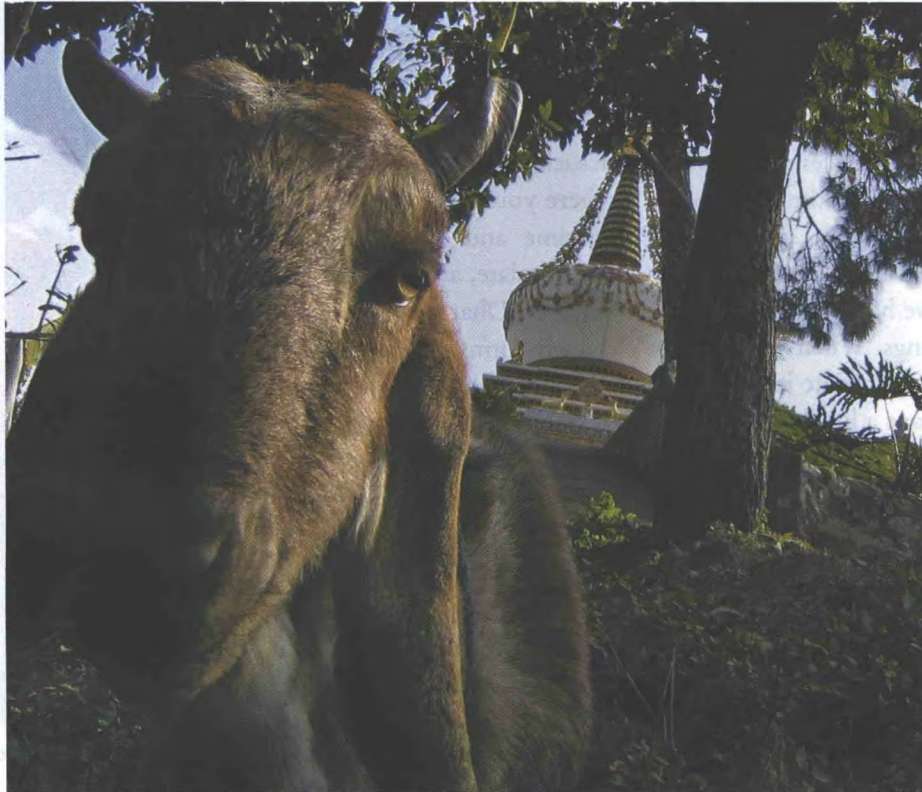


Nepal Sanctuary for Animals Underway

Story and pictures by Tania Duratovic and Phil Hunt



We must ensure that animals like this goat have the best possible care after they have been saved from death.

With generous donations and help from many people, plans are progressing for a new sanctuary for rescued animals in Kathmandu, Nepal. A blessing for the animals who will have the good fortune to live there, the Animal Liberation Sanctuary consists of thirteen acres of land located in the hills of the Kathmandu Valley, adjacent to Kopan Monastery. A project of Lama Zopa Rinpoche, its aim is to provide a safe environment for animals that were to have been killed for human consumption or sacrifice (still a popular activity in Nepal), and also to give them the opportunity to accumulate merit and the causes for higher rebirth and enlightenment.

Stupa in a Newari design

When Rinpoche asked in 2003 that land be bought for the animals already housed on the monastery grounds, Kopan Monastery started negotiations to purchase land nearby. Generous supporters donated and raised the required funds – approximately US\$70,000 – and the land purchase was finally completed in 2006.

Before the animals can be moved onto the land, much work is required to build infrastructure and facilities. Through the continued support of kind sponsors and fundraisers, over US\$100,000 has been gathered for building and development. Considerable preliminary assessment work over the last year will ensure that the land will be used most effectively. A number of challenges need to be overcome before animals will be able to live there. The land is terraced, it is steep, and there is currently no vehicle access.

One of the most important jobs will be the building of eight stupas that Rinpoche has requested. These will give the animals the opportunity to purify negative karma and accumulate merit. The stupas are of eight different traditional Newari¹ designs carved from stone, and are absolutely stunning (anyone visiting the Hyatt Hotel foyer in Kathmandu will recognize them).

