

ancestors. We have populated every corner of the earth, and still we are driven by curiosity and wanderlust, the desire to see what's over the next mountain or around the next corner. These days we mostly satisfy the urge via airplane, cruise ship, and railway; occasionally we set out on our own two feet.

Kathmandu's wonderful bookstores have travel accounts that go back to the 1800s, written by intrepid men and women. Some sought and found healing in their quest for adventure, others broke the barriers of their own culture, like Alexandra David-Neel, who disguised herself as a herder woman to slip unnoticed through the mountains, in the decades before Nepal and Tibet officially opened their doors to tourists.

Truthfully, I am "homesick" for a land that is not mine. I am haunted by the steppes, the solitude, the everlasting

snow and the great blue sky "up there!" The difficult hours, the hunger, the cold, the wind slashing my face, leaving me with enormous, bloody, swollen lips. The camp sites in the snow, sleeping in the frozen mud, none of that counted, those miseries were soon gone and we remained perpetually submerged in a silence, with only the song of the wind in the solitude, almost bare even of plant life, the fabulous chaos of rock, vertiginous peaks and horizons of blinding light. A land that seems to belong to another world, a land of Titans or gods? I remained under its spell.

Alexandra David-Neel



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JUNIOR RANGER PROGRAM: INITIATIVES FOR BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

Dolpa lies in Trans Himalayan zone of Nepal. It is both rich in cultural and biological diversity. At one side the presence of various religions such as Hindu, Buddhist, Bonposim, etc make Dolpa wealthy in culture while in other the presence of more than 33 mammals, 260 birds species, 529 useful plant species, various endangered and threatened species such as Snow leopard (*Panthera uncia*) Rhesus macaque (*Macaca mulatta*), Wood Snipe (Global Threatened Bird Species) make Dolpa a biodiversity hot spot. It is proved by the registration of Phoksundo Lake as a Ramsar site.

Though Dolpa district is rich in biological and cultural diversity, it is alienating its richness due to human pressure. Due to the lack of infrastructures, the conservation activities are not being shored up. The main problem seen is unsustainable harvesting of the medicinal plants such as Yarchagumba (*Ophiocordyceps sinensis*) and Panch aaule. The hunting and poaching have been a great problem for sustaining the endangered species in Dolpa.

As we all know, without education, thought cannot take its height and width. Unless and until one cannot think or doesn't start thinking, the community stays

Blue sheep, main prey of Snow Leopard.

in stagnation, undeveloped and dependent. The Snow Leopard Conservancy (SLC) has taken the most effective initiatives with the junior ranger program in Dolpa for the sustainable protection of biodiversity of the region since 16 May 2000; with peak of effectiveness in conserving the biodiversity at grass root level by student's participation.

The didactic Junior Ranger program, which was unique not only in Dolpa district but also in the whole Nepal, was developed in such a way that each student gets an overview about the environment and its importance's on our life. The curriculum makes each and every student clear about the pollution, population, and basic needs for life, natural resources, corrective measures, and role for environment conservation. Among all, the most important and interesting topic was about Snow leopard. Being a student from the home of the Snow leopard (*Panthera uncia*) I always get fascinated by this charismatic species.

JR program not only emphasizes the problem of identification but also focuses on the research and solution for the problem with the direct participation of the student. The activities of the junior ranger program always focus on the overall development of the students. This program is successful in providing ample details about natural resources, flora and fauna and their conservation to the student from their school life. This JR program is gaining popularity in the Dolpa region because of its remarkable contribution on the conservation of flora and fauna of its region.



Trap made by hunters to kill blue sheep. Killing of blue sheep reduce the snow leopard's population. By implementation of Junior ranger program, people are more aware and now this sort of trap are seen in very low number.

Because of this program, students interested in natural resources are trying to find their future in the environment sector. Likewise today also many students are involving in nature conservation activities. This program has become a turning point for my career. I completed my undergraduate degree in forestry science all because of this program. Also, as I was made aware of the importance of Snow leopards and its prey (JR program), I was encouraged to conduct the research paper on interaction between Snow leopard's prey: Blue sheep and livestock in Shey Phoksundo National Park area.

This program has succeeded in encouraging students on conservation of endangered species like the Snow leopard by teaching about its habitat, life cycle and its prey.



Ex-junior ranger Suraj Upadhaya presenting thesis. I joined forestry science because of motivation by junior ranger program, now President of Youth for Nature Dunai-1-Dolpa, Now Kathmandu, Nepal www.greenearthnepal.blogspot.com www.iofsuraj.blogspot.com

The snow leopard's realm still holds the ancient magic. Safina said,

The mystical view of animals holds a kind of wisdom not because it brings us closer to reality but because it brings us closer to survival.

We know that we have it in our power to ensure the survival of Snow Leopard here on earth. It's the power that Safina defines as the ability to wield the miracle of life's energy.

All we need is the collective will to do it.

The Snow Leopard Conservancy has community-based conservation and education programs in half the snow leopard's range countries. Visit: SnowLeopardConservancy.org to find out how you can help, or to order a copy of Vanishing Tracks, available as conventional or e-book.

Dr. Rodney Jackson has twice been honored for his life's work and conservation leadership by being shortlisted — in 2008 and 2010 — as one of six nominees for the Indianapolis Prize, the world's leading award for animal conservation.

Now for the third time, he has been named as one of 29 finalists picked from across the globe for the 2012 prize.

Jackson is considered one of the world's foremost authorities on snow leopards.



Turning a pest into a prize: Ecotourism values snow leopard conservation in Ladakh

For the past seven years, KarmaQuest Ecotourism and Adventure Travel has teamed up with the Snow Leopard Conservancy turning tourism revenues into reasons to protect the endangered snow leopard and its high altitude home in Ladakh.

Led by an expert wildlife spotter, assisted by trained local scouts and a high-powered telescope, trip members track the cats as they descend from the mountaintops in search of prey. KarmaQuest's Wintertime Quest for the Snow Leopard groups have spotted the cats on three out of three trips, unbeatable odds!



A Snow Leopard seen on 2011 Quest
Photo by Katie Garrod

The 2011 KarmaQuest group observed a female snow leopard for an entire day: "We watched her through a spotting scope and she looked so close we were able to see her eyes and whiskers... everyone was blown away." Sibylle Noras, Founder and Publisher www.snowleopardblog.com, Australia

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