

# International Owl Festival

Owl Conservation Program

Nepal

2-3 March, 2012



विश्व लाटोकोसेरो महोत्सवको  
अवसरमा आयोजित  
“लाटोकोसेरो संरक्षण कार्यक्रम”  
साङ्कोष-५, धादिङ

'Owl Conservation Program' organized on the occasion of  
**'International Owl Festival'**  
Sangkosh-5, Dhading, Nepal

Supported by  
- Houston Nature Center , USA  
- WWF Nepal



Organized by:  
- Ghumaunedanda Bhageruthan Community Forest Users' Group  
Sangkosh, Dhading  
- Friends of Nature, Kathmandu, Nepal  
- Forest and Environment Protection Society, Dhading

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Report submitted to  
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WWF Nepal

By  
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# *Owl Conservation Program, Nepal*

Organized on the occasion of



*Supported by –*



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*Other Partners –*



## Acknowledgement

The first International Owl Festival was celebrated in Nepal with support from many individuals and organizations on 2-3 March 2012. Foremost, we would like to thank the Houston Nature Center, USA and WWF-Nepal for their financial support of the Owl Conservation Program. We are grateful to all those who contributed donations in support of the program, and thank Karla and Hein Bloem, Geraldine Werhahn, Yadav Prasad Ghimirey, Raju Acharya, Prem Raj Neupane and Sajiv Shrestha for their financial support; and WWF Nepal and Bird Conservation Nepal for valuable conservation materials provided. Thanks also to our partners *Forest and Environment Protection Society, Dhading* (FEPS) and *Ghumaunedanda Bhageruthan Community Forest Users' Group*, and friends Bhumiraman Nepal, Ram Lama, Binod Ghimirey, Bidhan Adhikary, and Prahalad Lammichane for their logistic support. We thank Roshan Bhandari and Manoj Shakya Panju for creative face painting sessions, and are most grateful to our chief guest Angelika Appel for her encouragement and successful completion of the festival.



From left to right standing: Ram Lama, Raju Acharya, Bhumiraman Nepal, Angelika Appel, Tul Bahadur Gurung, Prem Neupane, Pralhad Lamichhane. Sitting: Yadav Ghimirey, Roshan Bhandari, Manoj Shakya Panju and Bidhan Adhikary.

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## The venue

The International Owl Festival took place in the Owl Conservation Area of Syaulibazaar, a settlement in Sangkosh Village Development Committee (VDC) of Dhading District. Syaulibazaar is located at 27° 56.781' N / 84° 54.418' E at an altitude of 1193 m, and comprises about 50 households.



A bird' eye view of Syaulibazaar

Most inhabitants of Syaulibazaar belong to the ethnic group of Gurung people. They rely on subsistence agriculture and use accessible land surrounding the settlement for growing crops, grazing their livestock, and collecting fodder and firewood.

Dhading District ranges in altitude from 300 m to 7000 m, and represents a diverse ecological zone including tropical, temperate and upper alpine climates. Since 1978 the Dhading District Forest Office has handed over more than 600 patches of community forest to local people. Community forest is now managed by Community Forest Users' Groups (CFUGs). The households of Syaulibazaar belong to the *Ghumaunedanda Bhageruthan Community Forest Users' Group*.

Till date, no organization focuses on wildlife conservation issues in this district, although the area is well-known for wildlife trafficking including the trading of owls. About 60 owl specimens are either hunted or traded annually. The use of

snare is common, and gun shots are heard at night in the entire district. Children and young people use catapults to kill birds.

The first International Owl Festival was celebrated in Syaulibazaar to initiate conservation awareness in the district. More than 200 people attended the festival including inhabitants of Syaulibazaar and neighboring villages of all ages, representatives of different CFUGs, District Forest Office, Friends of Nature, Forest and Environment Protection Society, and journalists.

