The past months have seen great challenges and even greater successes in the conservation world. In this issue of Inside the Himalayas, you will read about WWF joining hands with actor and activist Leonardo DiCaprio to save tigers from the brink of extinction; the historic MoU signed between Nepal and China to protect biodiversity and environment; WWF’s Climate Ambassador Apa Sherpa reaching the Everest Summit for the 20th time with yet another clarion call against Climate Change; and much more.

And all this, because we worked as a Team – a Greater Team of our partners, stakeholders and the diverse Nepali communities we work for.

Together, Team Work will make the Dream Work.

Anil Manandhar
Country Representative
LEAD STORY

REDD Alert!

Pioneering forest carbon initiatives in Nepal

Ugan Manandhar
Senior Programme Officer, Climate Change and Energy

Forests have been identified as an integral factor in reducing global greenhouse gas emissions; however, the ‘how’ and the ‘what’ of forest carbon is still developing, at best. While, global negotiations process under the UNFCCC has yet to decide how the exact mechanisms will come into place post 2012, when the Kyoto Protocol expires – developing countries and local communities are increasingly encouraged to reduce emissions through effective forest management and there is growing international consensus that the protocol’s second phase should include mechanisms that recognise and provide incentives for these REDD initiatives.

REDD or Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation is, in simple words, an effort to make trees worth more standing than cut down by providing developing countries with economic incentives to protect their forests. Yet, it goes beyond forest carbon and incorporates the role of biodiversity conservation as well as livelihoods opportunities recognizing the rights of indigenous people and local communities – thus ensuring socio-economic and environmental safeguards.

WWF Nepal has initiated an Early Action Project to pilot the concept of forest carbon so as to integrate it with the synergy of landscape and species conservation in Nepal. The Terai Arc Landscape (TAL) including the protected areas was identified as the project boundary for creating a sub-national forest carbon baseline for the country. An inventory methodology was developed to kick off the groundwork on accounting forest carbon stock. Stakeholder consultations at national, regional and local level involving local and indigenous communities was also conducted to disseminate information on the significance of REDD.

The entire process includes the participation of local communities as Local Resource Persons (LRPs). One hundred and twenty LRPs from across fourteen districts of the Terai Arc Landscape were trained to conduct the ground truthing work and conduct forest carbon inventory. The LRPs examine carbon pools like trees and shrubs; roots; litter (leaves, twigs) as well as soil from permanent sample plots, to help account their carbon content.

The data obtained from the field are analyzed both with deskwork and in the lab to determine the carbon content. Factors like forest fires, encroachment, land-use change, fuel wood pressure and illegal logging are also taken into account to justify issues like leakage and permanency.

The forest carbon initiatives in Nepal is one of the most advanced inventories done at this level involving local people and enhancing their capacity. This work will ensure in the collection of valuable data, creating standard methodologies and usage of technologies that will go a long way towards establishing REDD mechanisms – eventually benefiting the climate, as well as biodiversity and local livelihoods. ugan.manandhar@wwfnepal.org

Did You Know?

• Deforestation and forest degradation account for nearly 20% of global greenhouse gas emissions, more than the entire global transportation sector
• It is predicted that financial flows for greenhouse gas emission reductions from REDD+ could reach up to US$30 billion a year.

(www.un-redd.org)

The People behind REDD in Nepal

A Personal Experience

My name is Tommaso Mignani and I am an environmental researcher from Italy. As a child, I always dreamt of working for “the Panda”; and this dream finally came true when I joined the WWF Nepal Family as a volunteer intern. On my second day of work for WWF, I joined a field trip in the Terai area to observe the forest carbon inventory work being conducted by WWF.

Establishing a baseline scenario for carbon sequestration is not a simple task; you need to have the technical tools, of course, but these are not enough if the participants lack passion and determination. After being in the field for almost three weeks, I found out that the Local Resource Persons (LRPs) of the districts that I visited – Nawalparasi, Palpa, Rupandehi, Makwanpur, Parsa and Chitwan – all shared something in common: a genuine devotion for this work.

