

## *Namaste from the Board*



If there is one lesson that Nepal has taught us, it's that personal connections make things happen. Over the twelve years since Chandra's passing, CGCT and our sister organization in Nepal, Chandra Gurung Conservation Foundation (CGCF), have grown closer and stronger together. It's not just a bond that evolved from the shared loss of a friend, father, and mentor; it's a symbiotic relationship built upon trust and commitment that is personal and professional. Please read on about what we are together achieving:

- Our flagship Mentorship Program is now in its ninth year. Fourteen mentees have graduated with hands-on experience in "people-oriented biodiversity conservation." CGCT's Wendy King reports on this year's mentees' studies below.
- CGCT and CGCF have just signed an agreement to extend the Mentorship Program for three more years, and to strengthen connections between past and present mentees, international and Nepali mentors through regular exchanges and publications.
- During a visit to Nepal, Wendy Lama met with CGCF Board members to discuss enhancing mentees' participatory research and planning skills before beginning their fieldwork. Please stay tuned.
- Together CGCT and CGCF have taken up a project close to Chandra's heart – in his birthplace Sikles – supporting and empowering women weavers with a new loom and plans for follow-up training in allo product design and marketing. Please read Wendy Lama's article on Sikles, Nepal's home of ecotourism.
- CGCF Executive Director Amanda Manandhar Gurung (Chandra's daughter) and CGCT Board member Steve Powers bring us up to date on the reconstruction of a school in Gorkha District, the epicenter of Nepal's April 2015 earthquake.

## **CGCT Helps Nepal**

After Nepal's devastating earthquakes of 2015, CGCT raised over \$50,000 for relief projects in Nepal. Our friends at the Gurung Society (US) raised money with the goal of rebuilding a school to be named in Chandra Gurung's honor. The stipulation was, however, that the money it raised could only be used for construction costs and not administrative costs.



CGCT contributed to the administrative costs to ensure that the school would be built. And thanks to a herculean effort by CGCF Executive Director Amanda Gurung to maneuver paperwork through the approval process, three years after the earthquake the school rebuilding in Gumda, Gorkha District has started. If all goes well, the school should be completed and turned over to the community by March 2019. Here is a photo of the school construction underway.

After 26 months in a temporary building, Tartong's 37 girl and 28 boy students, ages 3-14, are now in the new school, which is a model in the region. The District Education Office commend-

On a personal note: CGCT congratulates Amanda on her marriage this year and is grateful that her new responsibilities allow her to continue to attend to CGCF matters. Chandra's son, Adhish, is pursuing a Masters' degree in Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Amsterdam in the Netherlands. We wish them both all the best.



CGCT's Wendy Lama returned to Chandra's home village with a group of women trekkers this October. They learned about Chandra's life and legacy at the ACAP Eco-Museum featuring a room dedicated to Chandra and the 24 who lost their lives in the 2006 helicopter crash. CGCT had helped support the museum which displays not only Chandra's noteworthy professional achievements and awards but his favorite Hawaiian shirt (worn in the photo above) as well as family pictures, his hiking boots and memorabilia. Be sure to visit it when in Sikles.

We invite you to share your stories and any photos you may have of Chandra on our [Facebook](#) page. And please connect us with others who knew him. We thank you for being part of the CGCT family and continuing to support our all-volunteer efforts to keep Chandra's visions alive.

We could not do it without you.

Sincerely,  
CGCT Board members: Wendy Lama, Maureen DeCoursey,  
Steve Powers and Wendy King

---

## 2018/19 Mentorship Program Update

The goal for the Chandra Gurung Conservation Trust is to nurture the next generation of Himalayan leaders in conservation and sustainable development. Since 2006, CGCT and our sister organization the Chandra Gurung Conservation Foundation have supported Nepali graduates' field research projects, focusing on people-oriented biodiversity conservation. Your donations have enabled 14 Nepali students to pursue field research and strengthen their commitments to conservation and sustainable development. Please read on about the 2018 mentees' projects.

Ms. Sabita Thapa and Mr. Kushal Shrestha received 2018 CGCF-CGCT Mentorship grants to conduct people-oriented biodiversity conservation field research projects.

Mr. Shrestha's project supported ornithology field research in Gorkha and developed bird biodiversity and conservation workshop curriculae to encourage biodiversity stewardship amongst student members of an eco-club that he created. He studied at the Institute of Forestry in Pokhara. Dr Hum Gurung, former Director of Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN) and Former CGCF Chairperson, and Mr. Jyotendra Thakuri, BCN Senior Program Officer, mentored Kushal through the project.



*A boy from the ecoclub observing birds in foggy environment.*

ed the community for its engagement, efficiency, and resiliency, all of which helped reduce costs. We are delighted to be part of this success story! With help from donors, we hope to continue to help HELP bring latrines, water taps and other WASH components to schools in this region.