### *Reaching Syaulibazaar*

Dhading Besi, the district head quarter is located west of Nepal's capital Kathmandu, and can be reached within 3 hours by public transport. The unpaved road from Dhading Besi to Syaulibazaar is a serpentine mountain road winding uphill. Only four-wheel-drive vehicles are able to pass through the dusty and deeply rutted road, taking about two hours for about 7.5 miles (12 km).



Our vehicle got stuck several times in the dusty and deeply rutted road to Syaulibazaar, although we unpacked our entire luggage.

## The activities

### *Presentation about Owl Conservation*

In the evening of 2<sup>nd</sup> March, Raju Acharya and Binod Ghimirey gave a presentation about owls of Nepal.



The slide show took place on the main street of Syaulibazaar.



Binod Ghimirey explained distinct characteristics of owls and their important role in rodent control.

Most Nepali communities are affected by load shedding schemes. The electricity supply in Syaulibazaar lasted from 7 to 8 PM, which was just about enough to finish the presentation.

## *Bird Watching*

In the early morning of 3<sup>rd</sup> March, a couple of friends of nature went for bird watching.



The children in particular enjoyed looking through the binoculars.



Himalayan Bulbul



Long-tailed Shrike

Apart from bulbuls and shrikes we sighted Common Buzzard, Black Kite, Common Kestrel, Jungle Crow, Common Crow, Black Drongo, Blue Whistling Thrush, Great Tit, Green-backed Tit, Great Barbet, Blue-throated Barbet, Rock Pigeon, Eurasian Tree sparrow, and House Sparrow.



## Exhibition

Later in the morning, we decorated the walls of Syaulibazaar's festival hall with posters and banners about owl conservation.



**Let us stand together to conserve owls !!!**

बनघारमा तथा रस्ताहरूमा चोरी-तन्जु वा चर्म तथा मादक पदार्थहरू



These are some of the posters that informed about the role of owls in ecology, and why they are threatened.



The exhibition attracted visitors of all ages ...



...who immersed in reading the poems and essays on exhibit.

### *Face Painting*

Roshan Bhandari, Manoj Shakya Panju and Ram Lama opened their face painting studio next to Syaullibazaar's festival hall.





Children and youth of Syaulibazaar enjoyed the face painting session.

### ***Cultural Program***

The cultural program of the festival took place in front of Syaulibazaar's festival hall and comprised speeches, plays, performances of local dancing groups and handing over of awards and certificates.



In the afternoon, the people gathered in front of the festival hall, waiting for the cultural program to start.

Top Bahadur Gurung, teacher of *Sangkosh Higher Secondary School*, kindly facilitated the cultural program and introduced the guest speakers to the audience.





Tul Bahadur Gurung, Chairman of the *Ghumaunedanda Bhageruthan Community Forest Users' Group* announced the declaration of the Owl Conservation Area in Syaulibazaar. In this 6 ha sized area the use of catapults and gun shooting is banned.



Girls from Syaulibazaar performed a folkdance to the rhythm of a *madal*, a traditional drum.

Raju Acharya, Country Representative of the *World Owl Trust, UK* briefed the audience about the history of the International Owl Festival. He spoke about the importance of owl conservation and the urgent need to control the illegal hunting and trading of owls in Dhading District.



Dronacharya Simmkhada, Principal of the *Sangkosh Higher Secondary School*, announced the foundation of the *Bird Conservation Bal Club* in his school, in which children can become members.

A resident of a neighboring village presented a song, in which he criticized the negligence of local people and governmental agencies regarding bird conservation.





*Hariyali Bhajan Samuha*, a traditional religious music group from Dhading District, presented a singing and dancing program. Their lyrics are about nature, wildlife and social issues, intended to create awareness for the importance of nature conservation.

In his comic one-act play a boy from Syaulibazaar played the role of a curious village elder asking funny questions about the ongoing International Owl Festival.





Nabin Bandu Pahadi, Secretary of the *Forest and Environment Protection Society, Dhading*, talked about owl conservation in the past, when they were appreciated as protectors of crops and envoys of Laxmi, the Hindu goddess of wealth and prosperity.

