



BACKGROUNDER FOR PRESS RELEASE (October 5, 2006)

About the Worldwide Nature Artists Group (WNAG)

The Worldwide Nature Artists Group (WNAG) is the world's foremost international organization of nature artists, dedicated to the celebration and preservation of our natural heritage. The WNAG is internationally recognized for its prestige, elite pool of talent and the uniqueness of its innovative programs and activities. Membership is by invitation-only, through a juried process and is limited to 500 artists worldwide. It reads like a "Who's Who" of nature art, and includes the top names in the field, including Robert Bateman, John Banovich, Guy Coheleach, Glen Loates, Pollyanna Pickering, Gamini Ratnavira, Andrea Rich, and David Shepherd.

Using leading-edge communications technology, the WNAG furthers its mission of promoting nature art and supporting conservation, biodiversity, and sustainability globally, through artistic expression, education and innovative cross-disciplinary initiatives. Founded in 1997, the Group operates in a non-profit capacity and is committed to working cooperatively and creatively with other organizations that share the same concerns for our planet. For more information, visit www.natureartists.com.

About the WNAG Flag Expeditions Program

The WNAG Flag Expeditions Program was created to make possible the field study and artistic rendering of endangered species or habitats deserving of greater public attention. There will be a strong emphasis on the study of unique, threatened habitats, and rare or endangered species in remote parts of the world. WNAG Signature Members can apply to obtain financial support and the privilege of carrying the WNAG flag on their journey.

Upon return from the expedition, participating artists will be required to submit to the Foundation, a written journal and sketchbook of their journey, photos with the WNAG flag in situ, a signed flag and video footage when possible. The Foundation will provide funding, as well as prominent exposure in a growing number of venues including on the WNAG Web site, for each artist and each expedition.

Based on Foundation funding to-date, at least two Fellowships - each worth up to \$5,000 US - will be made available each year.

The first WNAG Flag Expedition was completed in January 2006, with artist David Kitler. Full coverage of this trip, including photographs and a complete exhibit of Kitler's Flag Journal, can be seen on the WNAG Web site.

Pollyanna Pickering and her upcoming journey to Bhutan

Background: Bhutan is known to its inhabitants as 'The land of the Thunder dragon'. Located in the Himalayas, bordered by Tibet, Nepal and India, virtually the entire country is mountainous. Thanks to its remoteness, political isolation, small population, and difficult terrain, Bhutan has emerged into the 20th century with the majority of its forested lands and unique ecosystems intact. Now, with an increasing population, improved roads, and limited farming land, a major effort is needed to protect this virtually unspoiled mountain kingdom.

Bhutan is home to 165 species of mammals, many of which are extremely threatened. The most remote of the Himalayan countries, Bhutan is the least touched by modernity and is included in Conservation International's list of 19 Global Hotspots for conservation of biodiversity. This 'hotspot' list identifies high biodiversity ecosystems under the greatest threat of destruction as well as wilderness ecosystems which

remain virtually intact. These priority 'hotspots' occupy less than 2% of the earth's surface between them, but contain more than 50% of earth's terrestrial biodiversity, and house almost 75% of the world's most endangered plant and animal species.

The main threats to the environment come from poaching and logging. Many of the endangered species in Bhutan are sought after for body parts which have supposed medicinal or other valuable properties. The Bhutan Forestry services division operates an anti-poaching programme, which encompasses endangered plants, animals and trees.

Pickering will visit several of the country's reserves, where she will sketch in the field, creating a record of the diverse habitats, and the wildlife which inhabits the region. On her return to her studio she will complete 50 pieces of original work for a major exhibition, followed by lecture tours and gallery shows. These will highlight the natural history of a Kingdom about which remarkably little is known in the west, and stress the importance of conserving the ecology of the region.

All the animals in Bhutan are protected by the Buddhist ethic, which prohibits killing. As a further protection, the *1995 Forest and Nature Conservation Act* defines several species as totally protected, including the Asian elephant, clouded leopard, leopard cat, and the red panda, a species Pickering has previously painted following her expeditions to China. Bhutan has also developed an Integrated Conservation and Development programme with assistance from the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) to allow people living within a protected area to farm, graze animals, and collect firewood in harmony with protection management.