Animal liberation in the Buddhist tradition is not simply about freeing animals from immediate harm. What animals need is a get-out-of-jail card, not just for this life, but also from the lower realms, and ultimately from cyclic existence altogether. Our teachers explain how difficult it is to get out of the lower realms, where beings continually create more negative karma and the causes for further rebirths in the lower realms. Therefore, to really help our animal brothers



and sisters, we need to help them create the causes for higher rebirth and enlightenment.

Another important factor in animal liberation is ensuring that the animals have the best possible care after they have been 'saved' from death. To release a rescued animal in a place where it will simply be recaptured and killed is obviously not ideal. An example of this is when enterprising individuals at Buddhist pilgrimage sites sell wild, caught caged birds, or fish in bags, hoping that compassionate Buddhists will give in and buy them. The birds haven't the strength to fly far and are often re-captured or killed by predators; the fish go back in the same pond where they were captured and so on. Well-intentioned people will release animals into an environment that is not their natural

¹ Newars are the indigenous people of the Kathmandu Valley.

Stressed buffalo crammed into a truck

habitat. If the animal dies, does it get much benefit?

This is where holy objects are so important. In Singapore, for example, the Amitabha Buddhist Center organizes the rescue of thousands of shellfish and other marine animals from the fish markets.

They are circumambulated around holy objects to generate merit, and then are released in a marine reserve where fishing is not permitted. Even if some of the animals die when released, they have been given the chance to generate the causes for higher rebirth. As humans are the greatest predators of marine animals, the marine reserve offers more protection than anywhere else.

Liberating bigger animals, particularly those kept for human consumption, such as cows, buffaloes, goats, pigs, sheep, chickens, and ducks, becomes a real challenge. These animals cannot go into the wild, they are not safe on our streets, and you need a pretty big backyard to look after them yourselves!

This is a big job. In a flash of generosity you could buy a buffalo in Nepal or India – but then what do you do? If you cannot look after it (and they can live for decades if given the opportunity), how can you ensure this animal just saved from the butcher's knife won't end up back there? Animal liberation could be looked at in the same way as foster-care or adoption for humans. It is a wonderful opportunity to give an escape route to a being trapped in an unfortunate situation.

This is what the Animal Liberation Sanctuary is all about. It is there to give those few animals under the watchful eye of Rinpoche and the Abbot of Kopan Monastery, Khen Rinpoche Lama Lhundrup, the best conditions to escape the lower realms. Not only will they be regularly led around the stupas, they will also hear mantras, sutras, and teachings on



CD or from visitors. Like the story of the pigeon who heard the great pandit Vasubandu reciting the *Abidharmakosha* and was reborn human and became a great scholar, perhaps these animals will soon be helping others understand the Dharma.

Construction won't start at the sanctuary until 2008 when initial preparations are complete. Even then, the number of animals rescued will be limited due to the size and steepness of the land. As tempting as it is to rescue more and more animals, if the land were overstocked, it would lead to serious erosion problems and stress on the animals themselves. However, for those sentient beings who are able to be rescued at the sanctuary, it will make lifetimes of difference. We are always working on ways to maximize the number of animals that will benefit from this project. Additionally, it is hoped that more land can be bought nearby so that more animals can be rescued, although land here is highly sought after and very expensive. A further plan of Rinpoche's is that similar animal liberation sanctuaries will be established for the long-term care of rescued animals in different parts of the world.

The wish to help animals has been given an increasingly high profile in Buddhism in recent times. It's not a new fad; it is a fundamental tenet of Buddhist philosophy – *all* beings in samsara are suffering, there is a cause to this, there is a way to stop it, and Dharma is the key. ☸

Tania Duratovic and Phil Hunt are the Coordinators of the Animal Liberation Sanctuary. If you would like further information or want to help, please contact them at philandtania@moose-mail.com or go to www.fpm.org/projects/alp/