

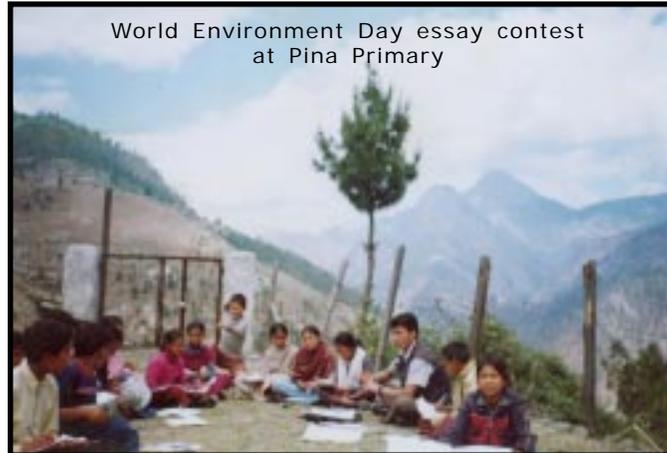
Junior Ranger Education Program Field Visit, Dunai, Nepal, November 2005

By Darla Hillard, Education Director, Snow Leopard Conservancy
And Nagendra Budhathoki, Education Consultant, Junior Ranger Program

The original schedule called for our arrival in Dunai a week earlier, but we were delayed due to a political strike in Kathmandu, office closures, and unexpected complications in securing a special-area trekking permit for Darla to visit Dunai. As a result our field visit coincided with the Tihar holidays, one of Nepal's most important festival times.

Mugu Program Update

With the permit finally secured, we flew from Kathmandu to Nepalgunj, where we met with Gopal Bom, Mugu District Coordinator of the Junior Ranger Program (JRP). In keeping with the program's appreciative, participatory approach,



World Environment Day essay contest at Pina Primary

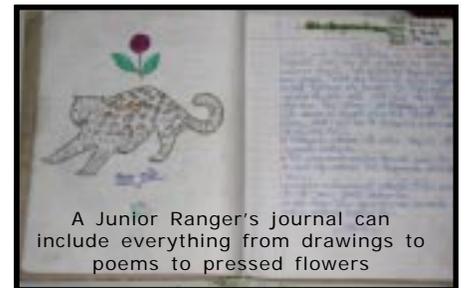
Gopal is especially proud that the JRP students are serious, interested, motivated, and hard-working. At first he'd thought they might not be, since JRP is an extra-curricular activity, with no grades or credit for participating. The kids actually put JRP homework before their other subjects.



JRP Field Trip to Rara Lake

- The teacher's overview needs to be translated into Nepali.

People from the remotest corners of Mugu district have migrated down to the administrative headquarters of Gumgari to give their kids an education in the midst of the political strife. There are 120 kids in 6th grade.



A Junior Ranger's journal can include everything from drawings to poems to pressed flowers

our meetings followed a consistent format that included a review of recent activities; a discussion of results and accomplishments of which participants are especially proud; and any aspects of the program that need improvement.

We reviewed the Education Kit provided earlier, which included picture books, fact sheets, and activities. Gopal said:

- The picture books are especially helpful, but the teachers need more photos of animals.

Forty-three Junior Ranger kids participate in field trips and after-school activities. In the past kids would play hookey on Fridays, as the school week officially ends at noon. But since the JRP has been running (on Friday afternoons), kids are now attending for the whole day.

Indicators of Success

- The JRP has contributed to better school attendance overall.
- Students put JRP homework first.
- Students want the program to be extended beyond the present Class 6 year.

Teachers are also learning; previously they had no formal environmental education experience. This is something Nagendra is proud of too, that the JRP curriculum encourages instructors to learn with the kids.

Gopal also commented on what can be improved:

- The original curriculum is focused on Dolpa, but should be expanded to include Mugu, with a chapter about Rara National Park.
- The JRP is only a one-year curriculum; how to continue kids' involvement?

Visit to Dunai, Lower Dolpa

Girls' Feeder Hostel: The next day we flew from Nepalgunj to Juphal. Binod Dhakal, Dolpa District Coordinator of the JRP, met us for the three-hour walk to Dunai. We had lunch and visited the Girls' Feeder Hostel. Here we were joined by Rabindra Shahi, JRP Assistant Coordinator.

