

## Workshop Background

Natural grasslands cover approximately 14 per cent of Nepal and are important areas in terms of biodiversity and sources of forage for wild ungulate and domestic livestock. In the plains of Nepal (*Terai*), natural grasslands occur along riverine flood plains. As a result of increasing population pressures in this region, these grasslands only exist in their natural state within protected areas such as Royal Chitwan National Park (RCNP), Royal Shukla Phanta Wildlife Reserve (RSWR), Parsa Wildlife Reserve (PWR), Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve (KWR), and Royal Bardia National Park (RBNP). Neighbouring grassland and sub-tropical forest habitats have rapidly been converted into agricultural land and grazing commons.

In the mountain areas, Trans-Himalayan and alpine rangelands are home to a diverse array of wildlife and are grazed by livestock, which are an integral part of the livelihoods of several different ethnic groups. While there is a general assumption that these areas are being overgrazed, little is known about the ecology and sustainability of prevailing land-use practices.

These alluvial *Terai* grasslands, Trans-Himalayan rangelands, and alpine meadows have been listed as Global 200 Ecoregions, identified by the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) as of significant importance for biodiversity. Many of Nepal's protected areas (PAs) are also located within the Eastern Himalayan and Tibetan Plateau Ecoregions, which are ranked as high priority sites in the Global 200 Index.

The extent of research in the different areas varies; most of the grassland ecology research has been conducted in the *Terai*. The initial idea for this workshop arose out of the concern of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) and WWF that the extensive research conducted to date in the *Terai* protected areas has not been adequately summarised or translated into effective management action. Follow-up discussions with the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) revealed that in contrast the primary issues in the mountain parks arise from a lack of appropriate research. As a result, these three organizations proposed a joint workshop to address the research issues in *Terai* and mountain regions simultaneously. This publication is the first volume of three summarising the results of this workshop.

### Goals and Objectives of the Workshop

The primary goal of the workshop was to bring together the Wardens of Nepal's National Parks, staff from The King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC) PA, and international/regional scientists conducting grassland research in mountain and *Terai* protected areas of India and Nepal to summarise the major results of grassland ecological research and devise effective research and management strategies for grasslands in the mountain and *Terai* protected areas of Nepal.

## Objectives

- Document the history of grassland management and its impact on biodiversity in protected areas of Nepal (*Terai* and mountain areas)
- Summarise the major grassland ecological research conducted in protected areas of Nepal
- Gain perspectives from scientists working in similar ecological zones of Nepal and India
- Gain information on recent development and future directions of grassland ecology from regional/global perspectives

## Output

- Research and management guidelines for protected area managers
- Research, Management, and Policy groups formed to address grassland issues in the protected areas of Nepal

## Workshop Participants

- Wardens of Nepal's Protected Areas
- KMTNC Protected Area staff
- Key policy-makers
- International/regional scientists conducting grassland research in Nepal and India
- (Technical papers were included from research workers who were unable to attend the workshop to ensure completeness in the coverage of technical information.)

## Workshop Agenda

The Workshop was organized in the following manner.

### I. General Overview

Introduction to the Workshop and Working Definitions

Ecology of the Grasslands of the *Terai*

- General overview of *Terai* protected areas – ecology and management
- Grassland research in the *Terai* of Nepal and India

Ecology of the Grasslands of the Mountain Areas

- General overview of mountain protected areas – ecology and management
- Grassland research in the mountains of Nepal and India

### II. Working Group Sessions (Concurrent)

Ecology of the Grasslands of the *Terai*

- Individual *Terai* park reports (summary of research work, management issues faced in each PA)
- Working group sessions to define data gaps, identify future research needs, and define management strategies for *Terai* protected areas with sufficient data

Ecology of the Grasslands of the Mountain Areas

- Individual mountain park reports (summary of research work, management issues faced in each PA)

- Working group sessions to define data gaps, identify future research needs, and define management strategies for mountain protected areas with sufficient data

### **Workshop Inaugural Session**

The inaugural session of the workshop on 'Grassland Ecology and Management in Protected Areas of Nepal' was held on the morning of 16 March 1999 at Lalmati, Royal Bardia National Park. Mr. Sushil Bhattarai, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation, was the chief guest. Mr. Dibya Dev Bhatta, Director, Mid-western Regional Forest Office chaired the session.

Chief Warden Mr. Shiva Raj Bhatta welcomed the participants to Royal Bardia National Park and said that the presence of researchers, park managers, and conservationists from both India and Nepal was very encouraging. He also hoped the ensuing interaction would help in making appropriate recommendations for the effective management of protected areas.

Following the welcome address, the chief guest, Mr. Sushil Bhattarai, formally inaugurated the workshop by lighting up the *Panas*.

On behalf of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, the Management Officer Mr. Shyam Bajimaya welcomed the participants and hoped that the deliberations would have far-reaching effects on the management of grasslands and rangelands that would ultimately lead to sustainable conservation of natural resources. He stressed that the issues relating to grasslands need to be addressed immediately. He also shed light on Nepal's conservation efforts in the last twenty-five years and added that, despite great conservation challenges, Nepal has set aside more than 16 per cent of the country's land as protected areas. Concluding his address, Mr. Bajimaya remarked that the interaction was aimed to be instrumental in reaching a consensus on preparing guidelines for the effective management of grassland resources.

The chief guest Mr. Sushil Bhattarai expressed his pleasure at participating in the workshop. He emphasised that grasslands were of prime concern because both wildlife and local people depended on them. He also added that grass cutting was permitted for a few days during winter in the *Terai* parks. Likewise, local people traditionally use grasslands for grazing livestock in the mountain parks. He hoped that the workshop would come up with prescriptions for His Majesty's Government and guidelines for protected area managers for the sustainable management of these grassland ecosystems.

The presiding chairperson, Mr. Dibya Dev Bhatta, concluded the session and said that grasslands outside protected areas were equally important and also needed immediate attention. He hoped that the interaction would help in preparing guidelines for protected areas and wished for the success of the workshop on behalf of the Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation.