Biodiversity of
Raj Bhavan
Gangtok, Sikkim, India
Biodiversity of Raj Bhavan
Gangtok, Sikkim, India

AUTHORS:
Usha Ganguli-Lachungpa
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Dedicated to
Late Smt. Karuna Singh
(1943 to 2010)

First Lady of Sikkim

whose passion for flowers
and work on rebuilding of the Raj Bhavan gardens
will remain everlasting
in its blooming flowers and plants.
His Excellency
Shri Balmiki Prasad Singh,
Governor of Sikkim
who restored this silent witness of history
to its former glory in 2009
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Foreword

Sikkim is a land blessed with rich biodiversity. From prehistoric times, the original inhabitants of Sikkim (Lepchas, Bhutias and others) have played major roles in conserving the flora and fauna of the land and in preserving the purity of water. The coming of the Ramayan-Mahabharata tradition and Hinduism to this region further advanced the ethic of conserving ecology. All these belief systems reinforced their intrinsic local values about the preservation of ecology. It is not surprising that the local people view the forests and mountains as abodes of their gods and goddesses and their preservation as a sacred duty.

Over the years the abundant biodiversity of Sikkim has attracted scholars and monks, botanists and nature lovers. Ever since the British Scholar J.D. Hooker spent two years exploring the eastern Himalayan region and produced a masterly study of Sikkim’s flora in the late 1840s, Sikkim has fascinated botanists and lovers of nature.

The biodiversity profile of Sikkim, both wild and domesticated, is enriched by more than 4500 flowering plants, more than 523 species of wild and indigenous orchids, around 28 species of bamboos, seven species of canes, more than 350 species of ferns, around 450 species of birds, more than 600 species of butterflies and probably more than 2000 varieties of moths besides other species of insects (including micro-organisms) on land, in the air and in the water.

When I began residence in the Raj Bhavan, Sikkim, I was amazed by the beauty and tranquility of the place and its location. Although the campus was constructed in 1890 significant changes have since taken place, but the Raj Bhavan retains its natural ambience, peace and serenity.
With each passing day I came to discover the astounding variety and profusion of plants, animals, birds and insects in the Raj Bhavan compound. It presented a teeming microcosm of the biodiversity of Sikkim in general.

I could visualize how John Claude White, the first Political Officer and the founder of these magnificent premises, was attracted to this pristine site then located in sheer wilderness. White has paid a rich tribute to this discovery in the following words:

"In my jungle wanderings around Gangtok, I came across a charming site in the midst of primeval forest which seemed suitable in every way, so I determined to build on it, felling only the trees which might possibly endanger the safety of the house, a necessary precaution, as many of them were quite 140 feet high............. and in front the ground fell away with a magnificent view across the valley, where, from behind the opposite hills, Kanchenjunga and its surroundings snows towered up against the clear sky, making one of the most beautiful and magnificent sights to be imagined, and one certainly not to be surpassed, if equaled, anywhere in the world”.

The original biodiversity that existed on the Raj Bhavan campus included large Oaks, Chestnut, Magnolia, the beautiful Ironwood tree Sygmingtonia populnea locally called ‘Pipli’, small trees like the native Olive called ‘Bhadrasey’ Elaeocarpus lanceaefolius, fragrant shrubs like Daphne used for making local paper and thick groves of bamboo, useful for weaving mats.
Interestingly, at the beginning of the last century this campus was an entry-point for numerous exotic garden plants from around the world into Sikkim and her neighbouring States. Conversely, many indigenous plants from Sikkim such as alpine herbs, shrubs, trees and orchids reached distant continents through the efforts of successive Political Officers who resided here.

The natural richness of the biodiversity of Raj Bhavan as well as beauty of its campus was enhanced by the Political Officers (both British and Indian) and Governors who lived here. Several of them took a personal interest in the conservation of both the biodiversity and the beauty of its garden. However, the Raj Bhavan has also witnessed phases of indifference and neglect. Natural calamities, too, have adversely affected the biodiversity.

The first set-back to biodiversity in the post-1975 era was reduction in the size of the Raj Bhavan estate from 200 acres to the present 70 acres in order to meet housing and office accommodations for both the State Government and the Government of India. As a result, concrete structures and human habitations have replaced trees and shrubs, birds and butterflies, insects and moths, orchids and rhododendrons. Periods of indifference and neglect also meant human interference in gardens and construction of footpaths for movement of security and service staff with little attention to biodiversity needs. The earthquake of 2006 led to the decision to build a new Raj Bhavan in the campus over an area of 5 acres causing further destruction of trees and plants and the raising of concrete structures.

In addition, Raj Bhavan itself, a landmark heritage building, was in a state of disuse due to the damage caused by the earthquake February, 2006. It was claimed that the building could not be restored and it was declared inhabitable. Even the upkeep and maintenance of the surrounding areas of Raj Bhavan comprising garden and compound with its own rich natural biodiversity, also seemed to lack the attention that it deserved. It was evident that the entire complex including the heritage house needed to be restored to its past glory.

On my arrival as Governor in July, 2008, I soon realized that the beautiful garden and the forested compound of Raj Bhavan urgently required attention both from aesthetic point of view and in order to prevent further loss and extinction of its once-renoowned biodiversity.

However, before one could think of improvements to the garden and the compound, priority had to be given to restoration of the house. I recalled some of my earlier experiences in restoration and retrofitting works of monasteries and historical monuments during my tenure as the Union Culture Secretary and instinctively felt that the retrofitting of this house was feasible.

A high level committee of civilians, civil servants and experts together with a representative from Indian National Trust for Art Culture and Heritage (INTACH) was constituted. This proved to be a very useful approach. The retrofitting of the Raj Bhavan under the aegis of this high level Committee and under the technical supervision of Thapar University, Patiala, was commenced and was completed in August, 2009.

While the retrofitting and renovation work was going on, I thought it appropriate to initiate measures for improvement of the idyllic charm of the garden and the forested compound around Raj Bhavan.
There was, I felt, a need to adopt a comprehensive approach in terms of both improving the physical vistas but also to conserving whatever remained of the natural wealth of the estate (sizeable areas of Raj Bhavan land had been requisitioned for other developmental interventions by the State and the Central Government agencies).

In another context I have recorded my views about Raj Bhavan in the following words:

“Raj Bhavan has a rich and inspiring history. Physically its majestic location, with a view embracing the Khaschendzonga mountain range and Gangtok valley, is a constant reminder of how human aspirations can blend with the magnificence of nature. Artistically, the campus now demonstrates how creative craftsmanship has fashioned a harmonious synthesis of British and Sikkimese architecture. Symbolically, Raj Bhavan is now a structure worthy of the Indian State and its constitutional attributes. To me, personally, the renewal of Raj Bhavan represents the confluence of preservation and progress, heritage and innovation, designed in ways acceptable to the diverse interests in the community within which it is situated. Raj Bhavan is indeed the measuring rod of Gangtok”.

During an environmental conservation programme held at Raj Bhavan in 2009, I took the opportunity to impress upon the officials and experts present the importance of recording and identifying the species of plants and trees within Raj Bhavan complex. It was decided to compile a systematic, documented book which could help scholars, researchers, administrators, teachers, students and laymen who may take interest in the natural heritage of the region. It is, I strongly believe, our responsibility to preserve, improve and assemble data on the bounty that nature has bequeathed to us. We have a sacred duty to enrich these endowments so that the heritage of our habitat will not be lost to future generations.

The need is to recapture the achievements of the past. J.C. White, the builder of the campus, found the garden as “a great joy and an everlasting source of amusement and employment” to himself and to his wife. In his memoirs White feelingly recalls the beautiful green lawns that they enjoyed even in winter, the profusion of early spring bloom “seldom seen in England”, the delicate mauve of the abundant Wisteria on the house and the wealth of roses that “flowered in such profusion, thousands of blooms could be gathered without making the smallest impression”. It was “a sight worth coming miles to see”.

The authors of this book Smt. Usha Lachungpa, Shri. Sudhizong Lucksom and Smt. Dechen Lachungpa and their colleagues and staff deserve commendations for their valuable inputs and their unstinting efforts in preparing this beautiful monograph, its pictorial arrangement of flowers, birds and animals and the descriptive notes.

