

# **Mahseer Conservancy**

## **Volunteer Program 2009**



**A unique opportunity to gain genuine wildlife experience and live in and become part of rural Indian community...**



**‘Mahseer Conservancy are an NGO specialising in Community-based solutions to Environmental and Wildlife problems’**

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# About Us

The Society for **Mahseer Conservancy** is a registered not-for-profit conservation NGO operating in Uttarakhand, India.

Mahseer Conservancy initiative was formed in 2004 after local naturalists identified a need to protect and conserve the stretch of the Ramganga River within the Corbett Tiger Reserve. Local villagers were getting no benefits or employment from the increasing tourism in the already impoverished and remote area and had turned to using dynamite and poisons to extract fish primarily the golden mahseer (*tora putitora*) from the river causing serious damage to the whole ecosystem.



We devised a scheme whereby sport-fishing rights were assigned over to four fishing beat managers, who in turn would contribute 60% of all angling permit revenue directly to the villages along their beats, and stipulated that all beats must train and employ local villagers as fishing guides and for river patrol. This in combination with successful sports days to raise awareness and close dialogue with the villagers have meant that now only 5 years on the bombing and poisoning have completely ceased and the fish stocks and rare and iconic species have recovered and returned.

The project is now not just been acclaimed as a rare success in Indian conservation circles, but also received a surprisingly favourable amount of positive media and publicity coverage.

We had been running conservation and eco-tourism based volunteer program for 3 years of those years, which has now been updated to focus on the most pressing conservation issues of the moment.

# Role of the Volunteer



You will get the chance to work on all of our below projects, our team is small so you will be an integral and important part of the programs, and gain **hands-on field experience**. As well as taking part in the projects volunteers must help with the **daily running and maintenance of the camp**. Any volunteers who wish to conduct their **own projects** whilst staying with us our more than welcome to do so, and we will gladly donate as much time and help as our resources allow.

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## Length of Stay

The **minimum stay is for 1 month**, but volunteers are welcome to stay longer if they wish.

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## Project Cost

The project cost for a single person is 22,000INR, which equates to about 11 euros per day, and for two or more people coming together 15,000INR which is roughly 8 euros per day. We do not discourage couples, however the shared accommodation is small and this must be taken into consideration. The cost above covers all meals (B,L,D), ample drinking water and transport and equipment while on field work, but does not cover travel arrangements to Ramnagar our nearest town, or other personal expenses.

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## Volunteer Requirements

- Demonstrable knowledge or experience in the wildlife or humanitarian field.
- Some previous experience in third world countries, jungle habitats, and/or basic living conditions is preferred.
- Volunteers must be of average or above fitness, able to conduct field work often in fairly hot and humid weather.
- Above all a patient, tolerant, open-minded and positive attitude and approach, and a love of wildlife are absolutely essential.

# Volunteer Accommodation

Volunteer accommodation is provided in the form of home-stay accommodation in the rural villages on the eastern periphery of Corbett National Park.

Corbett is blessed with incredible and iconic wildlife typical of the Indian subcontinent such as the Asian Elephant, Sloth bears, Leopards, 4 species of Deer, Porcupines, Otters, Mongoose, Hanuman Langur Monkeys, Gharial and Mugger Crocodiles, Indian Rock Python, King Cobra, giant River Turtles, nearly 50 species of birds of prey, nearly 600 species of bird and of course also home to probably the highest density of wild Tigers any where in the world.

Home-stays provide the host-families with regular and long-term income and enable our organization to provide subsidized lodging and resources to volunteers to partake in conservation research and actions. The home-stays we are currently providing are also used to accommodate higher per-night paying short-term guests.

The home-stays we are currently operating vary between each other. The home-stay at Dhikuli is in the form of a newly-renovated self-contained apartment upstairs from the family (even equipped with broadband and a small office for all volunteers to use).

The authentic mud-cottage at Ringora which is a village inside the Corbett Tiger Reserve offers a different experience to the volunteer. There is no mains electricity or water in the village so the cottage has been equipped with solar-powered lights and fans, and water must be collected from a nearby spring. There are now private but basic bathroom facilities (long-drop style). The village also comes as standard with wild tigers and elephants passing within metres of the cottage nightly (the village has an electric fence as a safety measure though).

Accommodation, bottled drinking water and simple vegetarian local food are provided for volunteers by the host family.



# Projects Brief: 2009

## *Forest Use Survey and Firewood Reduction Program*

Firewood collection for cooking and heating across the Indian-subcontinents is a huge problem, causing forest degradation, negative social impacts and, especially in Corbett, human-animal conflict. Tackling such a huge subject such as rural firewood dependency is not easy.

Our volunteer researchers accompany local women on their rounds in the forest and build friendly relationships with allowing accurate collection of valuable baseline data and inside knowledge of the activity. We also work closely with villages by providing sustainable alternatives to selected households, and monitor the success of, or resistance to, these alternatives in reducing firewood collection.

This project is in part linked to the Wildlife Institute of India.