## Sikles, the Birthplace of Chandra Gurung and Ecotourism

Returning to Sikles a year after my first visit, my thoughts go often to Chandra: how he'd encouraged his community and so many like it to be proud of their cultural heritage and to take charge of conserving the natural resources upon which their lives and livelihoods depend. His leadership inspired the evolution of people-oriented biodiversity conservation (POBC) in the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) and eventually throughout Nepal and the world.

Chandra Gurung Conservation Trust has adopted POBC as the foundation of its programs. Please continue reading how your support helps uphold Chandra's vision for Sikles as a model village that embraces its past while investing in a future of sustainable development.

Entering Sikles, we walk a flagstone path to the Gurung Cottage guest house. Bushes of bright golden marigolds rim the garden and soon we are greeted by a dozen women bearing garlands of marigolds to adorn our necks. We've arrived during Dasain festival season, when much of Nepal is in a celebratory mood and families return home for an all-important annual blessing.

My friend and colleague Dr. Chandra Prasad Gurung was born and raised in Sikles. His story is well told in Manjushree Thapa's *A Boy from Sikles*.

Throughout his too-short life, he adored returning to Sikles to see his parents and family. He brought electricity, improved water taps, and an awareness of the importance of protecting the environment. He urged the *aama samuwa* (mothers' and women's groups) to take leadership



Kushal Shrestha coordinated with the local Ludi Damgadhe Community Forestry User Group to research the avian fauna in their upper tropical and lower subtropical forests. Avian surveys were conducted along a fixed route in the Community Forest using MacKinnon lists: a quantitative approach to analyzing auditory-visual avian survey data that accounts for differences in effort, observer qualifications and weather. Kushal and his field team recorded a total of 93 species, 73 species during the winter and 69 species in the summer. His fieldwork successfully generated important biodiversity baseline avian data for this area.

The Kathmandu Post featured Kushal Shrestha's project "Three Rare Bird Species Spotted in Ludi Damgadhe, Gorkha." The team observed the White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis*, the Asian Woolley-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus*, and the Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis*, which are globally threatened species; and the endangered Collared Falconet and the Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*. Their extensive field work in the 300 hectare community forest was rewarded with a sighting of Nepal's single endemic bird, the Spiney Babbler *Turdoides nipalensis*.

Kushal coordinated with the principal of Shree Saraswoti Secondary School to form an eco-club with student members from the Ludi Damgadhe Community Forest. The eco-club members were oriented in biodiversity conservation in general, and specifically avian natural history including bird identification and conservation measures, and avi-tourism (or birding tourism, a form of ecotourism). Field trips were organized to give students first-hand experience identifying birds and observing bird behaviors and habitat.

Congratulations to Mr. Kushal Shrestha for his effective biodiversity conservation field work that generated a baseline bird list for the area, and for his educational and organizational impact coordinating and training a diverse group of stakeholders.

The second mentee for 2018 is Ms. Sabita Thapa whose project was "Problems and Prospects of Community Based Biodiversity Conservation." Sabita is finishing her MSc at the Institute of Forestry in Pokhara. Mr. Madhu Chhetri, previously with the National Trust for Nature Conservation and currently a PhD student at the Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences, and Mr. Brot Coburn, special projects director for the American Himalayan Foundation and CGCT Advisor, were her national and international mentors, respectively.



*Ms Sabita Thapa interviewing a Gurung woman at her home.*

Sabita focused her research on Sikles, Chandra Gurung's home village (see other article herein). She applied standard methodologies of random household sampling for interviews, focus groups and questionnaires, as well as for identifying key informants, conducting informal conversations, and processing and managing data.

Sabita describes the social change in Sikles: "...from a village where people kept dogs to assist in hunting to people working together to maintain the environment and support conservation." Sabita concluded that the motivating factor for participating in conservation efforts is that people in Sikles have a strong sense of ownership and responsibility for their environment. (Again, see accompanying article on Chandra's early impact on Sikles).



*Chandra and Amanda Gurung*

roles in lodge management, and helped to put into practice the nascent concept of ecotourism in the early 1990s.

Sikles became ACAP's first designated ecotourism destination. The charming hillside village still warrants that label though few foreign tourists know of it. Domestic tourism has spiked with the extension of a motorable road.

I'd brought twelve women trekkers here through my company KarmaQuest Eco-tourism and Adventure Travel to experience village life at its best. Here, people still comb and weave sheep wool on flagstone patios; weave bamboo baskets and mats for daily use; proudly display their century-old carved wooden windows in their tidy homes; and carry on many of the traditions described in the Sikles Gurung cultural museum, the only such in Nepal.

Yet Sikles is anything but backward. Children receive an excellent primary through high school education and some go on to earn college – even advanced degrees abroad – and return to lead Nepal toward a promising future.



She cites the following as examples of direct community action observed in Sikles: the healthy greenery in the village, the installation and maintenance of dustbins for trash management, and the overall cleanliness in the village. Sabita learned that people are the key actors in people-oriented biodiversity conservation, and that integrating nature conservation and development makes a win-win situation for people and their environment.