It is my hope that this book, while imparting information and pleasure, will strengthen our resolve to make the Raj Bhavan a microcosm of the rich biodiversity of the eastern Himalayan region in the future. In that sense, this volume is more than a record of what we have and what we have done – it is a pledge for the future.

Bhumita Bhadra Singh
Governor of Sikkim
Raj Bhavan, Gangtok
27th May, 2010

The very diversity is a repository of life, for it is through diversity that resourcefulness and resilience are ensured. Only in a world with diversity can we realize that the survival of mankind without the diversity of other life is an exercise in futility. Biodiversity is life insurance for life. This biodiversity to feed, clothe and shelter us and as keep us sane and healthy.

The Raj Bhavan Complex is a sister institution to the original dense forest that covered over a 100 years ago, providing wind security for the local people. The purpose of this book is to improve the Raj Bhavan Garden. His Excellency the Governor of Sikkim, Prasad Singh is a welcome one in the Forest, Environment and Wildlife.
Preface

The very word ‘Biodiversity’ means the ‘variety of life’. Sikkim as a renowned hotspot of biodiversity is famous world-wide and for its small size, perhaps the richest anywhere in various life forms. Few realize that the survival of mankind is not possible without the diversity of other life on this planet. Biodiversity is life insurance for life itself. We need this diversity to feed, clothe and shelter us as well as keep us sane and healthy.

The Raj Bhavan Complex is a small remnant of the original dense forest that clothed Gangtok over a 100 years ago, providing water and energy security for the local people. The present initiative to improve the Raj Bhavan Gardens as desired by His Excellency the Governor of Sikkim Shri Balmiki Prasad Singh is a welcome one; more so because the Forest, Environment and Wildlife Management Department is stepping into a new centennial era of modern scientific forestry. It is a tribute to the previous occupants of Raj Bhavan that the *Wisteria sinensis* planted there some 120 years ago, still survives and is depicted in this book. Recent plantation efforts include over 500 saplings of *Prunus* sp. and *Michelia* spp.

It was John Claude White who built the Raj Bhavan, then called the Residency, and it was also he who sent Crown Prince Sidkeong Tulku to Oxford for higher education, which effort culminated with the formal demarcation of Sikkim’s forests by the Crown Prince. Thus started the era of modern forestry in Sikkim which perhaps finds no parallel in the rest of the country. Sikkim has a long history of conservation and sustainable use of natural resources. The laws, policies and programmes of the later years are rooted in those strong conservation ethics responsible for the survival to this day of Sikkim’s extensive forest and wildlife protected area network making it the best in the country.

This book on the biodiversity of the Raj Bhavan Complex by our dedicated team has thus become a part of our centenary celebrations. The documentation of the extant flora and fauna of Raj Bhavan was a long felt need and we have strived to produce this well illustrated book with hope that readers will put this endeavour to good use.

S. T. Lachungpa, IFS
Principal Chief Conservator of Forests cum Secretary
Government of Sikkim
‘Raj Bhavan’, a name steeped in history for most and in mystery for the common man, is an exclusive secluded area located on a hill top above Gangtok township. Not many are privy to this part of the State Capital, hidden away behind a forested screen from the main road.

Earlier known as the Residency, a legacy left behind by Sikkim’s first Political Officer John Claude White, built in 1890, the property was renowned for its lawns and gardens and its European architecture. JC White recounts that the Residency garden was “a great joy and an everlasting source of amusement and employment” to himself and his wife. He comments on the beautiful green lawns they enjoyed even in winter, the profusion of early spring bloom “seldom seen in England,” the delicate mauve of the abundant wisteria on the house and the wealth of roses that “flowered in such profusion, thousands of blooms could be gathered without making the smallest impression.” He adds: “Perhaps the most beautiful sight was my office, a building a few hundred yards from the house, which was completely covered, roof and chimney included, with roses, and was a sight worth coming miles to see” (kcl.ac.uk/about/history/archives/india/domestic/garden.html).
You can still see today the famed Residency garden’s trailing Wisteria with its blue showers of flowers planted by White himself 120 years ago, at the entrance of Raj Bhavan, as reminisced by our own forester-gardener Mr. K. C. Pradhan. Later European occupants had introduced bulbous flowers like Daffodils and Narcissus. Today the area still has well tended lawns and gardens with seasonal flowers like Tulips, Lilies, and hybrid orchids as well as many species of trees like Rhododendrons and Magnolias. Historically interesting also are the native Beilschmiedia roxburghiana and the introduced exotic Cryptomeria japonica trees, their large girths uncommon outside the sanctuary afforded by Raj Bhavan campus.

