

# THE BHUTAN SOCIETY



## NEWSLETTER

Number 29

President: Lord Wilson of Tillyorn, KT, GCMG FRSE

April 2004

Monday 17th May 2004

**An illustrated lecture by Jessica Beaghen**  
**'Plant Conservation in Bhutan'**  
(or 'Travels of an Eccentric')



Many of you will already know Jessica Beaghen, Bhutan Society member and a horticulturalist and graduate from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. Jessica first visited Bhutan in May 2001 and on her return ran a successful appeal to raise funds to restore the polytunnels of Bhutan's Royal Botanic Garden. In October 2002 she was invited back to Bhutan for three months to run training courses for the staff at the Botanic Garden, and to visit as many of Bhutan's plant-based projects as possible. Her stay was then extended, covering the collection period, and her three month stay became seven and a half months!

Jessica is both extremely knowledgeable about her field and a lively and entertaining speaker. Do come along and hear her tales illustrated with her photos.

**Monday 17th May 2004, 6:30pm for 7:00pm**

**\*\* PLEASE NOTE NEW VENUE! \*\***

**The British Council (Room UG10)**  
**10 Spring Gardens, London SW1A 2BN**

Spring Gardens is off Trafalgar Square,  
under the Admiralty Arch

Refreshments available following the lecture

### Dates for your diary

Tuesday 21st September 2004

#### 'Recent developments in Bhutan'

Michael Rutland will give his annual round-up of events and developments in Bhutan in an informal talk followed by the opportunity for lots of questions.

The National Liberal Club, Whitehall Place, London.  
Full details to follow in the Summer newsletter.

Friday 22nd October 2004

#### The 12th Annual Dinner of the Bhutan Society

The House of Lords

Full details and a ticket application form will be included with the Summer newsletter.

12th - 26th May 2005 (to be confirmed)

#### Bhutan Society Botanical and Rhododendron Tour

See page 3 for further details

### New Events Secretaries

The Society is pleased to announce that we have two enthusiastic new events secretaries, Catherine Eva and Freda Ferne. See page 3 for details.

The Hon. Secretary Michael Rutland will return from Bhutan to the UK on June 20th, probably going back to Thimphu in late 2004. He would be delighted to meet Members visiting Bhutan during the times he is there – telephone him when you are in Thimphu.

*Guildford*

2 Windacres, Warren Road, Guildford GU1 2HG

Tel: (01483) 538 189 E-mail: [mrutland@aol.com](mailto:mrutland@aol.com)

*Thimphu*

PO Box 1044, Thimphu, Bhutan

Tel: +975-2-361 183 E-mail: [mrutland@aol.com](mailto:mrutland@aol.com)

This Newsletter is produced by Lucy & Bodo Hornberger to whom enquiries and contributions should be addressed.  
Unit 23, 78 Marylebone High Street, London W1U 5AP E-mail: [info@bhutansociety.org](mailto:info@bhutansociety.org)

The Society's website is at [www.bhutansociety.org](http://www.bhutansociety.org) and carries information about the Society, news and events, an archive of previous Newsletters and a selection of interesting Bhutan-related links.



## Why Dzongkha is losing out to English

by Gopilal Acharya with Samten Wangchuk  
Kuensel Online

When the modern education system first began in Bhutan, the medium of instruction was Hindi. English and Dzongkha took over in 1966. Almost four decades later most Bhutanese literates prefer to speak, read and write in English rather than in Dzongkha. Why did Dzongkha, despite being unanimously understood as an important and indispensable aspect of Bhutanese culture and identity, fail to gain common usage as English did?

According to Lungtaen Gyatso, the Principal of the Institute of Language and Culture Studies (ILCS) in Semtokha, many reasons could be attributed to what he calls the 'losing battle'. In his paper *Difficulty in teaching Dzongkha in an English medium system* Lungtaen Gyatso says that most students think Dzongkha is a difficult subject. "Dzongkha seems difficult not because it is a difficult subject," he says, but "the mind set is so strong that Dzongkha is compelled to appear difficult even though it is not so."

