspective on these events. For those wishing to know how the insurgency started and its subsequent development to late 2003, this book provides an excellent

background and is recommended reading for serious Nepal watchers.

GDB

**Gentleman Hunter.** By Peter Byrne. Safari Press, Inc., Long Beach, California. 2006. A limited edition of 1,000 signed, numbered and slip-cased copies. Pp. xvii+245. B&W Illus. Maps. Acknowledgements, Bibliog. Hb. \$ 65.00. ISBN 1-57157-225-2.

**Shikari Sahib.** By Peter Byrne. Pilgrims Publishing, Kathmandu. 2002. Pp xviii + 335. Maps. Colour & B&W photo. Bibliog. Hb. ICRs 750. ISBN 81-7769-183-X.

In the January 2001 issue of this Journal, I wrote that Peter Byrne's memoir, *Gone are the Days*, could arguably "be the last of the of the first hand accounts....of shooting tigers". Happily, Byrne has proved to me wrong in this regard. *Gentleman Hunter* is the story of Byrne's lifelong admiration for Jim Corbett, the legendary hunter of man-eating tigers and leopards in Kumaon, the district of India bordering on western Nepal. There have been other biographies of Corbett, but none by someone who possessed first-hand knowledge of hunting big cats and of every area in which Corbett lived and hunted. Corbett, born in India in 1875 of parents of Irish descent, was, what was then termed a "Domiciled European", wrote five books recounting his pursuit of man-eaters and of his life among the ordinary people of India – all of which are still in print from the Oxford University Press and are widely available in India. Peter Byrne has spent over forty years in south-western Nepal, first as a professional hunter and latterly as conservationist and author on the wildlife of the region, an area which is separated from Kumaon by the Sarda River. During this time he has retraced Corbett's steps, interviewing people who might have personal or family recollections of Corbett and the depredations of man-eating tigers and

leopards he pursued. Of particular interest was the Champawat man-eater, which began her career in Nepal, from where she was driven into India by a massive drive by the Nepalese, after having killed and eaten 200 people. As he does with Corbett's accounts of his other quarries, Byrne recounts his visits to the same ground as Corbett covered, describing the scene as it appears today and explaining many of Corbett's actions in the light of his own experiences. It is the latter, which gives *Gentleman Hunter* its extraordinary sense of verisimilitude and makes it much more meaningful than just another admiring biography of a servant of the Raj. After India's independence Corbett left for Kenya where he was to die in 1955, three months short of his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. In 1957 the Government of India renamed an existing wildlife preserve as the Corbett National Park. The park has since become a centre of the World Wildlife Fund's tiger preservation operation. Byrne states that in years following Corbett's departure man-eaters have all but disappeared from Kumaon. Being based in Nepal, Byrne escaped the problems, real and anticipated, that caused Corbett and others to leave the land of their birth and upbringing following independence. He has been able to continue his conservation work in the White Grass Plains (Sukla Phanta) of south-western Nepal up to the present day. At the end of *Gentleman Hunter* Byrne brings us up to date on his activities in Nepal and tells of the killing in December 1999 by a tiger of his cook who was bicycling home through the jungle. This leads to a discussion of the difference between a true man-eater and tigers that sometimes, apparently, confuse a human with their normal prey.

A final personal note: In March of 1999, during my last visit to Nepal, I spent ten days with Peter Byrne in the White Grass Plains. On departure I elected to travel to

New Delhi overland, rather than undergo the greater discomfort of the drive to Nepalgunj and the uncertainty of onward flights to Kathmandu and New Delhi. After crossing the border at Banbasa, I noted with a certain frisson of recognition that the Indian entry stamp bore the legend: Champawat, U.P.

R.F. Rosner

(*'Shikari Sahib'* is the Kathmandu/Indian published version of this work by Pilgrims and is available from Pilgrims Book House in Kathmandu. See their website [www.pilgrimsbooks.com](http://www.pilgrimsbooks.com) for availability and latest price. Ed.)