Many hidden treasures are lost to mankind simply because generally people are not aware of their presence and hence not able to appreciate the need for their conservation. This book is a result of the initiative of His Excellency the Governor of Sikkim Shri Balmiki Prasad Singh to bring this hidden treasure to the notice of the layman and add to the eco-tourism initiatives of the Government of Sikkim, besides highlighting the role of gardeners, foresters and the general public in safeguarding this important piece of Sikkim’s heritage. We hope this book achieves this goal.

Acknowledgements: We acknowledge the enthusiasm and encouragement of Mr. C. Lachungpa CCF (Land Use & Env.). Thank you Dr. Anna Balikci-Denjongpa of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok for help with pictures and historical accuracy, Dr. Avishek Bhattacharjee for checking flora list for scientific accuracy, Mr. Bharat Prakash Rai for the Nepali names of birds, King’s College, London for pictures of the Residency from its website, all 15 people who shared their photographs and Dependra Dewan, Sanjit and Mrinal Nandi for composing and designing this document.

Usha Ganguli-Lachungpa, Sudhi Zong Lucksom and Dechen Lachungpa
in every way, so I determined to build on it, felling only the trees which might possible endanger the safety of the house, a necessary precaution, as many of them were quite 140 feet high, and in the spring the thunderstorms, accompanied by violent winds, were something terrible and wrought havoc everywhere. By levelling the uneven ground and throwing it out in front, I managed to get sufficient space for the house, with lawn and flower beds around it.

Behind rose a high mountain, thickly wooded, which protected us from the storms sweeping down from the snows to the north-east, and in front the ground fell away with a magnificent view across the valley, where, from behind the opposite hills, Kanchenjunga and its surrounding snows towered up against the clear sky, making one of the most beautiful and magnificent sights to be imagined, and one certainly not to be surpassed, if equalled, anywhere in the world”.

http://kcl.ac.uk/about/history/archives/india/domestic/residency.html ......White published a surprisingly detailed and long list of plants found in his gardens as part of his account of working life in Sikkim. He also includes an image of ‘Wallichianum Lillies’ found in the Residency garden, and a nearly identical image can be found in Beryl’s album. As her grand daughter informs us, Beryl shared her parents’ passion for gardening. Perceval Landon also describes the appeal of the Residency garden: ‘Double Residency gates open and shut behind one...through the tree ferns and the dying bamboos of the drive one emerges into the English roses and clean short turf of Mrs Claude White’s home-made Paradise.’

White retired in October 1908. built was a lasting legacy he left to all the incumbents of the post: Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet based on the comforts of the English villa he had built. They were Sir Charles Campbell, Lt. Colonel W.F. O.G. Bailey, Major J.L.R. Weir, Mr. Sir Basil Gould and Anthony and more officers, David McDonelt, Battye and H. Richardson also

A. J. Hopkinson was the last British Resident of Sikkim. When India gained British rule in 1947, the Residency was the residence of the Indian Chiefs and referred to as ‘Bara Kothi’. A. J. Hopkinson had from 1889-1975 (Claude White to Gyan) 30 years between the first Political Of and the withdrawal of the last. White’s completed Residency building was not exposed to such a house. Tensions between the Whites and request permission to use the house; to see how it looked like what European furniture was available and what was still in use. A round table was also copied the round table for their private use.

In 1975, the institution of the Chogyal of Sikkim and Sikkim was formally induced as a formally induced Union State. For the culmination possible, Shri B. G. Governor of Sikkim on 18th M
White retired in October 1908. The Residency he built was a lasting legacy he left behind. After White, all the incumbents of the post of Political Officer Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet based in Gangtok enjoyed the comforts of the English villa-like Residency he had built. They were Sir Charles Bell, Major W.L. Campbell, Lt. Colonel W.F. O’Connor, Major F.M. Bailey, Major J.L.R. Weir, Frederick Williamson, Sir Basil Gould and Anthony J. Hopkinson. (Three more officers, David McDonald, Capt. R.K.M. Battey and H. Richardson also temporarily held the post).