We walked for hours through the forests under the midday sun; performed a thorough and exhausting measurement of trees’ diameter and height, and collection of soil and litter; climbed steep hills in order to reach the precise points pointed out by the GPS; coped with the frustration of not being able to arrive at a specific location, or of having to postpone the research because of bad weather conditions.

Through all these struggles, the smiling and willing attitude of the LRPs was crucial for conducting the research in a friendly and positive environment.

Motivated and determined, LRPs put a lot of effort in accomplishing their tasks. I was glad to see their involvement and their ability to deal with highly technical tools; moreover, I felt a sense of responsibility shared by the LRP, since they felt they owned this project as they own their forests. This is certainly another key feature that emphasizes the relevance of this research.

Most of the times I joined the LRPs for only one of the many sample plots they had to visit; sometimes they had to go from one point to another without returning home, or resting properly. I can only admire their enthusiasm and passion. The participation and involvement of local people in such projects will be crucial for Nepal to succeed in its path of socio-economic development, keeping conservation and the sustainable management of environmental resources as primary targets.
WWF announces Partnership with Leonardo DiCaprio to Save Tigers Now

Washington, USA – Actor and Activist Leonardo DiCaprio has joined forces with WWF (World Wildlife Fund) to save a species on the brink of extinction. With as few as 3,200 tigers left in the wild, WWF and DiCaprio kicked off Save Tigers Now. The campaign begins with an expedition to remote tiger habitats in Asia to document the wild tigers first hand and learn what needs to be done to save them from extinction.

Tiger populations are shrinking fast as the species is threatened by habitat loss and illegal poaching; their skins, bones and other body parts are used in many cultures as medicines, talismans, status symbols and clothing. But tigers can thrive if they have strong protection from poaching and habitat loss and enough prey to eat.

After DiCaprio was briefed by the WWF conservationists about the plight of these majestic animals, they decided to partner on a campaign to help raise awareness about the threats to tigers and raise funds for tiger preservation efforts. In honor of the Chinese Year of the Tiger, an ambitious goal of $20 million has been set with the vision of doubling the tiger population by 2022, the next Year of the Tiger.

“Tigers are endangered and critical to some of the world’s most important ecosystems,” said Leonardo DiCaprio. “Key conservation efforts can save the tiger species from extinction, protect some of the planet’s last wild habitats and help sustain the local communities surrounding them. By protecting this iconic species, we can save so much more.”

DiCaprio is traveling to Asia with WWF experts to see the threats tigers face first-hand. He will participate in anti-poaching patrols, meet with park guards on the frontlines of protecting tigers from international traffickers, and explore the best ways to protect these amazing creatures. The Save Tigers Now (www.SaveTigersNow.org) website will allow supporters to follow DiCaprio’s journey and participate in the effort to save tigers.

Sacred Himalayan sites bring together religious leaders, conservationists

Thimpu, Bhutan – A first-time workshop in Bhutan in May brought together religious leaders, government officials and conservationists to discuss how to better protect sacred natural sites in the region.

In many countries, religion and culture have played a significant role in the preservation of not only cultural riches, but also forests, rivers and in some cases mountains in the form of “sacred natural sites” that are revered by the local communities as abodes of their local deities or gods. These beliefs have directly or indirectly helped in preservation of nature, according to WWF.

WWF and its Living Himalayas Initiative organized the workshop, called “Sacred Natural Sites, Biodiversity Conservation & Climate Change in the Eastern Himalayas” in Bhutan from 17-19 May.

The overall aim of this workshop was to document the sacred natural sites in the Eastern Himalayan region (Bhutan, India & Nepal) and detail their importance to the conservation of the region’s bio-cultural diversity; to engage faith groups further in practical conservation; and to explore the increasing threats and adaptation needs of faith communities in the face of rapidly changing climatic conditions.

