



YALE UNIVERSITY
School of Forestry
& Environmental Studies



भारतीय वन्यजीव संस्थान
Wildlife Institute of India

August 30, 2012

Payson R. Stevens
Friends of GHNP
PO Box 810
Del Mar, CA 92014

Dear Payson,

In spring 2008, after graduating from college, I embarked on a 3-month research expedition in the Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP) that would define the direction of my life. Supported by a Fulbright Scholarship and the Wildlife Institute of India, I set out to measure the population status of three rare pheasant species: the threatened Western Tragopan, elusive Koklass Pheasant and charismatic Himalayan Monal. Each week I scaled the Tirthan Valley from the river's depths at Rolla to the spectacular 3,500m snow-capped views of Chhordwari and Khorli Poli. And each morning I rose before dawn to a frost-tipped forest and huddled on the mountainside, recording pheasant calls and greeting the warmth of the rising sun.

I learned about much more than birds that spring. In my three local assistants I saw strong men, their hands calloused by life in the mountains, their eyes soft at the sight of a wildflower. In their wives I saw empowered women, their hair tied back with colorful headscarves, their skillful fingers weaving the famous Kullu blankets. In the valley I saw forest teeming with life, the trees alive with birds and butterflies, the mountains crisscrossed with deer trails.

My research results indicated that encounters with all three pheasants increased substantially since the park's notification in 1999. The GHNP Forest Department's protection, combined with local people's minimal use of forest resources and the natural insulation of the landscape's undulating terrain, are preserving a stunning and sensitive environment that is also critical for the survival of natural ecosystems and human communities downstream.

My experience in GHNP not only revealed that species are recovering in the park but also showed me that sustainable existence between the forest and local communities is possible. This observation motivated me to enroll in a PhD program at Yale University, where I am now continuing research on human-wildlife interactions in India with the Wildlife Institute of India. GHNP's influence on my life is a small demonstration of its important role in the greater Indian ecosystem and its potential to affect numerous other people – if we can ensure its continued protection.

Sincerely,

Jennie Miller

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