A. J. Hopkinson was the last British Political Officer of Sikkim. When India gained independence from British rule in 1947, the Residency became the residence of the Indian Political Officer, locally referred to as ‘Barra Kohi’. A span of 86 years i.e. 1889-1975 (Claude White to Gurbachan Singh) lay between the first Political Officer’s appointment and the withdrawal of the last.

White’s completed Residency was a revelation, an object of much curiosity for the Sikkimese hitherto not exposed to such a house. They would often call on the Whites and request permission to wander around the house; to see how the Whites lived and what European furniture was like. The Residency had bay windows and a round dining table. This really fired the imagination of the local Sikkimese Kazis who also incorporated bay windows and copied the round table for their own residences.

In 1975, the institution of the Chogyal was abolished and Sikkim was formally inducted into the Indian Union as her 22nd State. For having made this culmination possible, Shri B.B. Lal was made Governor of Sikkim on 18th May, 1975 the very day that the amending Bill received the President’s assent. This marked the conversion of Residency into Raj Bhavan. The list of his successors is as follows:

1. B.B. Lal
2. Homi J.H. Taleyarkhan
3. Koma Prabhabhar Rao
4. Bhishma Narayan Singh
5. T.V. Rajeswar
6. S.K. Bhatnagar
7. R.H. Thahilani
8. P. Shiv Shankar
9. K.V. Raghunath Reddy (addl. charge)
10. Chaudhary Randhir Singh
11. Kidar Nath Sahani
12. V. Rama Rao
13. Sudarshan Agarwal
14. Balmiki Prasad Singh

In its previous designation as India House or “Barra Kohi”, it had been rated as one of the India’s best ambassadorial residences. Sited well above the town and insulated from the noise and fumes of the bazaar, the classic gabled structure blends into the greenery and trees of the landscape and looks upon the entire Khangchendzonga Range.

The area of the compound now consists of lawn and garden as well as kitchen garden, fruit trees and orchids. White’s Residency has stood as a silent spectator for over a 100 years as winds of change blew over Sikkim’s political landscape. However, the Valentine’s Day earthquake of 14 February 2006, the second big earthquake faced by this magnificent complex more than a century after the 1897 one that ripped through Gangtok’s bowels.
badly damaged the Raj Bhavan and rendered it structurally unstable. Fortunately, the then Governor was in his winter camp at Rangpo. A Camp Raj Bhavan was organized at the Circuit House below Ganesh Tok. In December 2007 the Camp shifted back to the old Raj Bhavan Annexe which was renovated. A new Raj Bhavan is being built in the complex.
Retrofitting and Renovation of Raj Bhavan

One of the effects of the 14th February 2006 earthquake in Sikkim was damage to the Raj Bhavan, with severe cracks in its walls rendering it structurally unstable and in danger of collapse in the event of fresh tremors. The authorities immediately undertook construction of an annexe and shifted the incumbents of Raj Bhavan therein. In July 2008, His Excellency Shri B. P. Singh became the next Governor of Sikkim. The Government of Sikkim agreed to his idea of retrofitting Raj Bhavan based on prior experience with some monasteries and historical monuments as Culture Secretary, Government of India.
Thapar University, Patiala, was appointed as Consultant and retrofitting was initiated under the leadership of Professor Abhijeet Mukherjee. A team from the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) had also previously visited Raj Bhavan following the quake, and together formed an advisory group with some local people. All strongly advised conservation of the historical and architectural values as well as need to ensure minimal visible impact of any rehabilitation measures. Retrofitting work involving about a 100 people working upto 18 hours a day was initiated on 4th December 2009 under Shri Raj Mohan Pradhan, Additional Chief Engineer, Government of Sikkim. Raj Bhavan has now gained its former glory in additional to several internal strengthening measures, ensuring that this heritage structure lives to see yet another century or more.
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Biodiversity of Raj Bhavan Complex, Gangtok

