

# 2014



लाटोकोसेरो तथा हुचील संरक्षणमा हातेमालो गरौं !!!

**'Nepal Owl Festival 2014'**  
(7-8 March) Agyeuli-5, Baghkor, Nawalparasi District

**'नेपाल लाटोकोसेरो तथा हुचील उत्सव'**  
२०७० (फाल्गुन २३ र २४), अग्यौली ५, बाघखोर, नवलपरासी जिल्ला

Organizers: Amaltari Buffer Zone Home Stay Agyeuli-5, Nawalparasi; Friends of Nature (FON Nepal) Kathmandu

Supported by: ACCORDEOS Foundation Switzerland

Festival Partners:



- अमलटारी उपभोक्ता समिति, अग्यौली-४
- गुन्द्रही ढकहा सामुदायिक बन, अग्यौली- ५
- स्थानीय युवा क्लबहरू
- स्थानीय महिला तथा पुरुष समूहहरू

## NEPAL OWL FESTIVAL 2014 REPORT

Nepal Owl Festival 2014 was celebrated on March 7-8, 2014 at Agyeuli, Baghkor VDC of Nawalparasi district in order to encourage local people take up owl conservation in the area. The festival was organized on the occasion of 'International Festival of Owls' and included different activities such as owl conservation camps, audio-visual presentation on owl conservation, nature photo walk & bird watching, *Tharu* and *Bote* cultural dance, traditional *bhodi* game, bird conservation *bhajan*, posters display, owl photo and sketch exhibition, owl face painting, conservation awards and many more. It is estimated that during the festival, around 3000 people (including 500 students who attained the owl conservation camps at their school) got the message about owl conservation directly whereas the message reached over a million people through different media reports spreading word about the festival and owl conservation messages.

Report prepared by:

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Friends of Nature, Nepal

## Acknowledgement

We would like to acknowledge the different organizations and individuals whose direct and indirect support made the Nepal Owl Festival 2014 a big success.

First of all we would like to thank our sponsor Accordeos Foundation, Switzerland for their financial support without which such a magnificent celebration would not have been possible. We would like to thank The *Parahaking Project* for cosponsoring the Nature Conservation Award, which is a component of ‘Nepal Owl Festival’. We would also like to thank our co-organizer Amaltari Buffer Zone Homestay Village, Agyeuli-5, Baghkor, Nawalparasi District for their excellent coordination in conducting the festival program smoothly.

Acknowledgement is also due to Amaltari Users’ Committee, Agyeuli-4, Godar, Nawalparasi, Gundrahi Dakaha Community Forest, Agyeuli-5, Nawalparasi, Local youth groups, cultural groups and mother groups, Houston Nature Center, USA, World Owl Trust, UK, The Global Owl Project, USA, Nepal Ornithological Union and authorities of Chitwan National Park for encouraging and supporting our efforts.

We want to thank different individuals who played prominent role in conducting the festival. We are most grateful with Kamal Jung Kunwar, Karla Bloem, Hein Bloem, Geraldine Werhahn, Tony Warburton, David Jhonshon and Ram Lama for their tireless support. We commend Rishi Baral and Som Sharma for their contribution in running conservation camps in schools, Sabita Gurung, Roshan Bhandari, and Manoj Shakya Panju for their contribution in art exhibit and face painting, Mohan Gurung for preparing the owl call device, Om Yadav for conducting nature photo walk and Som GC for conducting bird watching. We appreciate the effort of our volunteers Naresh Kusi, Chiran Pokharel, Sunil Thapa, Hari Sharma, Manoj Ghimire, Keshab Dahal, Prabal Rana, Shivish Bhandari, Sudip Sedain and Biraj Shrestha for their great coordination in efficient preparation and execution of the festival programs.