Inauguration of Indrawati Project Office

Chautara, Nepal – WWF Nepal in collaboration with The Water and Energy Commission Secretariat (WECS) of the Government of Nepal, have launched the Indrawati Sub Basin Project office at Chautara, aimed at conserving and managing water and related resources of Indrawati, a Sub Basin of the Koshi River. The Project will work towards efficient use of water to build ecological resilience and improve livelihoods of the local people in the face of climate change.

Dr. Ravi Sharma Aryal, Joint Secretary, WECS; Mr. Anil Manandhar, Country Representative, WWF and Mr. Hari Krishna Upadhyaya, Chief District Officer, Sindhupalchok District jointly inaugurated the Office on 15 June. Government authorities, representatives of political parties and local stakeholders of the project area participated in the inauguration function and expressed their commitments to provide necessary support.

This project is the scaling-up of the already ongoing Dudhkoshi Sub Basin Project, which is the first field piloting of National Water Plan 2005 of Nepal.

Earlier this May, WWF Nepal had signed a project agreement with WECS under which, WWF will endeavor to support US$ 3.19 million over a period of five years to undertake activities in the Koshi River Basin. The Indrawati Project falls under this Project Agreement. The project is supported by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and WWF Finland for three years.
Apa Sherpa declared South Asian Goodwill Ambassador for climate change

Apa Sherpa has been a passionate advocate of Climate Change impacts in the Himalayas as part of WWF’s Climate for Life campaign. In May this year, he took his climate crusade to the top of the world yet again by unfurling a Climate Change message as he reached the Everest summit for a record 20th time. The banner carried by Apa Sherpa read “YOU HEARD OUR VOICE, NOW RAISE YOURS – WE CAN STOP CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE HIMALAYAS”.

Last year, during his 19th Everest ascent, Apa had carried another banner to the Summit warning the world of the dangerous impacts of Climate Change in the Himalayas. Following that event, Apa and fellow Climate Ambassador Dawa Steven Sherpa were actively engaged in the Climate for Life Campaign, which led to the Himalayas getting significant attention in the Global Climate Debate.

This year, Apa was also joined in the Campaign by Carina Raiha, who became the first Finnish woman to climb Mt. Everest on 17 May 2010. Carina also took a similar banner to Everest which read: “WE HEARD YOUR VOICE, NOW WE’LL RAISE OURS – WE CAN STOP CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE HIMALAYAS.”

China, Nepal Reach Historic Biodiversity Agreement

Beijing, China – WWF welcomes the historic pledge by China and Nepal to work together to better protect nature in their countries.

On June 3, the two countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding on environment and biodiversity conservation, made between the State Forestry Administration of the People’s Republic of China and the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation of the Government of Nepal.

This is a historic moment for both the countries as their governments have joined hands for the first time to promote cooperation in the field of biodiversity conservation, management of forest resources and protection of wildlife.

WWF Nepal and WWF China, along with TRAFFIC, WWF’s specialized global wildlife trade programme, played a pivotal role in fostering cooperation between the governments of the two countries.

“This cooperation will help towards conserving the natural heritage and benefiting the people in both the countries,” said Anil Manandhar, Country Representative, WWF Nepal, who was present at the function in Beijing, China as part of the Nepali delegation along with Wildlife Trade Manager of WWF Nepal, Diwakar Chapagain.

SFA Deputy Director Ms. Yin Hong, People’s Republic of China and Mr. Yuba Raj Bhusal, Secretary of Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation Government of Nepal signed the MOU in the presence of Honorable Minister Mr. Deepak Bohara, Minister of Forests and Soil Conservation, Government of Nepal.

South Asia Forge Consensus on Wildlife Enforcement Network

Kathmandu, Nepal - Experts from South Asia have laid the foundation for a South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network (SAWEN) as a co-ordinated regional response to combat illegal poaching and trafficking. Seven member countries agreed to the establishment of a secretariat and an outline work programme for the network.

