

# Learning and Leading Gap Scholars

## ● Jonathan Fry

Dates	March to June 2014
Locations	Nepal
Activities	Conservation and community volunteering



### ***Why did you want to do a gap experience?***

I wanted to gain experience in a new culture and environment, be involved in a different society and understand how other people live. I wanted to gain a larger insight into the world of conservation and how it was practiced in a different country, including the challenges they face and how they deal with them.

I also wanted to do this gap scholarship as it had always been my dream to work abroad, and perhaps something I would want to pursue in my future career. I have always loved geography since school, especially the practical side so I was excited to go abroad and participate in local conservation, although I didn't anticipate how much I was going to love it.



### ***What did you do on your gap experience?***

My flight was in the evening on the 1<sup>st</sup> March; 8 hours to Abu Dhabi and then 5 hours to Kathmandu in Nepal on my own. The project had a member of staff to meet me at the hotel and go over the travel details and relevant information. It then took 3 days to reach the base camp in the small town of Ghandruk in the Annapurna region.

Once there, the main research tasks I did were bird surveys which included walking around the local area or in stationary positions. Luckily a bird expert was on hand to help! I also did butterfly surveys using nets and then went deeper into the forest and remote areas to set camera traps. We managed to catch a picture of a leopard which is rare.

Less frequently I participated in community work such as waste collection around the town of Ghandruk, working in schools and playing sports with the local children. We also had some leisure trips to Annapurna base camp, some hot springs and Pokhara. Overall we did so much it's hard to explain it all, but everything I did was greatly enjoyable and worth it.



***What did you find easy and challenging?***

It was difficult identifying the different birds as there are so many species - from vultures to the Verditer Flycatcher. But the hardest part was getting used to the culture and way of life there and having to survive without home comforts! It was my first time abroad, chucked in at the deep end I definitely missed my friends and family. But after a while I started to make friends quickly, got used to the culture and way of life and really started to enjoy myself.



The easiest thing was making new friends from all different cultures and backgrounds, and I ended up meeting some amazing people. The people there helped me overcome my homesickness and I'm still in contact with many of them.

***What impact has your gap experience had?***

The gap experience improved my skills in conservation work and furthered my knowledge of how it is practiced. I gained lots of knowledge on the state of wildlife and environment in that region and how it can be protected. I definitely matured as a person, living independently and away from home for the first time. My confidence increased and I built on my teamwork and management skills greatly. It was a huge learning curve and strengthened my motivation for a career in that field of work.



***Where there any unexpected outcomes?***

Everything was a shock to me, so all the outcomes were unexpected! But this only increased my love for geography and has now set me up for my career path.

***What do you plan to do next?***

I now have a great motivation to seek a career in conservation. I am taking another year off to work and volunteer doing local conservation and to save up for some more travelling next year. I am then going to do a degree based in conservation and then work towards a career in this field. This gap experience has given me more of a chance of this becoming a reality.



***What is your advice for anyone thinking of taking a gap experience?***

The most important thing is to enjoy yourself! My three pieces of advice would be:

- 1) Plan your trip out thoroughly and make sure you choose the right place and project.
- 2) Don't take too many valuables or expensive items.
- 3) Most of all don't stress whilst your planning, a strong simple plan is easy to make and then follow.