The Himalayan black bear, and sloth bear can also be found in Bhutan. Other large mammals include the Sambar deer, musk deer, wolf, yak, water buffalo, and the greater one-horned rhino. So far, 675 species of birds have been recorded in Bhutan, reflecting the country's wide range of ecological environments. It is especially famous for its wintering populations of the vulnerable black-necked cranes. The Ibisbill, a high-altitude wader, is unique to the region.

Tigers can be found throughout Bhutan, although the population is mostly concentrated in and around Royal Manas National Park. Governmental conservation measures, coupled with the protected and almost inaccessible habitat, provide sufficient areas to sustain viable breeding populations of several other species of cat, including the Asiatic golden cat, fishing cat, clouded leopard, and marbled cat. The snow leopard can be found in high altitude areas.

Because of the unique variety of plants and animals found within Bhutan, ecologists consider this eastern Himalayan kingdom to be an area critically important to global efforts to preserve biological diversity. A total of 26% of the country is within protected areas – either wildlife sanctuaries or national parks, providing habitat for the many endangered species. Large areas of the country remain virtually unexplored. Even the protected areas have not yet been fully studied, and the indigenous species not as yet been comprehensively catalogued.

In addition to visiting the Royal Manas National Park, the Jigme Dorji National Park, and the Black Mountain National park, Pickering would aim to travel to the Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary. This reserve is unique, because it is the only sanctuary in the world created specifically to protect the habitat of the yeti! The Bhutanese name for the yeti is 'Migo' and these creatures are widely believed to exist throughout the northern part of the country.

The Blue Poppy, Bhutan's national flower can also be found in this region. A monocarpic plant, it blooms only once before producing seeds and dying. Until a British botanist confirmed its existence in 1933, the blue poppy was also widely believed to be mythical - just like the yeti.

Following this journey, it is likely that Pickering would be inspired by the symbols of Bhutan's religion – the colourful prayer flags which flutter throughout the landscape. Buddhist art aims to transmit in symbols or signs a spark of the eternal stream of life and consciousness – a noble tradition to aspire to!

About Pollyanna Pickering

Pickering is recognized as one of Europe's foremost wildlife artists. She is the most published fine artist in the UK, and her original paintings hang in corporate and private collections throughout the world from Australia to Siberia.

Pickering studied at the London Central school of Art, graduating with distinction, and she has worked freelance since 1969. Her original paintings have been exhibited to critical acclaim in top galleries throughout the UK and Europe. She has her own gallery in the Peak District of Derbyshire where she lives and works. In 1983 her work was first accepted for display by the Royal Academy, the same year in which she won her first major trophy, the Silver Palette Award. For many years she was accredited to the Tryon and Swann gallery, and has exhibited at the Mall galleries with The Society of Wildlife Artists, and in Australia with Christies Fine Art.

Pickering has dedicated her life to the welfare of animals - not only in conserving habitats and species, but also alleviating the suffering of individuals. She is the Founder of the Pollyanna Pickering Foundation, which raises funds for the protection and rescue of wildlife, endangered species and the environment as well as emergency disaster relief.

She is member of The Wildlife Art Society International, and The Society of Animal Artists (New York) and a signature member of the World Nature Artists Group and the Society of Feline Artists.

Pickering is a highly acclaimed public speaker, giving over 100 talks each year about her expeditions and conservation work. She is currently booked for lectures through to 2008, with many venues and societies inviting her back annually to hear her latest talks. In 2004 she was voted 'Speaker of the Year' at the national speaker finders conference, beating strong competition from professional lecturers, politicians and actors.

For More Information

Worldwide Nature Artists Group: www.natureartists.com

WNAG Flag Expeditions Program: www.natureartists.com/flagprogram

Pollyanna Pickering: www.natureartists.com/pollyanna_pickering.asp

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