The historic First Meeting of the South Asia Experts Group on Illegal Wildlife Trade was convened in Kathmandu on 19 May with the objective of helping wildlife law enforcement agencies becoming better organized than the criminals themselves. As a major step towards a co-ordinated and collaborative mechanism, the Experts Group agreed that an action-oriented approach under the newly formed SAWEN should be pursued without delay.

The experts from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka agreed the structure, functions and operational parameters for SAWEN, including ideas for developing multi-lateral activities based on strong inter-agency co-operation at the national level.

The Government of Nepal has offered to drive this process further in hosting the network and acting as an interim co-ordinator for the network.

The First Meeting of the South Asia Experts Group on Illegal Wildlife Trade was hosted by the Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation, Govt. of Nepal, and supported by WWF Nepal and TRAFFIC International.
29th April 2010 - It was my seventh day in the Sagarmatha National Park. We were on an important mission to conduct a Blue Sheep habitat suitability assessment for its translocation in the area. After days of hiking in the pristine landscape surrounding Everest, Lalu dai and I had finally reached Phortse, a small and lively village. The earlier night’s snowfall had decorated the valley with its white paint and it looked mesmerizing. The full bloom of rhododendron made the valley even more spectacular. I was really excited - with my camera ready to capture the most exclusive wildlife sightings.

The hills were garnished by the beautiful forests, the best being that of rhododendrons. There were beautiful grasslands, home to several rare and endangered species of the world like the Snow leopard, Common leopard, Musk deer, Himalayan serow and hundreds of beautiful birds. Suddenly as we moved downhill by the stony trail of Phortse, a sudden, shrill call from a Himalayan Tahr completely shocked us. I got to know from Lalu dai that male tahrs produce such alarming calls only when there’s some predator around. Then suddenly Lalu dai shouted “A snow leopard!” But by the time I had turned to look, the animal had disappeared. However, luck was on my side because again another shout from Lalu dai - “Four snow leopards”. But I didn’t spot these elusive animals so easily as snow leopards have fabulous camouflage with their gray, white and yellowish fur and the spotty rosettes.

But my prayers were answered in a while. I spotted a snow leopard walk on the other side of the ridge across the Dudhkoshi river. It climbed a rock and lied on it. Suddenly, I saw three others clinging to her (mother followed by cubs). They all looked like a piece of rock from a distance and weren’t moving at all. Lalu dai remarked with awe, “During my fourteen months search for snow leopards, I never got to see these magnificent creatures; you came for a day in snow leopard land and saw four in a go. Indeed, you are one lucky girl”.

The snow leopard cubs that we saw were almost getting into sub-adulthood and very likely will disperse very soon. This signifies the need of additional food and space to cater to their ecological requirements. We believe that the space may not be a limiting factor, but the food is. Thus it is high time for wildlife managers to focus on replenishing the prey base in Sagarmatha if we are to ensure survival of healthy snow leopard population in the future.

Thanks to the creation of the Sagarmatha National Park, the snow leopard reported to have extirpated 25 years ago, are back, but for how long?

As I stood up from the rock on which we had been sitting for the last one hour, I realized my legs had gone stiff. But it was ok; I could withstand several stiff legs in return for this special hour – feeling very privileged to have been able to spend a few precious moments... in the shadows of the snow leopard.

Sabita Malla
Research Officer, TAL

© WWF Nepal / Sabita Malla

Chitwan, Nepal – Two rhino calves, swept away by the flooded Narayani River in Chitwan, were rescued by a team comprising of WWF Nepal staff, Chitwan National Park Assistant Warden and technicians and veterinarians and NTNC staff.

On the night of 21st June, the two rhino calves were drained by the Narayani River from Dibyapur Island. Villagers found the female rhino calf (approx. 4 months old) entangled on a fallen tree in the flowing river near Laukhani area of Nawalparasi district and brought it to their village. On the same night a male calf (approx. 10-15 days old) was found in Narayani River near Amaltari and was brought to the Park Range post, Amaltari.