**The Restless Quest. - Britain and Nepal on collision course and the start of the British-Gurkha connection in 1746 – 1815.** By JP Cross. Koselee Books, Kathmandu. 2004. Pp ix + 430. Maps. Gloss. Notes. Hb. NCRs 850. US\$25. ISBN 99946-50-26-2

The new book by John Cross is an impressive historical novel of no mean size, some four hundred and fifty pages in all. The background is the sweep of history over the seventy years which saw the Honourable East India Company extend its sway inexorably westwards from Calcutta. Parallel with this was the seemingly unstoppable advance of the burgeoning new Kingdom of Nepal, leading inevitably to a collision of interests with the British. The historical background, meticulously researched by the author in his mountain retreat, is supported by some sixty reference notes throughout. Woven into recorded history is the colourful and sometimes earthy narrative of the adventurous life of a Gurkha boy called Chegu Dura, born on a dark night of ill-omen in a remote hill-village, who nevertheless, changing his name, goes on to become the great national hero Bhakti Thapa. He is killed in his last battle leading the Gorkha Army, revered by his men and

honoured in death by his adversary in battle, General Ochterlony. This, the start of the Anglo-Nepalese War of 1815, is only briefly recorded. The bulk of the book sees Chegu, aka Bhakti Thapa, grow up in medieval Nepal and venture forth to the Valley of Kathmandu and the plains below, to lead the tumultuous and dangerous life decreed by destiny and recorded in folklore. There is a list of sixty-seven principal characters in the prologue. We meet his extended family, and with him confer with Rajahs and at other times to be dismissed as an uneducated native. He lives and wears the garments of Capuchin missionaries and later is recruited to serve with the Company's army. Soon he can speak French and English, becoming a protégé of Clive of India, guiding and spying for the English but then plotting against them as his homeland of the

mountains is threatened. Meanwhile everyday life in the hills, ruled by ancient tradition and superstitions, is brought to life by the author in his own inimical style. We leave Bhakti Thapa as, approaching old age, he is summoned from retirement for the impending war with the British. He leads his men to his final battle, to a place in history, and folklore.

John Cross's book is the stuff of folklore, described by himself as a collective 'grey-beard memory of stories'. One can only admire the tremendous amount of research and effort he has done. His reward will be a rekindling of interest in this neglected and unsung period of history, played out on the borders of the Raj and the land of the Gurkhas.

*JM Evans*

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 OBITUARIES
 

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**Major TJW Allen MC**

Major Tom Allen, a life member of the Society, died on 19th June 2005, aged 87. He was the son of an army officer, Brigadier-General Allen who had served in The Buffs and had had service in Africa and on the North West Frontier. Like many of his generation in those days he followed his father's career and after schooling at Malvern College he passed the examination for the Royal Military College Sandhurst, being granted his commission in 1938. Initially he joined the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry for a period of one year before joining the 1/5th Royal Gurkha Rifles of the Indian Army. His war service took him to Iran and Italy. It was in Italy that he won his Military Cross. His battalion was involved in an attack on the village of Mozzagrogna, north of the River Sangro, on the night of 15 November 1943; at that time he was commanding one of the leading two companies in the assault. The weather conditions were appalling and Tom was wounded in the German counter-attack but continued in command. The second company commander was also wounded so Tom took over the command of both companies as they set up the defence of the areas that they had gained. The following morning Tom recognised the need for urgent re-supply and despite his wounds led the party involved in that work. Subsequently he was wounded twice more before he was finally evacuated. His actions resulted in an immediate award of the MC. In 1947, on partition, he joined the 6th Gurkha Rifles, one of the four Gurkha regiments that were transferred to the British Army. After service in Malaya and Singapore he finally retired from the Army in 1951. His

service with the Gurkhas had kindled a strong interest in Nepal and her people. He was active in efforts to improve the life of people in the remote villages by funding school, health, water and agricultural projects. He settled back in UK in 1988. Although he never married he adopted a number of Nepali children who became his 'family'.

**Dr William Brown OBE RDI**

Dr William Brown (Bill) died on 16th March 2005 at the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital, aged 76. Bill, the husband of Mrs Celia Brown, was well known to many members, and had been ill for some time. He was strong supporter of the Society through the help and assistance that he gave Celia during her long tenure as secretary of the Society. For a time also the Society's journal was put together by his office.