Congratulations to Sabita for her research reconfirming the positive potential of people-oriented biodiversity conservation. Her research highlights the value of communities like Sikles in motivating other communities to take biodiversity conservation into their own hands. Sabita's fieldwork strengthened her personal commitment to partnering with local communities and integrating conservation and development.

And our heartfelt appreciation to the mentors who generously volunteer to guide the mentees throughout their field work, analysis of data, and preparation and publication of their results. We couldn't do it without you!

Going forward, CGCT and CGCF have recently signed an MOU for a three-year funding period to continue the Mentorship Program. CGCT welcomes the opportunity to continue working with CGCF to nurture future Himalayan leaders in conservation and sustainable development.

THANK you to all of you who support mentoring the next generation of People-Oriented Biodiversity Conservation!

During our three-day visit, we sat with members of the *aama samuwa* in their kitchens, learning to cook Gurung specialties; we danced and laughed with them, and tasted the home-made *tin paaniraksi* (triple distilled liquor) that Chandra used to share with his friends in Kathmandu.

Ecotourism is a two-way experience and we aimed to find a way to "give forward" to Sikles. With a generous donation from the women trekkers, supplemented by CGCT funds, we gifted a promising group of women weavers enough money to purchase a new loom. They plan to expand their production of fine allo cloth – a linen-like fabric made from the hand-processed fibers of the stinging nettle plant. Proceeds from their sales will help support a waste management program, and in time a childcare center to give the Sikles youth a head-start.

CGCT and its sister organization Chandra Gurung Conservation Foundation are exploring ways to train the weavers in enhanced design and marketing of their products. As Chandra knew so well, empowering village women pays forward many times in community and conservation benefits.

I climbed the steep steps to pay my respects to Chandra's brother Chitra Singh and his wife Sun Maya before leaving Sikles. In his 80s, Chitra Singh still tends the rice fields, and Sun Maya tells me of their children's and grandchildren's studies on the porch of the home in which Chandra and his brother were born. We share hugs and stories of Chandra, and they pass their gratitude to all of you for supporting CGCT. As Chandra so often said: "*Maya namarnu hos*" ("Don't let the love die").



## 2019 Mentees and Mentors Announced at December Annual Event

CGCF's Annual Commemoration Event was held on the 15th of December, 2018. December 1st was Dr. Chandra P. Gurung's birthday and CGCF adopted it as its Annual Commemoration Day. Since CGCF was instituted by previous mentees of Dr. Chandra Gurung, and the CGCF-CGCT Mentorship Program is one of the hallmarks of the organization, CGCF has taken the opportunity to announce the new mentees and mentors for the forthcoming year on this day.

In addition, each past year's mentees present findings from their projects, funded by the Program. The event was held at the Hotel Ambassador, and was attended by over 50 young graduate students and friends of CGCF.

The 2019 mentees are:

Ms. Anisha Rana graduated with Distinction as a Gold Medalist from the Institute of Forestry, Pokhara with a Bachelor's of Science in Forestry. She is awarded the menteeship to study the contribution of ecotourism, particularly home stays, to biodiversity conservation. The case study area is Panchase Lekh, close to Pokhara. Ms. Rana's mentors are Maureen DeCoursey (International Mentor), a CGCT Board member and specialist in sustainable development; and Chhing Lamu Sherpa, Chairperson of Mountain Spirit and CGCF Member(National Mentor).

Ms. Tshiring Lama has a Masters in Science, Natural Resources Management from Pokhara University. As a mentee, she will continue her research supporting snow leopard conservation in the Dolpo region of Nepal. Tshiring is also distinguished by her receipt of the Chandra Gurung Memorial Fellowship from the World Wildlife Fund for Nature in 2014. She will be mentored by international snow leopard expert Dr. Rodney Jackson (Snow Leopard Conservancy) and Dr. Ghana Gurung, former Chairperson of CGCF and Country Representative of WWF-Nepal (National Mentor).

CGCT congratulates Anisha and Tshiring on their selection and looks forward to supporting their important work.



*From left-to-right, Kushal Shrestha (Mentee 2018), Anisha Rana (Mentee 2019), Chhing Lamu Sherpa (Mentor 2019), Ghana Gurung (Mentor 2019), Tshiring L Lama (Mentee 2019) and SabitaThapa (Mentee 2018).*

Please give generously to the Chandra Gurung Conservation Trust. All administrative work in the US is done voluntarily so that all contributions go directly to field programs. Semi-annual financial and program reports are available for review upon request. Chandra Gurung Conservation Trust has received Section 501(c)(3) tax exempt status with the IRS thus, allowing your donation to be tax deductible.

**Please click here  
for donations**

**Chandra Gurung Conservation Trust**

PO Box 729  
New Lebanon New York  
12125 USA