**Volunteer Fred in the field**

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## *Gyps Vulture Colony Monitoring and Conservation*

Five species of vultures in Asia are in grave and imminent danger of extinction across the Indian subcontinent. In the last ten years they have experienced the most rapid declines ever observed in any animal species, estimates at around 99.9% collapse in population for *Gyps bengalensis*, once the most numerous raptor in the world. The cause was found to be Diclofenac, an anti-inflammatory drug used as a pain-killer to treat sick cattle and livestock.

Our project now titled 'Corbett Vulture Campaign' began in June 2009 and encompasses;

- Vital monitoring of Indian White-backed vulture colonies
- Investigations into the continuing use of Diclofenac on livestock
- An awareness campaign targeting the key villages, religious festivals and the veterinary, pharmaceutical and agricultural communities



**Indian White-backed Vulture**  
*(Gyps bengalensis)*

## **Habitat Restoration and Afforestation Scheme**

Removal of the exotic, invasive bush Lantana Camara and planting of native grass, shrub and tree species has been continuously undergoing since 2006 in the Ramganga valley and is planned for the area around Ringora village.

In addition to this we have finalised plans with the conservation non-governmental organisation ATREE for them to send their staff to our area for them to train local villagers to make furniture from removed lantana bushes, which we will then run. This is an exciting program as it ties in very well with some of our other community-development programs.



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## **Environmental Awareness Program**

In conjunction with the other programs SMC hold lessons and workshops in the school in Ringora and nearby villages. The topics covered include threats to wildlife, flora and fauna of the region, the importance of natural resources and sustainable living.

These topics are presented in a simple and child friendly-way using aides such as native potted plants and other wildlife and related artifacts and our own specially produced textbook. Pens, paper and other material is also distributed. Additionally information boards promoting wildlife conservation are to be placed in four villages.



# Frequently Asked Questions

## **What is an average daily schedule?**

Due to our varied programs our week-by-week schedules are subject to many factors. Depending on season or need our weekly schedule programs are ongoing, progressive ventures, so it is hard to predict. Field monitoring or awareness campaign work can start early in the morning or be late in the evening however in reality it may turn out very different and we try to involve volunteers in all wildlife related expeditions.

## **How basic are the living and working conditions?**

The conditions ARE basic. The cottage has open plan sleeping and living quarters so the space and privacy are to some extent limited. The toilet is a long-drop style not flushing and the nearest shower is 5 minutes walk and used by all households in the village. You are staying in the heart of the village and will be treated with curiosity. It is important to state however that this is part of the charm; most people take a few days to adapt and then find that they are having a very unique, enjoyable and unforgettable experience.

## **How hot does it get during summer?**

Here in the north of India the weather becomes quite hot from April on through till August, with the months of May, June and July also having high humidity.

## **What is the food like?**

Simple wholesome, mostly vegetarian and hygienically prepared traditional Indian cuisine. Typical dishes include curried lentils, potatoes, mixed vegetables, kurd, rice and flatbreads.

Am I going to work directly with tigers?

Our research projects are not centred on tigers however parts of the firewood program do focus on human-animal conflict. Corbett is renowned for its high density of tigers and the area immediately surrounding the Ringora has movement around it most nights. Your best chance for spotting one in the wild is a safari/game drive within the National Park, we can certainly help you arrange one of these if you wish.

## **Are couples welcome?**

Couples are welcome but you should bear in mind that privacy is limited and you cannot be provided separate sleeping quarters so couples must consider this carefully

## **What is the medical advice?**

You must at the very least consult your doctor about having routine vaccinations topped up (tetanus, diphtheria etc.) and rabies vaccinations when visiting India are a good idea, however in our region it is quite rare. Malaria risk is classed as low but again we would certainly not advise against taking precautions.

## **Do I need a visa?**

You will almost certainly need a visa, the most appropriate type being a 6 month tourist visa. Consult your nearest issuing authority (in many countries including the UK this is VFSGlobal) or Indian Embassy.

# Application and Selection Process

Please forward us a current CV, photograph and covering letter explaining why you wish to volunteer with us. Please also let us know the approximate dates you would like to come out.

We always like to have an informal interview / chat with people at some stage so please feel free to contact us by phone.

*(From a UK landline call 0844 439 93 93 first, then enter the number for 3p per minute, [www.dialaround.co.uk](http://www.dialaround.co.uk) for details)*

Our contact details are;

Sumantha Ghosh	+0091 971 924 3939	Manager
Oliver Gray-Read	+0091 963 958 4325	Volunteer Co-ordinator

Address: Tiger Camp, Post. Dhikuli Via, Ramnagar – 244715, Nainital (Dist), Uttarakhand, India

Email: **[vanghat@gmail.com](mailto:vanghat@gmail.com)**

Please feel free to ring us up if you have any questions about anything at all. If you would like further information on how to reach us and background info on our area please request the Background Info Factsheet.

**Corbett is a very special and magical wildlife area, we very much look forward to hearing from you and seeing you here soon!**