This included compiling and collating the articles and the advertisers' artwork and completion of the design and layout before being sent onto the printers, thus saving the costs of this work. Bill was a highly skilled and experienced engineer and bridge designer, probably the foremost such designer. He played major parts in the design of some of the most famous bridges throughout the world. After school he studied engineering at Southampton University and Imperial College London, joining the well known firm of Freeman Fox in 1956. He became a partner in the firm in 1970 until 1985 when he established his own engineering design partnership – Brown Beech Associates. His first bridge was that spanning the Volta River in Ghana in 1956. In his early projects at Freeman Fox he worked as the deputy to the lead

designer, Sir Gilbert Roberts. He was involved with the design of the Forth Road Bridge, and he was the principal designer of the Severn Bridge which both had, for those days, what were described as 'adventurously long spans.' He was also the principal designer for their next project, the Humber Bridge, at which stage Sir Gilbert retired. Bill was the principal designer and engineer for the two Bosphorous Bridges. This led to great admiration for his work by the Turkish government since the cost of the first bridge was recovered in two years, rather than the predicted twenty. He was also the designer for the elegant Erskine Bridge over the river Clyde. As a designer Bill was keen to push technology to its limits, attempting to design and build ever more elegant and longer bridges. This philosophy has risks and at Freeman Fox this was shown by collapses of box-girder bridges at Milford Haven and at Yarra in Australia, the latter subsequently found to be a construction fault. However Bill was undeterred and with his deep knowledge of steel and its properties and manufacture continued to work on innovative designs for longer and more advanced bridges. For bridges in Denmark he designed and patented a new system for spinning aerial cables which cut the cost of making suspension cables for bridges linking the islands of Zeeland and Sprogø. His other work included the design of mountings for the Herschel telescope in the Canary Islands, a method known as the welded-boom concept that permitted modern slender cranes to carry large loads, the design of the swing bridge in Hull and the twin-leaf bascule bridge over the Golden Horn. At Brown Beech he used his own wind tunnel to test many designs including those yet to be built. For about thirty years he worked on his concept for a bridge to span the Messina Straits. When

it was agreed to proceed with the final design in the early 1990s he was appointed the lead designer by Stretto di Messina and then spent two and a half years based in Rome. The Italian Government has since given approval for the project to go ahead and construction is due to start in 2006. At the time of his death he was working on proposals for bridges in Hong Kong/China, a link from Java to Bali, and the Gibraltar Straits crossing. Amongst the honours awarded to him were the OBE and the RDI (Royal Designer for Industry). He has left an outstanding legacy of bridge design of huge value for important future projects. The fruits of his labours, some of the most elegant bridges ever designed, will continue to be seen and used for many generations to enjoy.



*(The picture above shows Dr Brown with HRH The Duke of Gloucester visiting the second Bosphorus Bridge during its construction.)*

### **Thomas Cranston Hughes MBE BEM**

Tom Hughes, although not a member of the Society, was well known to many members who served in Dharan in the British Gurkha Cantonment, known locally as 'Ghopa Camp', and by those who, over the years, attended the religious services held in the embassy in Kathmandu or who visited his orphanage in Dharan Bazaar. He died in Dharan following a heart attack on 2nd February 2005 at the age of 62. Thomas Cranston

Hughes was born in Warrington, Lancashire on 30th March 1943, the only son of Thomas and Margaret Hughes. With two Toms in the family, Tom junior was known as Cranston to his family and friends and it was not until many years later, on joining the Army, that he became known as Tom to his colleagues. He grew up in the small village of Rixton, near Warrington, attending the local school until passing his 11-plus examinations and moving on to Grammar school in Manchester. Throughout his teenage years Tom was an avid Scout and church organist. A committed Methodist, he played the organ at Rixton Methodist Chapel from a very early age and the love of the church organ never left him. On leaving school at the age of 16, Tom began work as a trainee accounts clerk in Manchester. Over the next few years he continued to play the church organ and developed his interest in Scouting, becoming an assistant Scout Leader. However, at the age of 18, sensing no great future in the local area he decided to broaden his horizons and join the Army, electing to put his accounts training to some use by joining the Royal Army Pay Corps. On completion of his basic training, Tom served in units in the UK and Berlin before arriving as a young Sergeant in the Pay Office of the British Gurkha Recruiting Depot in Dharan in 1967. At the time there had been concern over the possible fraudulent management of Indian transport invoices and Tom was assigned to sort out the 'muddle'. Due to his painstaking attention to detail and his intrinsic honesty the situation was remedied, saving the British Government many thousands of pounds. For his outstanding efforts, which were over and above his normal workload, Tom was awarded the British Empire Medal. With a very junior British Officer and a

locally employed civilian, Tom arranged a regular Sunday worship for the many Christian nurses and ancillaries in the British Military Hospital. To the reactionary ex-Indian Army command structure in Dharan at that time, such an initiative smacked of pious impertinence from the two lowliest serving members of the Cantonment staff and they were both summoned by their respective masters for an 'interview without coffee'. However, with Tom playing his much beloved pedal organ and the young officer seeking to emulate his lay preaching father, the regular Sunday worship went ahead with a mixture of English and Nepali readings and hymns.

Tom's first project in Dharan was to form the '1st Dharan Scout Troop' for the British children of the Cantonment. However, on widening membership to the children of the many locally employed Nepalese civilians, some of the British parents withdrew their children and Tom was furious! Through the local Nepalese in his Scout Troop, Tom became increasingly aware of the dreadful social conditions of children in nearby Dharan Bazaar, many of whom were disabled, orphaned or otherwise unwanted children living and begging on the streets.

In 1971 Tom announced that he intended leaving the Army to buy a small house in Dharan Bazaar as a home for both himself and some of his orphaned Scouts. Such a move was unprecedented in the British Gurkha Military system and enormous attempts were made to dissuade Tom from his plan. However, he returned to the UK, purchased his discharge and bought an ancient camper van that he packed full of kit and drove overland back to Nepal.

In November 1972, Tom received his first child, Binod, through information received from friends. Binod and his sister

had been abandoned by their widowed mother and the sister had died of malnutrition. *Jiwan Jyoti*, as his home was called, was up and running. Other boys soon followed and before long the home was full to overflowing. Within a short time a second, larger home was purchased and Tom and the younger boys moved in. Two of his elder 'sons' remained in the first home, which was near to the centre of the bazaar, and despite both being quite severely handicapped, they established a thriving cycle repair business. With more land in the new home Tom began a very successful pig rearing unit and he was well known to all serving in the Cantonment as he called at each married quarter daily in his three-wheeled Tempo to collect the swill. For many of Tom's friends and long-term supporters this was their first introduction. By the early 1980's his third and final home was purchased enabling him to take in 'weekly boarders': children who had a living relative but who, because of circumstance, could not afford to care for them.

Throughout the whole of his time in Nepal, Tom continued to play at the monthly Sunday worship and, with the closure of the cantonment in Dharan, at the British Embassy services in Kathmandu. It was after one such Christmas Eve Midnight service in Kathmandu that Tom started back on the 14-hour road trip to Dharan. For company he had one of his 'sons' and his new daughter-in-law; the couple having recently eloped to Kathmandu to get married. Whether through tiredness or just the poor state of the road Tom drove over a cliff edge. The vehicle somersaulted several times and came to rest upside down about 150 feet down a scree slope. Miraculously no-one was injured and all three were able to make their way back up

to the road where they waited until daylight, fearful that the vehicle might catch fire. At dawn they recovered their belongings from the Landrover, which was a total wreck, and 'hitch-hiked' their way back to Dharan. They arrived home shortly before midnight to find all of the other boys waiting with their untouched Christmas meal, not wishing to start until 'Dad' got home. It was, in Tom's words, 'one of the best Christmases I ever had.'

One of Tom's abiding passions was for collecting. His collection of Nepali stamps apparently surpassed even that of His Late Majesty King Birendra, but he gave it up when Nepal began issuing 'first-day' covers in an attempt to gain much needed foreign currency. Tom's collections of razor blade wrappers, air-sickness bags and fruit stickers are legendary, and nothing of interest was ever discarded lest it might be swapped for something to add to one of his collections. Tom was also an enthusiastic crossword compiler and had many published: he was a regular contributor to the *Spectator* and dedicated puzzler magazines.

In 1991, for his service to the children of Nepal, he was awarded the MBE to add to his BEM. Tom was very proud of his Lancashire roots and his determination to do what he considered his moral duty was never influenced by sentimentality or concerns over others' opinions. He was utterly honest, sometimes to a disquieting degree when dealing with the Nepalese authorities, but in so doing he earned the respect of all. He was at pains to pass on this fundamental sense of being straight to his boys and in so doing has raised a generation of honest lads who are of enormous benefit to a developing Nepal. Tom's eldest sons are intent on continuing his work in Dharan.