Prior to the introduction of modern education in Bhutan, monastic institutions strictly followed Dzongkha as a medium of instruction, and speaking Dzongkha was customary within the Dzongs. But as the modern schooling system progressed, the standard of English also began to take noticeable strides with the introduction of modern areas of study such as science, mathematics, geography and history.

Lungtaen Gyatso's paper states that the subject ratio between English and Dzongkha and their instructional periods is 6:2 throughout the country, except at the ILCS where it is 2:4. Thus, despite studying Dzongkha for 11 to 12 years in school, the majority of students are unable to write without many mistakes and the standard of Dzongkha is far poorer than that of English.

The inevitable demand for English, and Dzongkha's more limited scope and opportunities, also discourages students from learning Dzongkha seriously. About 95% of pupils take English or English-related streams and only 5% take Dzongkha as their main mode of study after the tenth grade. Also the demand for English literates against Dzongkha literates is very high in almost all work places both public and private.

"Today people are not sure of what concrete advantages they can avail from the knowledge of Dzongkha," he said. "So when there is a choice between the two, people naturally go for English."

Although Lungtaen Gyatso argues that Dzongkha as a language is not difficult, he admits that orthographically, Dzongkha is more complicated to learn than English. Its complex syllable formation requires a

firm foundation right from the beginning. For example, a beginner English learner can learn (and is taught) construction of different words immediately such as a-p-p-l-e = apple. But in Dzongkha there are so many other intricate steps before a learner is ready to construct words. "The different aspects of letter combination take quite a good deal of time to digest. This is where the learning pace of Dzongkha becomes slow and takes more time than learning English in the initial stage," he says. "But once one has a sound foundation of the basics, then mastering Dzongkha is easier than mastering English. Dzongkha teaching/learning has overlooked this crucial difference and has tried to adopt the same English teaching method to teach Dzongkha."

Another major factor against Dzongkha catching up



*Learning Dzongkha takes more time than English at the initial stage*

with English is that subjects such as science, geography, and mathematics cannot be taught in Dzongkha since it cannot handle technical subjects. Consequently, Dzongkha does not have a major share in the Bhutanese information world.

Lungtaen Gyatso suggests a radical shift in approach to teaching Dzongkha, going back to the conventional way of teaching "where word by word and syllable by syllable sort of recitation existed". He also suggests increasing contact hours in schools, effective assessment, encouraging use of Dzongkha in offices and, most importantly, creating a 'Dzongkha atmosphere'.

However, he concludes that Bhutan's education system means that English will remain in the forefront, always ahead of the national language. "Efforts should be made to enable Dzongkha to receive more importance because every native language is the best medium of communications to relay local and indigenous thoughts and values. Dzongkha is the language of Bhutanese religion, philosophy and culture and no language can better understand and interpret what is unique to Bhutan."

\*\*\*\*\*

*See page 4 for interesting statistics about Dzongkha*



# News & Updates from the Bhutan Society



## A Message from the Society's new Events Secretaries

The Society is pleased to announce that we have two enthusiastic new events secretaries, Catherine Eva and Freda Ferne. They write:

Our illustrious Michael Rutland has asked us to take on the task of arranging the programme of events and speakers and we have, for better or worse, agreed.

So it's hello from her – Catherine Eva and it's hello from me – Freda Ferne.

Who? Well we were both lucky enough to be part of the Bhutan Society's 10th anniversary visit in November 2002, which is where we met. You may remember an article by me (Freda) in the newsletter about this visit.

**Catherine Eva** (life member): I live in Bristol and Crumlin, South Wales and have visited Bhutan three times, stone baths still my favourite. Currently a member of the Board of Trustees of the British Council and an advisor to the three Government Commissions concerned with equality.

**Freda Ferne**: member since my first visit in 1994 when I trekked in the northwest Lingshi, Laya region. Living in a tiny hamlet 10 miles from Bath. Previously a primary school teacher for 20 years. Co-owner of a small flock of Wiltshire Horn sheep. Heavily involved, mainly acting, with three local theatre groups. I wonder how I ever had time for a full-time job. My life is a good balance of work and play and I know how lucky this makes me. Owner of some magnificent hats which seem to incorporate the much overlooked design feature – the ability to make people smile.