The diversity of life forms in Gangtok's Raj Bhavan Complex is to be seen to be believed. The entire Complex, spread over an area of almost 10 hectares at an altitude of about 1800m is contiguous at its upper end and to its east with Ganesh Tok-Pinetum-cum-Smrirdvan and the Himalayan Zoological Park at Bulbuley which links further up with the Ratey Chu Reserve Forest (RF) almost all the way to the Cho La Range bordering the Chumbi Valley. At its lower end and to its west it links up the last green lung of Gangtok, the Forest Colony at Balwakhani, going further down to the Rani Khola (River) separating it from the bird-rich Fambong Lho Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). It thus forms a vital part of the forested Oxygen-Bank and more importantly, Water-Bank on which depends the very survival of the state capital, Gangtok.
FLORAL DIVERSITY includes various species of native and exotic trees like Oaks, Chestnuts, Himalayan Alder, Rhododendrons, Magnolias, Michelia, Cryptomeria japonica, Japanese Cherry Prunus cerasoides; shrubs like the paper-yielding Edgeworthia gardneri with its attractive blossoms hanging in small yellow bunches, a magnet for various bird species; the thorny Rubus ellipticus bushes with tasty yellow berries, and the un-edible red and yellow varieties of the exotic Night Queen or 'Raat-Raani' Cestrum shrubs with their white and red berries respectively; so also the many varieties of attractive ferns including the large primitive Tree-Fern and fern-allies like Selaginella, Lycopodium and Equisetum greening the edges and untended nooks of the Complex.

Many of the large old Engelhardtia spicata trees with their long inflorescences and winged seeds can be seen festooned with varieties of epiphytes like the orchids Pleione, Dendrobium, the red-flowered Agapetes serpens, climbers like Rhapidophora, the itchy Mucuna, large and small ferns, mosses and lichens.

Bamboo diversity can be seen in species like Sinarundinaria intermedia, Sinarundinaria hookeri and Dendrocalamus hamiltoni. Many exotic shrubs have also established well in this complex over the century, providing valuable shelter to small birds and animals. The ground flora consists of varieties of grasses and herbs including some valuable medicinal plants like Artemisia vulgaris and Astilbe rivularis. Many seasonal flowering plants like Calendulas, Petunias, Asters, Marigolds, Primulas, Sweet Peas, Lilies, Roses, Hybrid Orchids and Calla Lily Zantedeschia are lovingly maintained by the Raj Bhavan gardeners, providing splashes of colour on the lawns, while the heady scent of the large flowered Michelia doltsopa trees flavour the air delicately. A rare annual treat is the Rhododendron arboreum in flower, its blood-red blossoms lighting up this lovely tree, truly an incandescent gift of nature.

FAUNAL DIVERSITY includes a variety of small mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, butterflies, moths, beetles, dragonflies and many other insects. In fact the entire complex is part of an Important Bird Area or IBA which encompasses the Gangtok township, Ratey Chu Reserve Forest, Bulbuley and the Fambong Lho Wildlife Sanctuary. The most commonly seen animal is the brown Himalayan Squirrel Dremomys lokriah. The occasional Large Palm Civet Paguma larvata locally called 'Kala' can be seen clambering on the Engelhardtia trees. Yellow-throated Martens or 'Malsapro' have also been seen here as are the smaller weasels ('Nyauri Musa') which chase after small birds and mice.
The most magnificent however are the rarer Flying Squirrels *Petaurista magnificus* locally called 'Rajpantahi'. Occasionally some Barking Deer and Jackal also stray into the fringes of the Complex from surrounding forested areas or can be heard during dawn or nights.

The most easily sighted wildlife however are the large numbers of birds seen and heard within the Complex and surrounding areas.

The earliest to call at around 4.30 am are at least four species of owls including the Himalayan Wood Owl, Collared Scops Owl, Jungle and Barred Owlets. These silent predators keep the Complex clear of rats and mice providing a valuable but free service. As the sky lightens, the Raj Bhavan wakes to a dawn chorus of bird-song. The Great Barbet or 'Nyaul', Green-backed Tit or 'Chichinkotey', the blue-green Verditer Flycatcher or 'Hareni', the White-throated Fantail, various Laughingthrushes.
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The most easily sighted wildlife however are the large numbers of birds seen and heard within the Complex and surrounding areas.