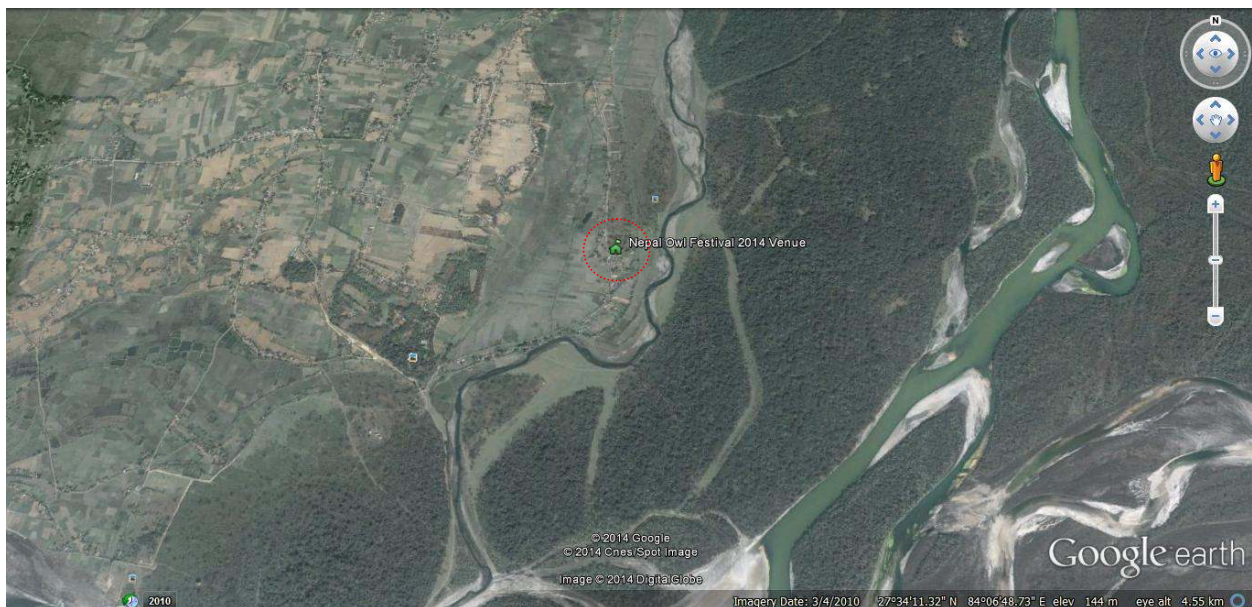


## Overview of the Nepal Owl Festival 2014

Nepal is home to 21 species of owls which is nearly 10 percent of the total owl species found in the world. None of the species are considered globally threatened and only eight species are classified as nationally threatened. However, conservation awareness on owls is low in the country which makes it extremely important for conservationists to make people aware in order to make sure that the anthropogenic threats are reduced. This is why this festival was conceptualized. The owl festival was first celebrated in Dhading district of Nepal in 2012. Following its huge success the trends has been continuing ever since. This is the third consecutive year of celebration of Nepal Owl Festival.

### Site selection

After careful consideration among 5 possible venues our team decided to organize the Nepal Owl Festival 2014 at Amaltari Buffer Zone Homestay Village of Agyeuli-5, Baghkhori VDC, which is home to a small *Tharu* and *Bote* community in the Terai plains of Nawalparasi district of central Nepal. The site was selected for its ideal location- a riverine forest in close proximity for our birding activities and a warm and welcoming community of people highly enthusiastic to learn about conservation and live in harmony with nature. In addition our festival would also promote the local culture and the Home Stay program.



*Google earth's satellite image displaying the festival location Amaltari Buffer Zone Homestay Village (indicated by red circle)*

***How to get there***

The site is accessible through public and private transportation. It is located 167 km from Kathmandu and is approximately a 6 hours drive. You can travel there directly on a microbus from Kathmandu-Amaltari/Gochada or alternatively you can take a public bus or microbus from Kathmandu-Narayanghat-Danda (160km). From there you can take a Jeep or a microbus to Amaltari/Gochada- (7 km).



