

Bikes in the Wild - Chitwan, Nepal

Words and Photos by advocacy adventurer and Wheels 4 Life Board Member, Bryan Cole ([@bcolective](#))



Chitwan National Park, in the southern jungle of Nepal, is a truly unique place on our planet. As one of the world's most biodiverse ecosystems, Chitwan is home to a mind bending number of birds, a healthy streak of bengal tigers, herds of wild and domesticated elephants, a couple thousand everything eating crocodiles, and one of the largest concentrated populations of one horned rhinos remaining on Earth. Chitwan is a place where raw rivers and jungle forests and animals roam and rage freely in the wild. And yet in many parts of the protected lands and waters, just across the river lies a population of people who have called those places home for thousands of years.

The jungle lands surrounding Chitwan, originally and still inhabited by the Taru people, remain dedicated to small scale farming of crops like rice, millet, barley and potatoes. And as the jungle thrives mostly across the river, the realities of jungle life fight to survive any way they can not

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- Doma Paudel



unlike the rest of the world and in some cases harder. For both the wildlife of Chitwan and the people living on the banks of the jungle rivers and borders, basic survival sits at the center of daily focus. In that, finding food remains the primary pastime for both groups and often the two come in direct conflict. For the people, food comes from subsistence farming and often fishing on the banks of the deep jungle rivers. And for the animals, food is often more easily found, and with far less effort or conflict than within the heart of jungle, by sourcing it from the cultivated crops or even unsuspecting fishermen and swimmers at the river's edge.

Mainly as a direct result of the close proximity to the jungle, farmers, guides, tradespeople and the animals themselves are involved in a surprising number of direct human and animal confrontations each year. In most years, no fewer than 12-15 people are seriously maimed or killed due to direct animal conflict. But thanks to one incredible individual, and daughter of an animal attack victim and the first female jungle guide in Nepal by the name of Doma Paudel, the Wildlife Victim Fund was formed in 2017. The Wildlife Victim Fund was created to provide aid to individuals and/or their families who have experienced direct negative impact caused by animal encounters.

Starting with very little and left with even less after a animal encounter, the Wildlife Victim Fund aims to put aid into the right hands at the right time for people truly in need. So, when Wheels 4 Life Board Member and advocacy adventure traveler Bryan Cole made his way to Chitwan with his family for a jungle experience of a different kind, he naturally found his way to Doma for both her guide services and her position as a leading community organizer and advocate to help facilitate some Wheels 4 Life giving.

With a goal of giving away a few bikes on their family visit to Chitwan, Bryan and his wife Allison and son Fisher (7) worked with Doma to both explain the goals of Wheels 4 Life and find a few recipients whose lives would forever be changed for the better with the introduction of a bicycle.

Thanks to the knowledge and connection that Doma has with her local community, she was able to recommend a number of families more than fit to receive a bike from W4L. And over the course of a few short days, the Coles were able to connect with Doma, meet the families to help vet them as good Wheels 4 Life bike recipients, and then literally help to source and see the bikes built and delivered personally. In two separate trips to the jungle over a 2 week period, the Coles managed to provide 3 bikes to families in need. Looking forward, Doma has offered to help spearhead some ongoing project support to continue providing bikes to many of the countless families in partnership with Wheels 4 Life and the mission to Give a Bike, Change a



Life.



Below are the names and stories of the bike recipients from this 2018 project.

Recipient #1 - The Bote Family

Background - Just 6 months ago, Dipendra Bote (age 25) was fishing down my the Rapti River and was attacked brutally by a Marsh Mugger crocodile, resulting in the loss of his left leg. Now, his wife Manisa has the only job in the family and works doing laundry in the town of Sauraha in order to support the family of 5 including Dipendra's parents Suresh and Sukmaya, Dipendra's



brother and their little daughter Manisa (also). Thanks to the Wheels 4 Life donation, Manisa will now have a bike to get to and from work as well as get little Manisa to and from school each day. And with any hope, Dipendra will one day have a prosthetic leg and be able to use the bike as well when he is ready and recovered enough to work again.

Recipient #2 - Suman Bote - Age 15 , 10th grader

Background - About 10 years ago, Suman Bote's father Bhuneswor was killed by a crocodile leaving his wife Sukmaya, 3 sons and a daughter to fend for themselves, landless and poor in the jungle. Sukmaya now works in laundry to take care of her families basic needs and Suman is the first in his family to ever attend school of any kind. With over 6 km to get to school daily, the introduction of a bicycle has proven to be a game changer for Suman and his ability to get to and from school, study hall and more. Additionally, Suman's brothers and sister can use the bike for transport to and from town, errands, food, etc. when needed.



Recipient #3 - Kristina Shrestha - Age 11, 5th grader.

Background - Daughter and child #4 of the poor and landless Aasik Thapamagar (hotel gardener) and Rita Shresha (seasonal laborer), Kristina is the first in her family to attend school, thanks to the generous donation of an educational scholarship. Too poor to afford the small fees for Kristina to ride the bus to school (3 km each way) each day, Kristina was walking to and from school before meeting Wheels 4 Life. Now however, with the support of a new bike from Wheels 4 Life, Kristina will be able to ride to school, town, market and more. Additionally her 2 sisters and brother will be able to use the bike as well thereby providing a source of transportation for the entire family.



About the Author/Photographer

Bryan Cole is the former and long time Adventure Sports Marketing Manager at CLIF Bar and has over 20 years of leadership experience in the outdoor industry. Working closely at the intersection of adventure, lifestyle, athletics and advocacy, as a long time Wheels 4 Life supporter (India bike donor in 2006), and current Wheels 4 Life Board Director, Bryan is presently on the road indefinitely with his wife Allison and adventure world schooling their son Fisher (7). Amidst the endless outdoor pursuits and world learning opportunities they are also seeking immersive experiential cultural and advocacy opportunities along the way.

Follow [@bcollective](#) to see what Bryan is up to now and [@globalramble](#) for the full dose of adventure family rambling.