Tom never married, but leaves a sister,



115 'sons', and numerous grandchildren.

"Until his last message to us all, it was the same...he knew his purpose on earth...and he lived it beautifully ...and I am certain receives his eternal reward in glory. He was a great person; a cherished friend; a spiritual giant"

To accede to the interest generated locally in Nepal, Tom 'lay in' at the entrance to his home in Dharan throughout the morning of Thursday, 10th February to allow his many ex-service and civilian friends in Dharan and the surrounding area the opportunity to pay their last respects. Tom was afforded a military funeral with his coffin draped with the Union Flag and his Medals displayed. He was interred in the grounds of his home, within a small cemetery and garden of remembrance that he had established following the deaths of a number of his adopted sons.

*David Bannister*

*(I am grateful to Major David Bannister, late Queen's Gurkha Signals, for his efforts in compiling this piece. Major Bannister served with Tom in Dharan and remained a strong supporter of his work there. Since Tom's death he continues this interest which is reported upon elsewhere in the journal. Ed)*

### **Mr George Kinnear OBE**

Mr George Kinnear a long term member of the Society, died on 22nd July aged 91. His interest in Nepal and the Gurkhas started as a result of his war service in the Burma Army. George was brought up in Hampshire although he was a Scotsman, his father having been a doctor in Montrose and his mother a native of eastern Scotland. As seems to be the case with the Scots, he was always interested in his Scottish ancestry. He was a chorister at Magdalen College School, Oxford and then went to Epsom College. He passed

the matriculation examination in 1932 and was offered a place at London University; however, he joined the firm of Steel Brothers in London, a well known



import/export company and in 1935 was sent out to their operation in Burma.

Prior to the outbreak of the war he had already joined the Burma equivalent of the Territorial Army, the Burma Auxiliary Force. Initially, in 1939, he was in the Armoured Car Section which had its roots in the Rangoon Light Horse.

Mechanisation had taken place and the Section had been provided with some "ancient Rolls Royce vehicles, still giving 16 miles to the gallon". George has thoughtfully written about his experiences throughout the war, from which much of what I have written has been drawn. The Governor of Burma issued an Ordinance to the effect that no British European male might leave Burma without his permission. The intention was to stop all the young men in Burma returning to Britain to join up to fight the Germans in Europe. The Japanese had yet to enter the war. He was not called to regular service until July 1941 and after initial training found himself on the NW Frontier but on a course with the Indian Army Service Corps. In late 1941 he returned to Rangoon which had already been bombed by the Japanese and was sent join the Burma Frontier Force Reserve Battalion at Pyawbwe. This unit had many different

tribal groups in their ranks, including Gurkhas. George then took part in the long withdrawal from Burma. As the Mechanical Transport Officer, he was concerned with the maintenance of his unit's vehicles. He was sent to the Burmah Oil Co to obtain paint for these vehicles, for which he had to sign! He relates that after the war he received a letter from the War Office asking him to confirm the correctness of the bill that they had received from Burmah Oil! Some things never change! There was considerable confusion as the Burma Army withdrew ever closer to India, initially it was thought that it should remain in Burma, but his was not an option that was sustainable. George drove FM Wavell, the C-in-C India, along with the Commander of the Burma Army, when they visited the concentration area to where Burma Army had withdrawn to assess the situation. The remnants of that force were then transferred to the rear to regroup. It was whilst in Ranchi that the Duke of Gloucester (the present Duke's father) came to visit the troops. Following training and reorganisation, the Burma Regiment was formed from the old Frontier Force, two battalions of which were Gurkha. George was sent to one of these, the 4th Battalion, Burma Regiment. In preparation for the advance to recapture Burma, George's unit travelled across India into Assam, by this time he had risen to the rank of major. The battalion assembled at the airhead, an US-built airstrip which at that time was being guarded by the Mahendra Dal battalion of the Royal Nepalese Army. The night before the 4th Bn Burma Regt flew back to Burma was spent in the mess of their Nepalese comrades. *(It is worth noting that General Kiran SJB Rana, Royal Nepalese Ambassador to Great Britain 1974 to 1979, commanded the Mahendra*