The earliest to call at around 4.30 am are at least four species of owls including the Himalayan Wood Owl, Colbared Scops Owl, Jungle and Barred Owlets. These silent predators keep the Complex clear of rats and mice providing a valuable but free service. As the sky lightens, the Raj Bhavan wakes to a dawn chorus of bird-song. The Great Barbet or ‘Nyauf’, Green-backed Tit or ‘Chichinkotey’, the blue-green Verditer Flycatcher or ‘Hareni’, the White-throated Fantail, various Laughingthrushes...
A sighting of the red and blue dragonflies and golden-green damselflies are a sure sign that the nearby water sources are clean and fresh. These ‘tigers of the air’ are a wonderful biological control for mosquitoes in summer. The diversity of web-weaving, ground dwelling and ant-mimicking spiders, another of nature’s marvels and silent predators of pesky flies and mosquitoes, is astonishing. This area is also good for various species of beetles, bugs, praying mantises like Stick-Insects, Moths, Grasshoppers and Crickets.

Occasionally in the vegetation you might be lucky to spot a Japalura lizard like a miniature green dinosaur or a shiny Skink chasing after insects. Other reptiles known to occur but seldom seen in the complex are Rat Snakes, Himalayan Pit Vipers and Cobras.

As the day brightens and warms up, the manicured flower beds, lawns and other areas of the Complex attract varieties of butterflies and bees. Commonest among these are the Indian Tortoishelle, Indian Red Admiral, Himalayan and Common Jesters which breed on Stinging Nettle shrubs or ‘Sisnu’. Golden, Azure and Purple Sapphire butterflies fly like living jewels, giving little indication that their life cycles depend utterly on underground dwelling ants, while the Common Five-Ring and other brown coloured butterflies prefer the more shaded bamboo brakes and grassy patches. You can see the sun-loving Tortoishelle, a very territorial butterfly chasing away much larger Swallowtails like Red Helen and Spangle from their basking areas.
Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cifer*

White-crested Laughingthrush *Garrulax leucolophus*

Archaeoattaecus edwardsii

Tree Fern *Cyathaea spathulosa*
The entire complex is strategically located such that one can get grand panoramic views of the mighty Khangchendzonga Range, India's highest and the world's third highest mountain peak, but more importantly, Sikkim's Guardian Deity. This, combined with the fresh clean air, calm serenity and soothing weather makes the Gangtok Raj Bhavan Complex a perfectly hidden paradise worthy of all the care and love lavished on its maintenance. It is indeed a treasure and pride of Sikkim.

One may also find the harmless but beautiful Glass Snake or Glass Lizard Ophisaurus gracilis gracing the area its back shining an electric blue pattern. These beautiful but shy creatures also provide silent yeoman service to mankind. Smaller snakes like Trachyesium guentherii form valuable food for birds such as the Blue Whistling Thrush which is perhaps Raj Bhavan's best songster.

The most familiar amphibians in the complex are the Himalayan Bullfrog Nanorana liebigii, Himalayan Toad Duttaphrynus himalayanus, and some Philautus species of scrub or tree-frogs; the latter's 'tic-tic-tic' calls providing nightlong orchestras during monsoon breeding season.
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Cymbidium whiteae perhaps the most beautiful among wild epiphytic orchids in the world, is today on the verge of extinction. Its natural history was previously unknown. Nina Ranke, wife of John Claude White the then Political Agent to Government of Sikkim first discovered this orchid from Gangtok during 1889. King and Panting, authors of “The Orchids of Sikkim” named it after her.

Till then the species was safe and well guarded in the deep woods of Gangtok Township at 1700m and surrounding areas, hanging from tree-top branches. Its short hanging inflorescences laden with whitish-green flowers studded with minute purple speckles was not only unique in appearance but also a perfect camouflage.

Cymbidium whiteae is endemic to Sikkim and exclusively confined to Gangtok Township. However it was recently recorded from Rumtek on the fringes of the Tamang Lho Wildlife Sanctuary opposite Gangtok where it needs to be conserved in situ.
Orchids

**Coelogyne stricta**: Epiphytic or Lithophytic. Flowers whitish yellow to a shade of pink. Flowers from September-December at altitude about 1000-1200m. It is the most common species of Orchids.