We hope to come up with a varied programme which will include your favourite speakers, Françoise Pommaret and our very own Michael Rutland. We would also like to try some new events and venues and would welcome your ideas and suggestions – go on, you must have some. We are particularly keen, providing there is sufficient interest, in holding some events out of London – let us know where would suit you.

We look forward to meeting you at the first of our events – a lecture by Jessica Beaghen (see page 1).

Contact details:

**Catherine Eva**, Flat B, 3 All Saints Road, Clifton, Bristol  
BS8 2JG Tel: 0795 153 1931  
e mail: [evacatherine@hotmail.com](mailto:evacatherine@hotmail.com)

**Freda Ferne**, Canal Cottage, Avoncliff, Bradford on Avon,  
BA15 2HD Tel: 01225 865260  
e mail: [freda.ferne@avoncliff154.freereserve.co.uk](mailto:freda.ferne@avoncliff154.freereserve.co.uk)

## IS THERE ANYBODY OUT THERE?

...who finds London too far and would like to come to an event in the **Bristol area**?

This is an initial enquiry to establish the level of interest before we plan anything specific. If you are interested in principle please contact Catherine Eva (see contact details above).

## The Bhutan Society Botanical and Rhododendron Tour

12th - 26th May 2005 (tbc), led by Matthew Heasman

The Bhutan Society is pleased to announce a Spring visit to Bhutan to see flowering rhododendrons and other flora. This visit is aimed at the non-specialist who would like to learn something about Bhutanese flora, as well as those who are already fairly knowledgeable.

The Tour will take place during the peak rhododendron flowering period in mid May 2005 when we should be in time to see the end of the early flowering species and the beginning of the mid flowering period. It is hoped to see species such as the large leaved *Rh. kesangaie*, *hodgsonii* and *falconeri* as well as medium sized *Rh. campylocarpum*, *wallichii*, *xanthododon* and the unusual flowered *keysii* and possibly smaller *Rh. lepidotum*, *virgatum*, *setosum* and *fragariiflorum*. Other spectacular species include Magnolia, Daphne, Viburnum and orchids. We hope this is enough to whet your appetite!

Places will be limited to 15 and are open to Members and their friends. Some camping will be involved. Costs will be calculated later as they depend on the size of the party.

Initial expressions of interest to Michael Rutland, Hon. Secretary, either by email to [mrutland@aol.com](mailto:mrutland@aol.com) or by letter to Michael Rutland, PO Box 1044, Thimphu, Bhutan (registered airmail)

Matthew Heasman writes:

I first became interested in rhododendrons as a small boy, when my father took me to visit Inverewe, a famous Rhododendron Garden on the west coast of Scotland. Unfortunately, we visited at the wrong time of year to see any in bloom, but their large leaves and subsequent pictures left a lasting impression. Some years later I found myself at Inverewe with my wife and wasted no time in reacquainting myself with these amazing plants. That was it – I was hooked! For the last 15 years I have devoted much of my spare time to studying, growing and showing rhododendrons. I am a member of The Scottish Rhododendron Society and involved at all levels of the Society's activities. Becoming a member of the SRS brought great benefits to a young novice; the Society has among its members the Wright brothers (Arduaine Gardens), the infamous plantsmen Peter and his son Kenneth Cox, and David Chamberlain from the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh. My dream has always been to see rhododendrons in their natural habitat. My chance came in 1993 when I was invited to visit Bhutan by the Head Gardener of Benmore Botanical Gardens. The visit lived up to all expectations. On returning home I joined the Bhutan Society so that my interest in the country which is the home to a wide variety of Himalayan rhododendrons could be further enhanced. I was delighted to visit Bhutan again in 2002 with the Society in its 10th Anniversary year.

I am purely an amateur botanist with experience gained through my enthusiasm and interest in a wide range of flora and fauna and subsequent love of Bhutan, a country which has remained true to the natural habitat of many of the world's rarest plants. I look forward to guiding you through some of Bhutan's most rugged and beautiful landscapes and hopefully some of my love for the country and its flora will encourage you to grow some for yourself!