*Dal Battalion at some stage in the Burma campaign. George does not say who the CO was at that time, the autumn of 1943. General Kiran was the father of the present Royal Nepalese Ambassador, Mr Prabal SJB Rana. Ed.)* On arrival at Putao his unit was soon in action as they started the long slog back towards Rangoon. George fell victim to typhus and was airlifted back to Assam and then Calcutta. After hospital treatment he spent time recovering in Darjeeling, staying at the Planters' Club. He returned to UK for leave after a ten year absence. He returned to India by troopship and after a period in the Civil Affairs Service in Rangoon he was eventually discharged from the army in 1946, once again making the return journey by sea. Having returned to civilian life, he went back to Burma for about another fifteen years. Later, in the 1960s he worked on contract for the FCO and was appointed Head of Chancery in the embassy in Kathmandu, after which he was posted to London, subsequently being awarded the OBE. He and his wife, Flicka, retired to Wiltshire. He joined the Britain – Nepal Society and served on the committee in the late 1970s. He was a strong supporter of the Society, and I remember that he held forthright views which he would often express at the meetings. His wife, Flicka, pre-deceased him in 1995.

GDB

*(I am grateful to Mrs Elisabeth Colquhoun, George's niece, for providing me with the account of his service in World War II. It is interesting to note in this year, the 60th anniversary of the end of WWII, that George's motivation to write his short memoir resulted from his complete lack of knowledge of his uncle's service in both the Boer War and WWI. Apparently his uncle, Lt Col JF Duncan, had been awarded the DSO, the*

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*If your address has not been included here or has changed please accept our apologies and request inclusion in the next journal. Ed.*

## NOTES ON THE BRITAIN-NEPAL SOCIETY

*Patron:* HRH Princess Jotshana Rajya Laxmi Devi Basnyat

*President:* HRH The Duke of Gloucester KG GCVO

The Britain-Nepal Society was founded in 1960 to promote good relations between the peoples of the UK and Nepal. We especially wish to foster friendship between UK citizens with a particular interest in Nepal and Nepalese citizens resident – whether permanently or temporarily – in this country. A much valued feature of the Society is the ease and conviviality with which members of every background and all ages mingle together.

Members are drawn from all walks of life including mountaineers, travellers, teachers, returned volunteers, aid workers, doctors, business people, members of the Diplomatic Service and serving and retired officers of the Brigade of Gurkhas. The bond they all share is an abiding interest in and affection for Nepal and the Nepalese people. Membership is open to those of all ages over 18 and a particular welcome goes to applications from those under 35.

Ordinary members pay a subscription of £15 (husband and wife members £25) per annum. Life membership is a single payment of £300, joint life membership, a payment of £500, and corporate business members £50 and charities £25 per annum. Concessionary rates are available at both ends of the age range.

The annual journal includes a wide range of articles about Nepal and is sent free to all members.

We keep in close touch with the Nepal-Britain Society in Kathmandu, and their members are welcome to attend all the Britain-Nepal Society's functions. However we do not have reciprocal

membership.

Members of the Yeti Association which provides equally for Nepalese residents or those staying in this country are also welcome to attend the Britain-Nepal Society's functions, and can become full members of the Britain-Nepal Society in the usual way. The Yeti is a flourishing organisation and they publish their own attractive journal.

Throughout the year, the Society holds a programme of evening lectures, which are currently held at the Society of Antiquaries, Burlington House, Piccadilly, where members are encouraged to meet each other over a drink beforehand.

The Society holds an Annual Nepali Supper, usually in February and a Summer Outing, which is often shared with the Yeti Association. In the autumn we hold our AGM, which is followed by a curry supper which normally takes place at the Royal Nepalese Embassy. The Society also holds receptions and hospitality for visiting senior Nepalese.

Apart from the Summer Outing, events normally take place in London.

The Committee is actively seeking suggestions from members for ways of expanding and developing the programme.

Those interested in joining the Society should write to the Honorary Membership Secretary:

Mrs Pat Mellor  
3 (c) Gunnersbury Avenue  
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## THE BRITAIN-NEPAL SOCIETY

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