***Amaltari Buffer Zone Homestay Village***

The **Tharu** people are an ethnic group indigenous to the Terai, the southern foothills of the Himalayas in Nepal and India. As of 2011, the Tharu comprise 6.6% of the total population of Nepal. The Tharu people themselves say that they are a people of the forest. In Chitwan, they have lived in the forests for hundreds of years practicing a short fallow shifting cultivation. They planted rice, mustard, corn and lentils, but also collected forest products such as wild fruits, vegetables, medicinal plants and materials to build their houses; hunted deer, rabbit and wild boar, and went fishing in the rivers and oxbow lakes. The most striking aspects of their environment are the decorated rice containers, colorfully painted verandahs and outer walls of their homes using only available materials like clay, mud, dung and grass.

(Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tharu\\_people](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tharu_people))

**Bote** is a marginalized ethnic group of Nepal. They have two sub division between them "*Pakho Bote*" and "*Paani Bote*". There is an interesting story in the coinage of the name; *pakho* means land in Nepali whereas *paani* means water. There were two *Bote* brothers in an ancient time. They had a dispute over where to settle for their occupation. So they separated from each other and one moved towards the land and became known as *Pakho Bote* and the other moved towards riverside called *Paani Bote*. *Pakho Bote* are engaged in animal husbandry and farming whereas *Pani Bote* are engaged in boating fishing and gold panning.

(Source: <http://botesamaj.blogspot.com/>)

## Preparing for the festival

After site selection, the organizing committee was officially formed, led by Mr. Channu Ram Chaudhary, headmaster of a primary school in Amaltari (Shree Durga Bhawani Primary School).



*Stakeholder meeting in Amaltari*

It was decided that the festival activities would be held on Shree Durga Bhawani Primary School, a centrally located local school in Amaltari. The school volunteered its compound and classrooms to set up the stage and to display exhibits for the festival. Several meetings were held with different stakeholders to gather local support as well as to discuss the proceedings of the festival. Tasks were assigned to different groups to prepare for the big day.

### **In Kathmandu**

FON team brought together a group of volunteers and began preparations in Kathmandu. The team worked on designing and printing certificates, awards & banners, and collecting owl related articles and curios for display. Information regarding the upcoming festival was shared online through our FON facebook group which is a network of nature enthusiasts in Nepal.

### **In Amaltari**

While FON team was doing their part of promoting the festival in Kathmandu, our friends from Amaltari Buffer Zone Homestay Village were actively spreading word of the festival at a local level. The festival was promoted through local media – radio and newspaper, as well as through formal official invitations to other neighboring communities. Students of several local schools were invited to participate in owl themed poem, story, essay, and art competition.



### ***Owl conservation camps for students***

Several FON volunteers arrived at Amaltari a week prior to the festival to conduct owl conservation camps in seven schools targeting around 500 students. The main objective of these camps was to impart owl conservation concepts in the tender minds of the students. During the program, students learned about owls, their status, biology and conservation.



***(Left) Raju Acharya speaking on behalf of the owls during a conservation camp; (Right) volunteers Som Sharma and Rishi Baral conducted several camps in different schools.***

### ***Press conference***

A press conference was held in Amaltari to spread the word of the upcoming owl festival through the media to the public and policy makers in order to increase participation and to spread owl awareness.



***Press conference at Amaltari***

*Our team from Kathmandu arrived at Amaltari in March 5 to make final preparations for the big day.*

## **Festival Activities**

It was decided that the two day festival on March 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> would be celebrated to mark the Nepal Owl Festival 2014. Festival activities were divided between the two days – the inauguration, nature excursion activities (nature walk, bird watching), and public owl conservation camp on the first day, March 7<sup>th</sup>; followed by the main festival events - cultural programs, games, exhibitions and award distribution on the second day, March 8<sup>th</sup>.

### **DAY 1 (March 7)**

*The first day of the festival began with inauguration ceremony followed by nature walk and hiking activities until late afternoon and then a public owl conservation camp in the evening.*

#### ***Inauguration of program***

The festival was officially inaugurated by Geraldine Werhahn, a Swiss wildlife biologist.



