

# Luke Gamble's vet adventures in Nepal

**W**ELL, SEPTEMBER 8th was the date that Luke Gamble's Vet Adventures - Nepal was aired on Sky TV, so now I am at liberty to tell you the story of how the programme came about. Had I done so earlier I would have had to submit my article to Sky first of all, for their approval, so it really wasn't worth all that hassle.

Anyway, hopefully some of you saw the programme; if so, you are in a more privileged position than me because I've not been able to view it over here yet, though I hope that now it's out I shall be sent a DVD. Luke Gamble set up the charity Worldwide Veterinary Services (WVS) a few years ago and it was through his charity that we came across each other, as I had approached him to obtain some veterinary supplies for the Kathmandu Animal Treatment Centre (KAT), of which I used to be UK co-ordinator.

However, as many of you know, when I moved to live here in Nepal in 2009 a new animal charity was set up near my home in Pokhara, some 200 km west of Nepal's capital. I had continued contact with WVS and

by Juliette Cunliffe

did some absolutely remarkable operations, providing a wonderful opportunity for our vet, Dr Hem, who had never witnessed such major surgery before, let alone carried it out! One dog, who Luke named 'Jimmy', had an enormous



● Drs. Luke and Hem in action

was intrigued when invited to submit a proposal to have my local charity, Himalayan Animal Rescue Team (HART) featured in one of a series of ten programmes. Applications were invited from many countries which WVS had helped, so I was delighted when we heard that we had been selected as one of the final ten.

Hours were spent in the planning, for the film's producers, Red Earth Studio, did not only want to feature dogs, but other animals that needed help here in Nepal. I was not, at that stage, dealing directly with Luke concerning the programme's content, but it took me a long while to convince the planners that to find a snow leopard to treat in the space of their ten day trip was impossible! I have been coming to Nepal for over twenty years, and now live here, but never have I sighted this elusive cat, nor indeed has anyone I know. Tigers and wild elephants were also eliminated from the equation as the government has very strict control over these animals and seemingly doesn't want outsiders interfering.

## Remarkable

A lot of the filming was arranged to take place at HART, where Luke

incision round a large part of his neck; it was touch and go whether he would pull through, but Jimmy was a determined chap and he did, much to the film producer's delight!

The filming was also a great experience for me, for although in my early professional career I had worked for the BBC, primarily doing voice-over work, and for ITV, I had never witnessed the filming of a documentary programme. It was important that everyone wore the same clothes and even the same shoes throughout the days of filming so that scenes could be spliced and fitted back together in seemingly natural sequence. As it happened, my own little appearances were cut, so I needn't have bothered to keep washing and drying my 'Tibetan Breeds World Show T-shirt' that I chosen especially, though I am told I did feature for a few seconds. That's always the way with filming, hours and hours of film are shot, but in the end it has to be reduced to the programme's length.

A serious problem here in Nepal is that of transmissible venereal tumours in dogs (TVT's), and with the street dog population it is essential that this be controlled. Here in Nepal there is no chemotherapy drug available for dogs, but Luke had



● Juliette discussing the pros and cons of pet ownership

the bright idea of trying to obtain the human equivalent from a hospital in Pokhara. The film crew finally came up trumps at Pokhara's Indian-owned private hospital, Manipal, but to release the drug to a vet was unheard of! We all had to go along to meet the Hospital Director, who, after much debate, gave his permission and Luke then had to buy it from the drugs office, while we all hid out of sight so we were not captured on film. Obviously dogs with TVTs have to be neutered, but the use of chemotherapy at least gives them some chance of recovery, so this was a very well-worthwhile

time to mingle with the assembled crowd. I struck up a particularly close relationship with one of the camp's spectacular rams, which had been brought in from Tibet, and I was overawed by the number of Tibetan dogs that turned up for their jabs and a check up by the vets. Their owners seemed completely oblivious to the film crew, and by now even our own Dr Hem had got used to it, for he and Luke had been operating with cameras and microphones inches from their ears!

At the Hyangja camp we had organised for one of HART's Board Members, head of a Buddhist



● Luke Gamble & Dr Hem Awasthi hard at work

Monastery, to bring along a few monks to liven things up for the film crew, Gurung Rinpoche having offered to bless any animals whose owners so wished. The morning of that day's shoot I had a phone call asking if we wanted twenty-four monks, or thirty. I had only envisaged about half a dozen. We compromised and said he could bring as many monks as would fit into two jeeps. The end result was fifteen, and the film crew had a whale of a time filming the ceremony and the blessings.

## Tikka

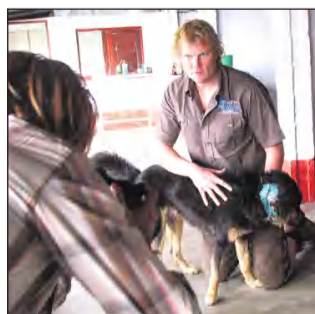
But it was not only dogs the film crew wanted to see. HART's Chairman, Dibya Kumar Baral, had organised for forty or so yaks to be brought to lower ground so that Luke could check them over. Luke and the crew still had to fly up to 3,600 metres in Lower Mustang and the timing had to be just right because the yaks could not remain at that altitude for more than two days. There was also the helicopter camera man to schedule. He was with us for only a couple of days but caused great delight when he landed at the World Peace Pagoda, right by our lodge. The helipad here is little used,

exercise. When we came out of the hospital, by sheer coincidence the holy-cow we had known about with a great bulge in its side was spotted, so it was a mad rush to catch her, the local people eager to help too. Luke diagnosed that what looked like a very large tumour was simply her intestines having burst through the stomach wall causing an enormous lump; it was inoperable but he said he had come across it a few times before and her chances of a long life were pretty good, so we all retired after a hard day, very relieved.

Another aspect of the canine filming was to do rabies and treatments camps. A small camp was held in a Nepali area of the town and was well received. I noticed one pastoral-type of dog had been decorated with a large red tikka mark down his forehead in honour of the occasion! But it was the treatment camp at Hyangja Tibetan Refugee Camp that was a personal highlight for me. Luke and Dr Hem were later arriving than planned as they were busy carrying out another operation on Jimmy, so that gave the rest of us plenty of



● Waiting patiently for 'Dr Luke' to arrive



● Producer Marc Rowedder photographing Lukes giant operation on a dogs neck



● Happy to go home after his rabies jab the owners daughter clutching HART's informative leaflet



● Waiting to meet the vets



● If Dr Hem can cope with this he can cope with anything



● Giving her Apsos the once over before her injections



● A most glorious ram from Tibet seems anxious to join the queue



● One of the unbelievably friendly and investigative goats at Hyangja camp



● Filming the Rinpoche's blessings

and it was not easy to clear it for the take-off, due to everyone having rushed up from the village for a look! Dibya also organised with the charity AHTCS for Luke deal with pack animals, and we fixed for him to visit Scott Mason's rescued birds of prey so, all in all I think the Film Director finally got what he wanted, despite

the scarcity of snow leopards! Finally, anyone who would like to know more about HART and the work we do here should please take a look at our new web site, www.himalayananimalrescueteam.com Our old address is now being used by another charity; this is totally out of order and understandably causing great confusion amongst our supporters.



● TV crew filming the Rinpoche and his monks



● Two Tibetan ladies with their Apsos

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