**Coelogyne corymbosa**: Epiphyte; flowers pure white and fragrant; flowering season is from May-June; Altitude 1800-2800m; not very common.

**Coelogyne longipes**: Epiphyte; flowers 2cm across, pale green with yellow. Flowering season is from May-July; grows at altitude of 1800-2500m, commonly found.

**Coelogyne occultata**: Epiphyte; flowers white with some oblique yellowish brown and two large blotches on the lip, strongly scented. Flowering season is from March-April, grows at altitude of 2000-2800m; an uncommon species.
Orchids

*Catasetum striatum*: Epiphytic or lithophytic; flowers whitish yellow in a shade of pink. Flowers from September-December at altitude about 1000-1200m. It is the most common species of Orchids.

*Catasetum euryphorum*: Epiphytic; flowers pure white and fragrant. Flowering season is from May-June; Altitude 1800-2000m; not very common.

*Catasetum reticulatum*: Epiphytic or lithophytic; flowers white and slightly scented. Flowering season is March-April; grows at altitude of 1500-2000m; common.

*Catasetum fimbriatum*: Epiphytic; flowers pale brown. Flowering season is Sept-Nov; altitude of 800-2000m; common.

*Catasetum longiflorum*: Epiphytic; flowers yellow and greenish. Flowering season is from May-July; grows at altitude of 1200-1500m; commonly found.

*Catasetum fimbriatum var. equinum*: Epiphytic; flowers white with some shade. Flowering season is March-April; grows at altitude of 1200-1500m; common.

*Rattanphyllum decipiens*: Epiphytic; flowers yellow tinged with green; no fragrance. Flowering season Aug-Sep; altitude 1200-1500m, not common.
Cymbidium longifolium: Epiphytic, pale lemon yellow occasionally flushed with pink. Flowering season Oct-Nov; at an altitude of 1700-2300m, common.

Cymbidium hookerianum: Epiphytic. Flowers spread 6-10.3 cm across, yellowish green with spotted lip with brownish purple dots. Flowering season Feb-May; at an altitude of 2000-2400m. Not so uncommon but threatened.

Pleione praecox: Epiphytic, spread 7-10cm across, flowers white suffused with purple. Flowering season Sept-Dec at an altitude of 1500-2400m, most common.

Muscotris barbata: Epiphytic, spreads 2-3.5cm long yellowish green with large brown markings. Flowering season Nov-Feb at an altitude to 1200-1800m. 1 common.

Eria coronaria: Epiphytic. Spread 2.3-2.8 cm across. Flowers cream white tinged with violet and lip yellow. Flowering season Oct-Apr at an altitude of 1800-3000m, common.

Epigeneium amplum: Pendent, small, brown with purple brown, glabrous, erect. Flowering season September at an altitude of 1500-1900m. Rare.
**Cymbidium longifolium**: Epiphytic, pale lemon yellow flowers, occasionally flushed with pink. Flowering season: Oct-Dec, at an altitude of 1700-2200m, common.

**Cymbidium hookeri**: Pseudobulbs, flowers spread 3-4 cm across, flowers yellowish green with spotted lip with brownish red spots. Flowering season: Feb-May, at an altitude of 2000-2500m, uncommon but attractive.

**Phalaenopsis praecox**: Epiphytic, spread 7-8 cm across, flowers white suffused with purple. Flowering season: Sept-Dec, at an altitude of 1500-1800m, most common.

**Phalaenopsis huillii**: Epiphytic, lithophytic, spread 6-7 cm across, flowers white, flowering season: Jan-Mar, at an altitude of 1800-2100m, uncommon.

**Monstera deliciosa**: Epiphytic, spread 3-5 cm, leaves yellowish green with large brown markings. Flowering season: Nov-Feb, at an altitude of 1200-1700m, rare.

**Epigaea cortifolia**: Plant 15-20 cm tall, roots branching, flowers 1-2 cm across, greenish brown, pendant, flowering season: Sept-Oct, at an altitude of 2800-3500m, rare.

**Epigaea rotundifolia**: Epiphytic or lithophytic, flowers 4-5 cm across, pale chestnut brown, slightly spreading, flowering season: Sept-Oct, at an altitude of 1500-1700m, rare.