### ***Nature Photo walk and Bird Watching***

After the inauguration, wildlife photographer, Om Yadav, and renowned birder, Som G.C. led a group of 40 people for nature photo walk and bird watching.

Armed with binoculars, cameras, and spotting scope the team explored the nearby riverine forest searching for signs of all forms of wildlife. They got the opportunity to observe a rich variety of flora and fauna, and signs of ungulates and wild cats and a variety of birds. Near the end of the trail the enthusiastic team of explorers managed to spot two *Jungle Owlet* (*Glaucidium radiatum*).



A Bird watching competition was also held in which five amateur birders signed up to play! In the end Gyan Rai won by spotting 84 species closely followed by Rishi Baral with 75 species in second place.

### ***Public owl conservation camp***

In the evening, an Owl conservation camp was held aimed at the local people in order to spread the conservation message of owls at the grass root level. A total of 350 people attended the programs. The camp featured an audio-visual presentation on importance of owls, and two documentaries.





## **DAY 2 (March 8)**



*The second day of the festival kicked off with an extremely popular Bhodi game. It was followed by exhibition of different owl related displays and a cultural program.*

### ***Bhodi Game***

*Bhodi* is traditionally played only once a year during a *Tharu* festival. It was a big gesture on their part that the *Tharu* community of Amaltari organized their traditional game to mark the owl festival.



*People enjoying the traditional Bhodi game*

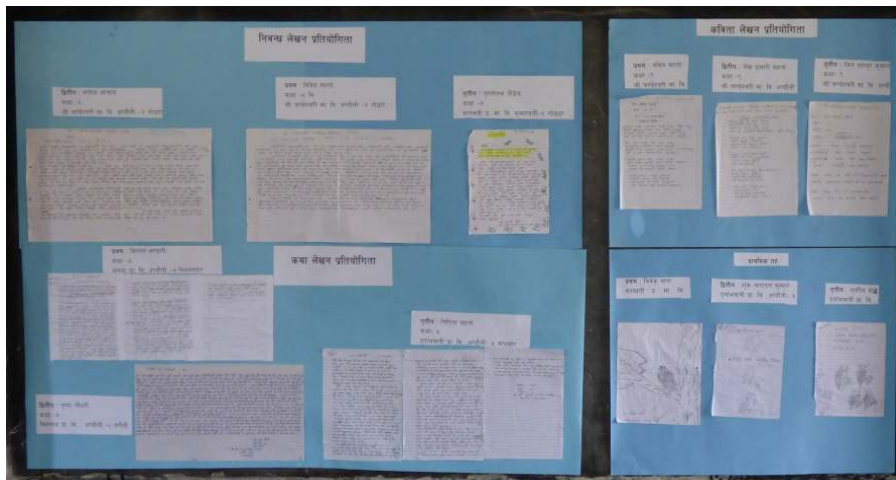
*Bhodi* is played on an open field with two or more competing teams. Each team consists of 10 players. A cluster of 10 uniform wooden rods around 3ft in length is stacked vertically in a small pit in a tight arrangement. A circle of around 1m diameter is drawn around the pit. Each player is given a similar rod. The objective of the game is to remove the marked rods on the pit out of the circle by throwing rods from a marked line around 30ft afar. Each player of a team take their shot turn wise and after each round the attempt to remove the marked rods is repeated until all the rods are out of circle or the 10 minutes are up. Then the team is scored based on their time and degree of success and the rods are rearranged for the next team. There are several rules to be followed during play. Overall the game is a test of strength, stamina and accuracy. One of the most fascinating things about the game is that the endurance testing game is traditionally played on a day of religious fasting.

Participation of the game was free for all; those without their own teams were teamed up randomly so everyone could join in on the fun. A big crowd of local people as well as visitors were gathered to watch the game. The crowd cheered enthusiastically for the 10 participating teams. The game went on for two hours after which the winning teams were declared. A team, named as 'owl team', from organizing committee also took part.

