
Sudden Encounters and Lasting Marks: An ethnography of those who live alongside wild animals in Bardiya National Park (south-western Nepal)

*Rencontres soudaines et marques pérennes : étude des vécus de celles et ceux
qui coexistent avec les animaux du parc national de Bardiya
(sud-ouest du Népal)*

Nolwen Vouiller



Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/ebhr/4474>

DOI: 10.4000/16ox8

ISSN: 2823-6114

Publisher

Centre d'études sud-asiatiques et himalayennes (UMR8077 CNRS/EHESS)

Provided by Collège de France



Electronic reference

Nolwen Vouiller, "Sudden Encounters and Lasting Marks: An ethnography of those who live alongside wild animals in Bardiya National Park (south-western Nepal)", *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research* [Online], 66 | 2026, Online since 21 July 2026, connection on 27 August 2026. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ebhr/4474> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/16ox8>

This text was automatically generated on August 27, 2026.



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AUTHOR'S NOTE

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Defence date: 6 July 2026

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- 1 Nolwen Vouiller's dissertation examines 'sudden encounters' (*jamkaa-bhet*) between humans and wildlife in and around Bardiya National Park in south-western Nepal. Drawing on 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork in a region where very little research in social science has been conducted recently, it analyses the lived experiences of populations who cohabit with tigers, leopards, elephants, rhinoceroses, crocodiles and snakes in a context of intensive biodiversity protection. The setting up of the Park (1988–1989) and the resulting dramatic increase in animal populations have created a

paradoxical situation: while Nepal celebrates on an international scale the success of its conservation policies, local communities face an increase in animal attacks and crop destruction. These ‘Human-Wildlife Conflicts’, usually studied within the natural or development sciences and seldom approached on a scale of an individual encounter and affect, are neither always binary or antagonistic, as this term implies. Instead, they reveal complex relationships that oscillate between terror and wonder, despair and enrichment.

- 2 Through a multispecies approach, close attention to psychocorporal experience – particularly the expression of ‘surprise’ – and an analysis of local vocabulary, this dissertation explores how inhabitants anticipate, experience and integrate their face-to-face encounters with animals – encounters that sometimes veer towards attacks. The analysis reveals that prior to their happening, these encounters – though ‘sudden’ – are often anticipated. It also shows that after the event, when they do not result in death, they may give rise to a bodily confrontation that leaves more or less visible ‘lasting marks’: physical injuries, bad dreams and avoidance of high-risk areas, but also artistic creations, the heroisation of survivors and a sense of one’s place in the world at large. More broadly, the analysis shows that, beyond individual encounters, the coexistence of people and animals generates secondary benefits (tourism and park-related livelihoods, international recognition) and mobilises unexpected mediators (domestic animals, rivers, certain professions, deities).
- 3 The dissertation thus demonstrates the way human social lives, representations of wildlife and ritual practices are reconfigured both by the interindividual crisis of the sudden, close-range encounter and by the broader challenge of coexisting with endangered yet dangerous animals in the Anthropocene age.

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Keywords: affects, conservation, encounters, human-wildlife conflicts, multispecies ethnography, Nepal

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Nolwen Vouiller holds a state diploma in Psychomotor Therapy (Sorbonne Université, Paris) and a master’s degree in Anthropology (UCLouvain, Belgium). She has completed a joint PhD in Ethnology-Anthropology (EHESS, Paris) and Political and Social Sciences (ULiège, Belgium). Her research examines sudden human-wildlife encounters (*jamkaa-bhet*) in and around Bardiya National Park, Nepal, with a focus on affects and bodily responses. As a singer and musician, she integrates artistic methods into ethnographic practice, particularly for sensory data collection

and public restitution. She is a member of the Multispecies Ethnography and Artistic Methods (MEAM) Network, the Nepal Research Network (RCN) and associate member of the Centre for South Asian and Himalayan Studies (Cesah), among other scholarly associations. The dissertation is available on the ULiège official repository (ORBi): <https://hdl.handle.net/2268/345175>
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