Nabraj Lamsal, Deputy Director of *Radio Nepal*, spoke about the role of media in promoting bird conservation activities.



### ***Awards and certificates handed over***

In mid February 2012, *Friends of Nature* together with the *Sangkosh Higher Secondary School* initiated award winning competitions in three local schools. Teachers motivated their students of grades 1-4 to paint birds. Students of grades 5-7 wrote poems about birds, and students of grades 8-10 wrote essays about owls and the role of students in owl conservation. A jury of three teachers decided which students are awarded during the festival for the best paintings, poems and essays.



दोस्रो



प्रथम

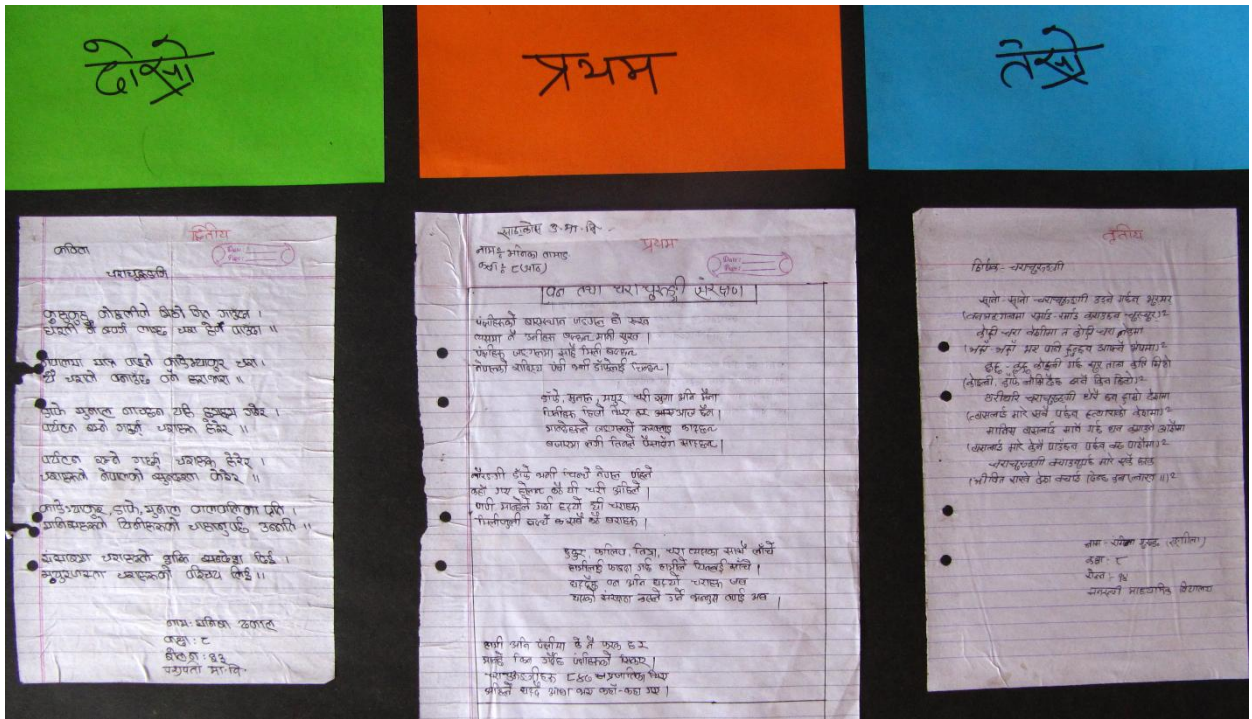


तेश्रो

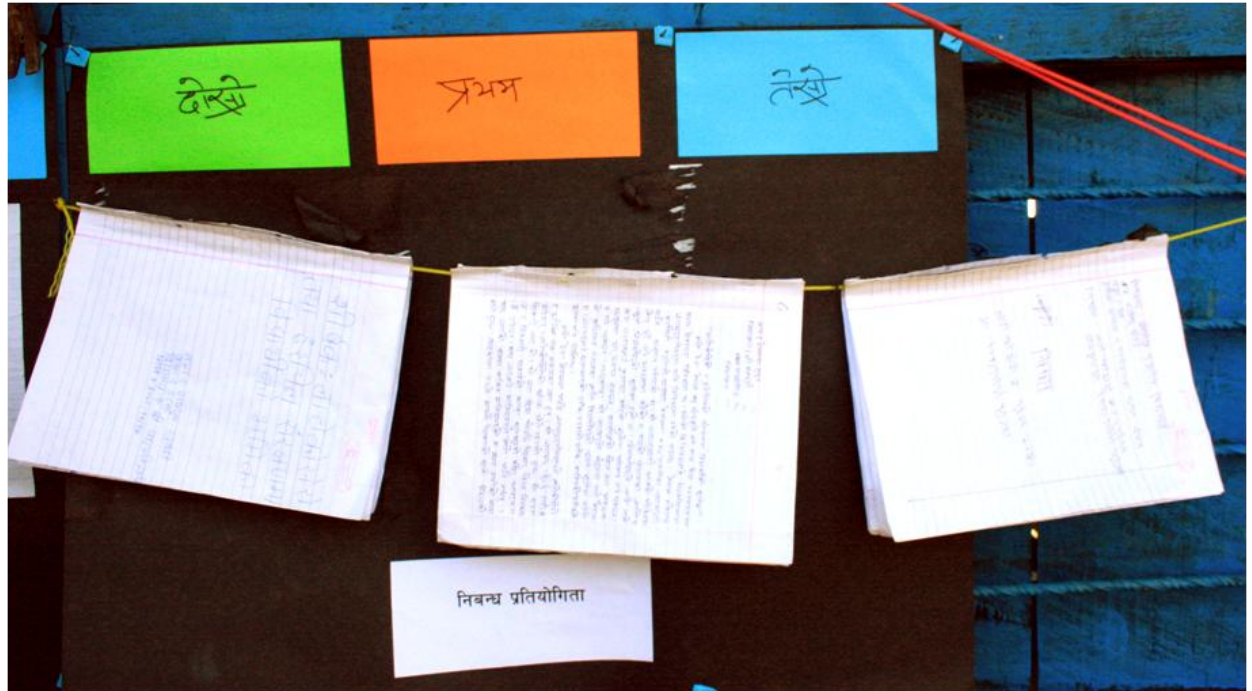
चित्रकला प्रतियोगिता

The children who made these three paintings received awards.





The students who wrote these three poems received awards.



The students who wrote these three essays received awards.



Raju Acharya announced the winners of the competitions. Tul Bahadur Gurung and Ram Lama, Chairman of *Friends of Nature*, handed over awards and prizes to students.

The *Sangkosh Higher Secondary School* received a certificate for the formation of the *Bird Conservation Bal Club*. Latter club received educational materials such as bird books and a notice board.





Chief guest Angelika Appel handed over a Conservation Award to *Ghumaunedanda Bhangeruthan CFUG* represented by Tul Bahadur Gurung for the declaration of the Owl Conservation Area in Syaulibazaar.

Nabraj Lamsal handed over a Conservation Award to *Hariyali Bhajan Samuha* for having organized more than 100 concerts in 16 districts presenting their dance and lyrics about forest and wildlife conservation.



Angelika talked about the importance of conserving our beautiful world for future generations and invited the audience to join her in singing a popular Nepali song.

Bhumiraman Nepal, Chairman of the *Forest and Environment Protection Society, Dhading* (FEPS) concluded the festival by talking about community forestry, the cultural importance of forests and the ecological role of forests as habitat for birds.



## **Media Coverage**

The International Owl Festival was covered by the national news media Kantipur Television, Avenews Channel, Sagarmatha Television, Nepal Television, Dhading Radio, and several local newspapers.

The Caledonian Argus also highlighted the festival online at

<http://hometownargus.com/2012/03/14/houstons-festival-of-owls-creates-an-international-impact-in-nepal/>.