***Exhibition***

**Inter school owl related poem/story/essay and art competition finalists**

A week prior to the festival, we had organized an interschool competition among students of sever local schools in the category of poem, story and essay writing and art competition among primary school students. The submissions were judged and top three in each category selected. The winning poems, stories, essays and art from the interschool competition were put on display.



*Display of winning submissions of the interschool competition*

### Owl sketch exhibition

The owl sketches were one of the highlights of the exhibition and drew in a lot of visitors. They were aimed at generating conservation interest in the local people. Submissions from local school children, Creative Academy from Kathmandu and paintings from students of two *Green Schools* in Chitwan were displayed. The main features were the sketches by accomplished artists Roshan Bhandari and Sabita Gurung.



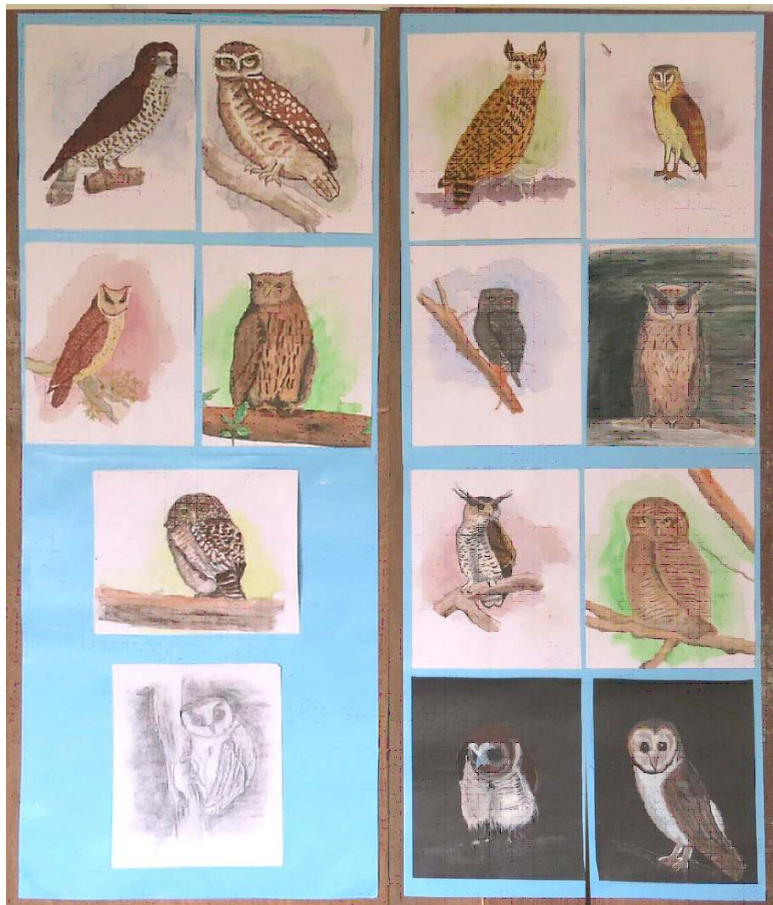
*Sabita Gurung (left) and Roshan Bhandari (right)*



*Sketches by Sabita Gurung, graduate student at Tribhuwan University, currently completing her Masters program in Zoology.*



*Some sketches by Roshan Bhandari, a freelance artist, Visualizer at TBWA/Benchmark Nepal, and art teacher at Sirjana College of Fine Arts, Kathmandu.*



*Art submissions by students of Creative Academy, Kathmandu*

### Owl call playing device exhibition

Another entertaining feature was the Owl Call Playing Device made by Mohan Gurung and Madan Gyawali, students of Pulchowk Engineering College, Kathmandu. The device can play calls of 8 species of owls. A picture illustration of owls accompanied the device so visitors could learn the call of the corresponding species.