The female calf was severely injured with several cuts on her flanks, ears and wounds infested with parasites. The team applied dressing to the wounds and provided the calf with glucose water, and a dose of penicillin to reduce its pains. The male calf was surprisingly in a perfectly healthy condition with no marks of injuries. Both the calves were then loaded on separate vans and were sent to Park HQ in Kasara.

Park Asst. Warden Ganesh Pant informed that both the calves are now fed on powdered milk and are doing well. Park authorities have decided to raise the calves in captivity until they get mature enough to be released into the wild.

© WWF Nepal / Sabita Malla

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Indeed! 17 glorious years since WWF’s inception in Nepal and the team still grows…in numbers…in value…in team spirit! Sharing laughter and tears this team of valued members has been through thick and thin and still looks forward to any challenge that is hurled at them!

The celebration of WWF Anniversary started in 2005 as an HR initiative celebrating this day ‘With the Staff, For the Staff and By the Staff’ especially because our late Country Representative, Dr. Chandra Gurung believed that whatever WWF had managed to grow to was solely because of the effort, time, experience, knowledge and skills of all our human resources. Ever since, we have celebrated each year with different themes like ‘Our Staff Our Pride’ in 2005; ‘Team WWF’ in 2006, when The Orange Piranhas and The Mighty Unicorns were born and we were christened to our respective teams. In 2007, we held a Memorial Anniversary, following the darkest incident that shook us all in September 2006. In 2008, Team WWF was back, followed by last year with the slogan ‘We believe we can fly’.

On 19 May, a function was organized at the WWF Nepal office premises. Past employees of WWF Nepal were also invited to the function. Among the attendees was Zenisha Moktan, Miss Nepal and WWF Young Conservation Ambassador. The prize distribution for the team games was followed by the Mighty Unicorns lifting the WWF Shield this year while the Orange Piranhas expressed their determination to win next year. Bhesh, Bijan, Eliza, Khadga and Trishna enchanted us all by their sweet melodies with Bhawani adding to the milieu with a musical on the guitar. Bhaskar proved to be another ‘Tara’ in the making with his stand-up comedy.

Like past years, the most exciting attraction was the Peer Voting where all staff nominate their colleagues to certain fun categories. This year, there were 9 categories in total. Tara Prasad Gnyawali walked away with the ‘Rib Tickler’ award whereas Neera Shrestha Shrestha Pradhan and Hira Kaji Manandhar shared the ‘Foot in the Mouth’ award. Prashant Singh was awarded the ‘Beating Around the Bush’ title with Hira Kaji Manandhar winning the votes for the ‘New Avatar’.

Ravi Pratap Singh was proclaimed the ‘Facebook Fanatic’ while Bhagwan Lal Shrestha and Prajana Waiba Pradhan shared the title of ‘People’s Person’. Tilak Dhakal swept away the award for the ‘Field Star’ with Prajana Waiba Pradhan being voted as the ‘Best Team Player’. For the first time in the history of Staff Awards, the ‘Employee of the Year’ award was shared by Dr. Rinjan Shrestha and Ravi Pratap Singh.

The entire event was a fun filled one with some more lessons learnt on team spirit. Because in the end, its not about Winning or Losing, or the Orange or the Blue, its about Positive Results, its about Trust and its about our Team –Team WWF!

prajana.pradhan@wwfnepal.org
It was my first ever mountain trek. I still remember how thrilled I was when I agreed to accompany my colleague Ugan (Sr. Program officer, Climate Change program) for the commissioning of the 35 kw Ghunsa microhydro in the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area (KCA). It would be my first visit to a WWF project site and the thought of setting foot into the wilderness of the mountains in peak monsoon season made it all very adventurous. And given that WWF Nepal through many years of dedicated work had brought KCA to fruition as the first community managed area of Nepal, the trek undoubtedly was going to be one of my life’s most significant event. Most importantly, I felt so proud that I was going on this historical mission to lighten the lives of so many people. Today, as I look back and recall the trip, I can only feel proud of how WWF has brought countless positive changes into the lives of rural communities of Nepal.