The hostel is run by Pasang Rana, a local of Dolpa, whose main job is teaching at Balmandir Primary School. Pasang is an active, committed teacher who requested that she be allowed to run the JRP in her hostel, even though it is not in itself a school. This government-supported hostel houses some 15 girls attending Saraswati Higher Secondary School.



Binod looks on as the girls and Pasang Rana greet Darla with garlands of marigolds and sacred bundles of juniper.

We were pleased that the Principal of Laligurans Primary School (located up the steep hill above Dunai), along with the principal and a teacher of Saraswati HSS took time to attend this meeting.

The girls were very shy and didn't talk much, but Pasang Rana said that for her the best

thing about JRP was the chance to learn while teaching. She asked for more data, such as information on other Parks and Protected Areas, photographs of animals, and information on medicinal plants and herbs.

After the meeting, we toured the dorms, JRP classroom, and kitchen. We discussed the inadequate funding for the hostel, which receives a government subsidy that barely covers food and the cook's salary. The girls themselves maintain the 40-year-old building as best they can. They need especially to replace the too-short kitchen stove pipe that pumps smoke into their dorm rooms above.

The girls served tea and cookies before heading home for the holidays. Some had a 5-hour walk to reach their villages before dark.

Meeting with JRP teachers: Present were Nagendra, Binod, Rabindra, Darla, and the following eight teachers from schools in and near Dunai: Bishnu Lal Buddha, Laligurans Primary; Gorkha Buddha, Shree Saraswati HSS; Jaya Krishna Hamal, Sundre Sherpa Primary; Pasang Rana, Girls' Feeder Hostel; Tek Nath Rijal, Principal of Bhakti Thapa Primary; Himali Shah, Principal, Balmandir Primary; Nara Hari Sharma, Sundre Sherpa Primary; and Ganga Upadhaya, Principal, Shree Saraswati HSS.

In 2005 there were eighteen participating JRP schools, so ten were unrepresented at this meeting: teachers from schools within a one-two day walk of Dunai had gone back due to our late arrival. Others, whose homes are outside Dolpa District, had left for the Tihar holidays.



Darla, Nagendra, Binod & Rabindra (far left) with the teachers

The discussion hit most of the points made by Gopal Bom and Pasang Rana. They wanted photos of animals. They also requested a snow leopard distribution map (large, laminated, with color).

Indicators of Success

A group of boys found that some adults had captured a Danphe pheasant. As Danphe meat is supposed to be good for health, the adults were about to kill the bird . . .



. . . The boys insisted that since the Danphe is Nepal's national bird, it should be handed over to the authorities so it could be released into Shey-Phoksundo National Park. This incident was reported in WWF's newsletter, specifically citing that the rescuers were members of Dunai's Junior Ranger Program.

More Indicators of Success

Near a house in upper Dunai a small stream pours down from the steep hillside. A leopard cat came down there and tried to catch a chicken. But the cat was so weak – and apparently sick– that it couldn't even run away. One Ex-Junior Ranger and two other kids caught it and took it to the Warden. Unfortunately it died before they found out what was wrong with it.



Dunai lies along the Bheri River as seen below and far left. Dunai Boarding School (far left) sits just below the red monastery, in this photo taken from upstream looking back. At the school, the Junior Rangers took turns talking about their experiences.



The Bhakti Thapa

Primary students are especially good at drawing. Three quarters through the school year these kids had already enthusiastically used up all the pages in their journals.

A boy at Laligurans Primary admitted that he had killed 200 birds before becoming a Junior Ranger. Now he has made a commitment never to kill another bird, or carry a slingshot again.

We asked what the teachers might consider *Indicators of Success* for themselves as teachers. They replied:

- New kids want to be in the program, but we can accommodate only a limited number. This makes the program very special.

- It's a new way of learning and has changed our teaching style.
- We never used to prepare for classes because it was just repetition. Now we create lesson plans.
- Traditionally we attended teacher trainings to get updates on new methods, etc. But we could never get access to any of the new materials. JRP provides good quality materials and stationery, so we can adequately prepare lesson plans and classes.

Visit to Dunai Boarding School

In the afternoon we crossed the River and walked up the hill to meet with the Junior Rangers at the Dunai Boarding School. We went quickly through the meeting,

as we were running late, and the students were most anxious to go into the town for "Deusi," singing and dancing to raise money (like trick-or-treat in the US). They would donate part of the money to the JRP.

They were most proud that their new JRP knowledge gives them "back-power" to talk to others, and to stand up to their elders in a confrontation such as the incident with the Danphe, which not only brought them recognition by WWF, but also a prize from Nepal's Department of National Parks & Wildlife Conservation.

There was also a migrating duck that got captured. A policeman standing by asked "why not eat it?" The Junior Rangers explained why, and saved the duck's life.

On March 27, 2005 Junior Rangers Ramesh Roka, Rabin Sharma and Tilak Rokaya of Dunai Boarding School, and Junior Ranger Man Prasad Budha of Saraswati High School rescued a daphe pheasant (Nepal's national bird) that had wandered into Dunai town and handed it over to the District Police Office. Many thanks go to these four brothers for such a remarkable feat in wildlife conservation.

-WWF Publication 2005

Meeting with Ex-Junior Rangers



The kids say, "Once a Junior Ranger, always a Junior Ranger." - Nagendra Budhathoki

Eleven Ex-Junior Rangers attended this meeting, in the midst of their holiday. Half of them have home villages that lie within the habitat of Upper Dolpa's snow leopards. Tsering Lamu (who will be attending the Tribhuvan University Forestry Institute in Pokhara), and Tsewang Gurung have seen snow leopards and they believe that

sightings are increasing. According to Tsering Lamu, depredation is not a huge problem for Phoksundo and Pungmo, as the villages move entirely to the high pastures in summer and guarding is better.

We discussed why they think snow leopard sightings are increasing. They thought possibly because of the ban on hunting since the park

was established, or that populations of prey animals are increasing. We don't have data to prove or disprove either theory.

Comments on the good things about the JRP:

Suraj: *I was able to start a bird-watching club at my university in Pokhara.*

Tsering Lamu: *JRP knowledge relates to other subjects, i.e., population and health.*

Suraj: *JRP is one year, then nothing. We need a follow-up club or something. We need a network to share ideas and take the JRP wherever we go (as a sort of alumni assn.)*

Akhanda: *There are four JRP schools in Dunai, but the kids don't necessarily know each other. We also need a network in Dunai after we finish the one-year program.*

Tsering Lamu: *We need to do more activities – involve as many local people as possible.*

The group agreed that they want to have a "moderator" who would be Park staff, WWF or other community member – not a teacher, as the relationship is different. They committed to initiate the new club by year end.

The best thing about the JRP was getting to know about the local environment, and the exposure to Phoksundo Lake.

- Chand Hamal, Ex-Junior Ranger

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge and thank the CDO Lower Dolpa for strongly supporting environmental education and nature conservation in the region, and likewise the Warden of Shey-Phoksundo National Park. We are most grateful to Angad Hamal for hosting Darla's stay at the Blue Sheep Lodge in Dunai; and to Gangadhar Kandel for his kind hospitality at the Sangam Hotel during layovers in Nepalgunj. Without the assistance of Niraj Shrestha of Himalayan Encounters and his staff we would not have received permission for Darla to travel to Lower Dolpa. We are grateful, too, for the kind and helpful waiver of the agency fee for this service. These generous contributions enable a greater portion of funding to go directly to the schools participating in the Junior Ranger Program.

Darla extends special thanks to Nagendra for joining her on this field visit, and for the extraordinary step of donating his 2004 consulting fee back into the Junior Ranger program.

We especially appreciate the fact that all the Junior Ranger teachers and kids took time from the festive and fun filled Tihar holidays to come to the meetings. Thanks also to Binod and Rabindra for giving time to the visit while rest of Nepal was celebrating, and likewise to Gopal who re-scheduled his Mugu trip numerous times in order to meet us in Nepalgunj.

Please see *Nurturing the Next Generation of Environmental Stewards in the Heart of Nepal's Snow Leopard Country*, in the Education section of the Snow Leopard Conservancy's website for background on the Junior Ranger program and the political situation in Nepal.