*Owl Call Playing Device*

### Owl Curio exhibition

A small exhibit of Owl curios collected by our team and friends from abroad were put on display. It represented the display of image of owl in our modern culture, everyday objects, and handicrafts.





## ***Face Painting***

Owl Face painting has been a popular attraction of our festival ever since the trend started in the first festival in 2012. Armed with their brushes and colors, artists Manoj Shakya Panju and Roshan Bhandari worked diligently spreading the spirit of the festival. It was a source of delight for children and adults alike.



*(Clockwise from top) Manoj Shakya Panju; Roshan Bhandari; and children gathered around their face painting stall*

## ***Owl Mascot***

A big owl mascot was displayed during the festival which was gifted by Rajesh Acharya from USA. The display was highly entertaining and everyone loved it.



*Owl mascot walking around welcoming everyone to join in on the fun!*

### ***High level visits***

Several distinguished people attended the festival to show their support for the cause.



***(Left) Yolanda Kakabadse, President of WWF International observing the exhibition; (Right) Jonathan Haw from South Africa***



## Cultural Program



The cultural program was one of the main events of the festival. Everyone had a great time watching the fascinating cultural display of the *Tharu* and *Bote* community through their song and dance performance.



*People from all walks of life, from near and far came to see the cultural program.*





*Medari Dance, a type of religious dance performed by 30 people with traditional drums and wooden swords.*

*Tharu Stick Dance; this traditional dance involves rhythmic beating of sticks and is usually performed by only males but here it is performed by both males and females*





*Bote Dance is performed by a pair of male and female with a miniature model of wooden boat and oar.*



*Jhumra Dance performed by a group of Tharu women*



*Owl Bhajan Song performance carries conservation messages*



*Audience join in on the fun dancing to the rhythm of Bhajan*

### ***Conservation speech***

We had invited different people working in the field of nature conservation. Representative from Local political parties, government officials and non government officials delivered speeches on the importance of owls and people's role. Mr. Raju Acharya, Country Representative of World Owl Trust and honorary Director of Friends of Nature highlighted the reasons of celebrating Nepal Owl Festival, threats to owls, importance of owls, locals role to conserve it. Several distinguished individuals gave speeches on the importance of owls and nature conservation, and the role of people as a steward to protect their natural environment.



***(From top clockwise) Kamal Jung Kunwar, Chief Warden, Chitwan National Park; Iner Prasad Mahato (teacher at a local college); Raju Acharya, Country Representative, World Owl Trust; Bishnu Prasad Paudyel, Chairman of Antipoaching Committee; and Prem Sankar Mardania Tharu, Chairman of Amaltari Buffer Zone Homestay Village gave conservation speeches.***

## ***Awards and Grants***

Awards and grants were awarded to different individuals and local groups who helped make the festival successful and to those working in the field of nature conservation in local and national level. These awards are a way of acknowledging and encouraging the efforts of individuals and groups who are tirelessly working in conservation sector.

### **Prize to interschool competition and *Bhodi* game winner**

The top three finalists of different categories of the interschool owl poem/story/essay and art competition were awarded with certificates and prizes. Also the winning team of the *Bhodi* game held earlier in the day received certificate and cash prize.



### **Gopal Lama Memorial Conservation Grants**

This research grant was established in memory of our beloved benefactor late Mr. Gopal Lama. Approximately 400 US dollar is provided to students doing research on nature related topics on competitive basis.

The “*Gopal Lama Memorial Conservation Grant 2013*” was awarded to Rishi Baral for research – *Altitudinal diversity of birds in Panchase Protected Forest, Nepal*; and the “*Gopal Lama Memorial Conservation Grant 2014*” was awarded to Shivish Bhandari for his research – *Prey selection by tigers panthera tigris tigris Linnaeus 1758 in Chitwan National Park, Nepal*.