## Bhutan appoints new Ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva

**A**mbassador Dasho Sonam T. Rabgye, Bhutan's new Ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, is the son of the late Dasho Sonam Rabgye who was Bhutan's first Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York in 1971.

The Ambassador joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1979. In 1985 he was appointed to the Bhutan Mission to the UN in New York, and in 1990 transferred to the Royal Bhutan Embassy in Delhi. From there, in 1997, Dasho Sonam T. Rabgye was appointed Ambassador to Kuwait. In 2000 he returned to Bhutan to head the Multilateral Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Thimphu. He held that post until 2003, when he was appointed as Ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva.

Dasho Sonam T. Rabgye is accompanied by his wife, Tshering Yangchen Rabgye, in Geneva. They have two teenage daughters.

## When pigs do fly...!

by Karma Choden, Kuensel Online

**A**fter the flight from London to Frankfurt, on to Bangkok, and then finally to Paro on a chartered Druk Air flight, the passengers would be forgiven for being a little jet-lagged. But if they were, they were not telling.

The passengers were 82 live pigs selected from rare breeds in Britain and transported to Bhutan by Bhutan's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). The pigs will form the nucleus for a pig breeding programme in Bhutan.

After what FAO describes as 'a significant logistic operation', which included one night's rest in Bangkok, all the piglets arrived in good health. Druk Air's commercial manager said that, since they could not fit into the cargo hold, the pigs flew in the passenger cabin. He quickly added, however, that the pigs were sitting in pens and not on the seats. With the chartered flight costing US\$ 27,000, the pigs made it into Druk Air's VIP flight category.

The piglets originated from several farms in Britain and were selected on the basis of stringent criteria. They had to meet high veterinary health standards for the transit through Thailand and import into Bhutan. Experience has shown that white-coloured pigs suffer from sunburn at high altitude. Pigmented or black-skinned pigs are the preferred options for farms at 3,000 metres above sea-level, a high altitude environment with strong ultraviolet radiation.

The importation of animals of both sexes of three different breeds will allow the development of breeding schemes in Bhutan. The project aims to improve food production and access to animal proteins.

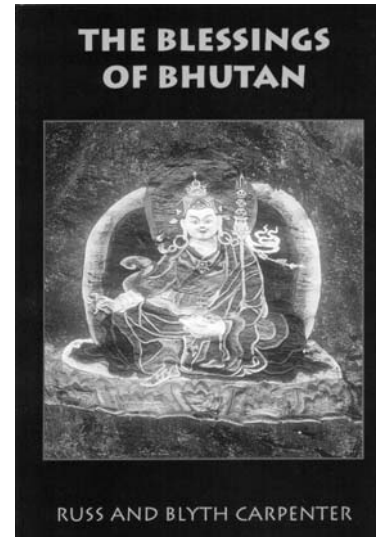
## The Blessings of Bhutan

by Russ and Blyth Carpenter

University of Hawaii Press 2003

192 pages incl. colour photos, glossary & notes

ISBN 0-8248-2679-5; US\$24.95



This attractive and thoughtful book attempts to define what is so distinctive (and so appealing) about Bhutan, a place the authors see as "an extraordinary laboratory in which to examine questions of culture and values".

The authors have spent a number of years living in Bhutan, working on a variety of social and cultural projects. Their experiences and impressions, often humorous, are blended with information about Bhutan's history, religion and arts, and presented in short 'sketches' grouped into eight sections – perfect for dipping into! Their regard for Bhutan and its people is obvious, however they are careful not to over-exoticize the Bhutanese and don't shrink from mentioning misunderstandings and problems they encountered, referring to their love for Bhutan a 'sword with two edges'.

*The Blessings of Bhutan* aims to entertain and inform and succeeds admirably on both counts.

Available from [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk) for £12.32 + postage

*continued from page 2*

### Dzongkha literates at a glance

- About 28 percent of the total population are native Dzongkha speakers
- About 65 percent of the population speak Dzongkha
- About 60 percent of the population can read and speak Dzongkha
- About 55 percent of the population can read, write and speak basic Dzongkha
- About 40 percent of the population can read, write and speak Dzongkha fluently
- About five percent of the population can read, write and speak Dzongkha professionally