

# Islanders stalked by tiger through the jungle of Nepal

Research expedition has close call with Royal Bengal

By David Edbrooke

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BEING charged at by tigers baring their fangs while crossing the Nepalese jungle on the backs of giant elephants was all in a day's work for a group of explorers led by Island adventurer Colonel John Blashford-Snell, when they travelled to South Asia recently.

A team of 20 from the Scientific Exploration Society, including Jerseywoman Jennifer Ellenger, journeyed to Nepal last month to carry out conservation studies on various animals, including tigers and rhinos.

The group, which included two doctors, a dentist and an engineer, camped within the Bardia National Park in the western region of the country, from where they undertook wildlife population counts while mounted on five domestic elephants provided by the park director.

And on the first full day in the jungle, they encountered the scariest of sights – and sounds.



■ Colonel John Blashford-Snell and his group of adventurers from the Scientific Exploration Society pose with the Jersey flag in Nepal

'Moving at a steady, lumbering gait we heard a low cough coming from a bush and then with a blood-curdling roar, a ten-foot Royal Bengal tigress charged at us baring its fangs,' said Ms Ellenger, who is a member of the Jersey branch of the Scientific Exploration Society.

'It hurtled at us like greased lightning and made a hell of a din – it was very good for the adrenalin,'

added Col Blashford-Snell. 'But we were safe on the elephant because the tigress knew that one sweep of its trunk could kill it.'

Environmental expert Professor Alastair Driver, of the University of Exeter, co-ordinated the wildlife studies, and over nine days the group combed the forests, jungle and grasslands to carry out their research.

'The expedition proved to be a real success and hope-

fully our research will be of value to the Bardia National Park,' said Col Blashford-Snell, who founded the Scientific Exploration Society in 1969.

'On this expedition we were particularly keen to see how the tiger was multiplying, secondly whether the rhino was still surviving and to see how the wild elephants were doing.

'The biggest joy was recording the increase in

tigers. When we were last there, in 2012, there were thought to be about 20 tigers across more than 1,000sq km. We discovered there has been an enormous increase in the tiger population and we encountered tigers every day.

'Today there are 2,000 Nepalese army soldiers guarding the area and protecting it, and that's why the tiger populations have grown – because no poach-

er is going to go anywhere near the park.'

The expedition party also visited a school which had been rebuilt thanks to funds of more than £4,000 raised by the Society.

'We raised over £4,000 towards the rebuilding of the primary school and I was able to raise almost £1,000 towards it thanks to generous Jersey people,' added Ms Ellenger.

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A ten-foot Royal Bengal tigress charged at us baring its fangs

Jennifer Ellenger

'And we provided monetary grants to local people, including a family whose baby was dragged from his house by a seven-foot man-eating crocodile,' added the colonel.

'The family had managed to save the baby, but the child sustained terrible injuries.'

During their visit, the group handed out reading glasses to villagers and toys to children, and ran a pop-up dentist clinic for local people.