***Rishi Baral (left) and Shivish Bhandari (right) were awarded the Gopal Lama Memorial Conservation Grant 2013 & 2014 to help complete their thesis projects.***

### Local conservation award

Local conservation awards were given to individuals and groups working at regional level for nature conservation. The individuals who received the award were Dhan Bahadur Chaudhary of Pthauli VDC, Nawalparasi for his contribution in wildlife conservation especially in birds; he has outstanding contribution to established countries first vulture restaurant in Pithauli VDC; Inner Prasad Mahato, Advisor (Gundrahi Dhakaha Community Forest, Augeyuli VDC-5), for his contribution in wildlife and bird conservation; Bishnu Adhikary, Antipoaching Control Initiation, Kolhuwa VDC; and Rabi Kanta Acharya, Pokhara-10, for his contribution in owl rescue and release.



*(Left) Dhan Bahadur Chaudhary and (Right) Rabi Kanta Acharya receiving their awards*

Local groups receiving the award were: Amaltari Users Committee, Augeyuli VDC-4, for their contribution in wildlife and forest conservation, and Gundrahi Dhakaha Community Forest, Augeyuli VDC-5 for their contribution in wildlife and forest conservation

### Nature conservation award

FON Nepal has been awarding Nature Conservation Awards since 2012 during the Nepal Owl Festivals, to outstanding individuals working in the field of nature conservation in Nepal. This year three individuals were given the prestigious award: *Som Bahadur G.C., Bhim Prasad Ghimire, and Madhav Prasad Baral.*

Mr. Som Bahadur G.C. is a well known name among birders and conservationists in Nepal. He has traveled 53 districts in Nepal and 27 countries overall as a part of his birding and conservation interests. He has conducted around 200 birding tours including more than 180 tours in Nepal helping to promote bird based eco-tourism in the country. He voluntarily gives presentations on Nepalese birds during all his abroad tours contributing hugely towards bird

tourism in Nepal. His other contribution includes conservation awareness programs in 45 schools, five awareness program through sports, study on declining population of vultures at Shuklaphata Wildlife Reserve, over eight articles in different newsletters and two interviews in environment awareness based television program “Aakhijhyal”. He documented the first record of Greater White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*) in Nepal whereas he was also a member of the team that documented four different species of birds new to Nepal. He is very passionate about birds and wildlife conservation.



*(From left) Bhim Prasad Ghimire Som Bahadur G.C. and Madhav Prasad Baral received the Nature Conservation Award 2014.*

Mr. Bhim Prasad Ghimire (41 years), a journalist is also an avid bird lover. He loves to capture birds in his frames and writings. He has traveled more than 15 districts to explore the various issues of wildlife and published more than 25 feature articles in Kantipur, one of the best and prominent national dailies in Nepal. He has also been publishing a lot of stories of wildlife in Kathmandu Post and Nepal Magazine. His writing skill is based on ‘field based explorative journalism’ which results in very simple and story like articles on mammals, herpetofauna and birds, including owls. Mr. Ghimire is interested in traveling, photography and observing and studying various components of biodiversity. He further plans to study and report about the Gangetic Dolphins, Owls, Bats and other small mammals. Currently, he works as an assistant senior sub-editor of Kantipur Publication in Eastern Regional Office, Biratnagar, Nepal. His journey in this sector has already reached 16 years. He has also been involved in rescuing birds and animals. He has received a course in bird ringing/binding, habitat management, census techniques and also worked as volunteer warden in Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory Trust in 2004-05. He also volunteered in Falsterbo Peninsula Bird Observatory in Sweden in 2008 for two weeks and in D Aosta Bird Society in Italy for five days. In the future too, he wants to work



for birds, wildlife and nature conservation through action, education and awareness programs in Nepal.