On 20th June 2008, we took off to Taplejung, the beautiful little town from where our trek began the next day. And honestly, within an hour of our journey, I realized how difficult the trek was going to be. I felt weak, my legs hurt and my determination vanished as I almost lost hope. The days that followed were not at all easy. The monsoon rain hindered our trek all through, but we were determined. Now-and-then, I would be discouraged and shed tears, but Ugan and the nice potters we had would tirelessly try to cheer me up and constantly appreciate my decision to come to Ghunsa. It was not just the challenging topography, but also the hardships of local lives that melted my heart. As we made our way to our field office HQ at Lelep on the second day, we held several interactions with the mother’s group and other locals on WWF funded projects.

The fifth day was rewarding as we finally reached Ghunsa. For me, it was very emotional as I stood there and looked at this awesome place. Walking ahead, I silently paid tribute to our conservation heroes who lost their lives just here the previous September. With relatively cold weather at about 3500 m, I could feel a tinge of altitude sickness, but a nice fire and several cups of hot tea at Tashi’s cosy hotel brought my strength back. I even made friends with Tashi’s 84-year-old grandma who had never known how it would be like having electricity at home. What touched me was the hospitality of the Ghunsa’s, their simple and warm way of welcoming us. The day finally arrived and the microhydro came roaring into life. There were lights everywhere. It was not just the electricity, but the dreams and hopes of Ghunsa’s coming true. For Tashi’s grandma, it was like a miracle, to see broad daylight amidst darkness in 84 years of her life. It was equally exciting for me as I trained the local women on “rice-cooker operation”.

Ghunsa was finally electrified; our mission was accomplished. After several rounds of community discussions, we bid farewell to Ghunsa. I was thrilled at the thought of going home. I had missed my little one so much. But lost with these thoughts, I was unaware what lied ahead. I did not know that the very next day downhill, I would slip off a cliff in Gyabla and fracture my wrist. Thanks to monsoon, the densely growing vegetation obstructed my fall and I was able to hold on to a shrub. While I did not sustain any major injuries besides a swollen wrist, the blow was enough to shatter my strength and kill my self-esteem. Ugan’s timely help made me realize how important it is to have a good team when you travel through difficult terrains. One never knew what lied ahead.

The rest of our journey thankfully continued without any problems. As we flew to Kathmandu, I was happy and sad at the same time. I felt so proud of what WWF had just done to this tiny village up in the mountains. I would never ever forget this trip in my life. My wrist healed after 2 months of plaster, but the memories still linger. As I write this memoir today, tears silently creep into my eyes. It was my encounter with life and I learnt some very great lessons.

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Eliza Sthapit
Programme Development Officer

An Encounter with Life...
Hot off the Press

Proceedings: Launching of Indrawati Sub Basin Project

Pani Prasad Ventures to Raise Climate Change Awareness

STAFF ANNOUNCEMENTS
In the past months we welcomed new staff...
- Shiv Raj Bhatta
  Programme Co-ordinator, TAL
- Nabin Lal Shrestha
  F&A Officer, KRBM

and we bid farewell to...
- Dhan Rai
  Programme Co-ordinator, TAL
- Bandana Yonzon Lepcha
  Senior Officer, HR and Events
- Sanjib Chaudhary
  Communications Officer
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On the Cover:
Grasslands managed by the Community Forest Co-ordination Committee (CFCC) in Khata, on the border of Bardia National Park. The land was previously grazed on, leaving it barren and bereft of life. Through sustainable management, the area has now been regenerated. The committee was established with the help of WWF and allows communities to manage their own forests/grasslands in a sustainable manner. Khata, Bardia National Park Buffer Zone, Western Terai, Nepal.

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For Living Himalayas

WWF’s work in Nepal is part of WWF’s Living Himalayas Initiative which aims to bring the three governments of Nepal, Bhutan and India together to effectively manage and conserve the Eastern Himalayan region for the sake of their exceptional wildlife, breathtaking environment and unique people.

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For Living Himalayas

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