Mr. Madhav Prasad Baral (53 years) lives in Masbar, Pokhara and is currently the Assistant District Forest Officer of Kaski district. He has rescued and released wildlife in Kaski including Eurasian eagle owl and Barn owl (A total of 10 individuals). Other wildlife rescued and released includes four leopards, one civet, one barking deer and different species of snakes (30 in total). He has also conducted four bird conservation programs including two for endangered vultures. Conducting different bird watching trips in Pokhara is his other interest. He participated actively during the water bird counts in Pokhara. Furthermore, he was previously affiliated with Center for Biodiversity and Environment Conservation (CBEC) during which he passionately advocated the creation of World Peace Biodiversity Park in Raniban, Pokhara which has already been endorsed by the Government of Nepal. It has been twenty five years since he has been involved in conservation field through a variety of activities like bird and animal rescues, biodiversity conservation, community forest and natural resource management in various places in Kaski. Besides works mentioned above he has also completed diverse works like preparation of 100 Community Forrest Operational Plans, Documentation of Biodiversity and Indigenous Knowledge, more than 50 trainings on Community Forestry Management and more than 20 Climate Change Awareness Programs. His passion towards conservation beside his regular government service is exemplary and deserves high accolades.

### **Token of Love**

A token of love was presented to Swiss wildlife biologist Geraldine Werhahn for her active support to Friends of Nature, Nepal during the festival and other wildlife conservation activities.



*Geraldine Werhahn receiving the Token of Love*

### **Certificates to volunteers, and individuals who contributed to exhibits**

The volunteers and individuals who contributed in art exhibit, the owl call playing device, and owl documentary; and Shree Durga Bhawani Primary School (where the festival was held) were awarded with certificates of appreciation.

*Finally, festival organizing committee head and headmaster of a Shree Durga Bhawani Primary School), Channu Ram Chaudhary thanked the people of Amaltari and everyone who participated for making Nepal Owl Festival 2014 a success. He urged everyone to continue living in harmony with nature and help conserve owls and other wildlife.*

*With that the festival was officially brought to an end.*



## Nepal Owl festival in media

The Nepal Owl Festival was a huge success and was covered by several national news media through radio, television, newspaper, and online news.



*Raju Acharya giving an interview to BBC Nepali service*

### FM Radio

BBC Nepali Service  
Samarthe FM  
Madhyebindu FM  
Partial live on Times FM  
Vijay FM  
Gorkha FM  
Kalika FM

### National daily

Kantipur (Mid and western region version)  
Nagarik daily (Mid and western region version)  
Republica  
Annapurna Post  
Chitwan Post  
Rajdhani daily

## Television Network

Nepal TV  
News 24  
Local channels

## Online News link (English)

<http://setopati.net/politics/859/>

<http://www.thehimalayantimes.com/fullNews.php?headline=Owl+poaching+rampant+in+Nepal+&NewsID=407620>

[http://www.myrepublica.com/portal/index.php?action=news\\_details&news\\_id=70645](http://www.myrepublica.com/portal/index.php?action=news_details&news_id=70645)

<http://www.newsuk24.com/news/owl-poaching-rampant-in-nepal>

[http://www.winonapost.com/stock/functions/VDG\\_Pub/detail.php?choice=57599&home\\_page=1&archives=](http://www.winonapost.com/stock/functions/VDG_Pub/detail.php?choice=57599&home_page=1&archives=)

## Online News link (Nepali)

<http://setopati.com/samaj/9061/>

<http://www.sambadmedia.com/?p=77955>

<http://www.arghakhanchi.com/index.php?action=news&id=PWNET3lrak0%3D>

<http://www.citizenheadline.com/content/2734.html>

<http://www.rajdhani.com.np/en/component/content/article/39-recent-rews/23989-2014-03-09-00-13-53>

<http://nepal.cri.cn/761/2014/03/06/1s139718.htm>

[http://www.kalikafm.com.np/index.php?pageName=news\\_details&id=23409&catId=10](http://www.kalikafm.com.np/index.php?pageName=news_details&id=23409&catId=10)

<http://bit.ly/1m6lvvp>

[http://echitwanpost.com/chitwan/9176\\_2014\\_03\\_04/](http://echitwanpost.com/chitwan/9176_2014_03_04/)

<http://bit.ly/1tZQ8oR>

<http://www.nepalijapan.com/2014/03/06/96632/>

## Additional Festival Photos













