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September 26, 2006

Dear students, faculty, staff, friends:

It is with great sadness that I inform you that Matthew Preece, who received his Master of Arts in Sustainable International Development in May 2004, has died while at work in Nepal. Matt was on board a helicopter this last Saturday transporting dignitaries and World Wildlife Fund workers from the rugged mountains of Ghunsa in eastern Nepal. The team had just participated in the ceremonial hand-over to local communities of managing an important conservation area rich in biodiversity and cultural heritage.

Over the past few days, we have waited in hope and prayer that Matt and others might have survived the crash. That hope now appears dashed. The Government of Nepal has announced a national day of mourning and a public holiday in memory of the Minister of Forest and Soil Conservation and the 23 others lost in that accident.

Matthew was 31 years old.

Matthew's fascination with nature began when he was a child and as he matured he realized that he wanted to devote his life to the conservation of nature. He came to SID to broaden his understanding of biodiversity conservation in the context of developing countries and to learn more about integrating conservation with development efforts.



Matthew was an ecology instructor with Ecology Project International (EPI), a new non-profit organization that strives to partner high school students and scientists worldwide. As an instructor, he taught sea turtle ecology at the Pacuare Sea Turtle Reserve to students from the United States and Costa Rica. He helped create the program where high school students worked, he wrote to us, "in a hands-on environment, working with turtles on a nightly basis. These students became the research assistants of on-site scientists, collecting valuable data and performing conservation activities such as nest relocation."

During his year in residence, Matt won a Heller Alumni Travel Award and used it to attend the 23rd Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The theme of the conference, "Indigenous Cultures and their Interactions with Sea Turtles" greatly influenced his decision to join the World Wildlife Fund after graduation.

Matt was a gentle soul and brought a quiet dedication to his work. He had a real humility about him – a trait essential to development workers.

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Matt did his 2nd year practicum in India working under Prof. Kamal Bawa, the distinguished tropical biologist. Matt was assigned to ATREE -- the Ashoka Trust Research in Ecology and Environment centered in Bangalore, India. I recall how impressed Matt was with the professionalism of their work – and how much he became respected by ATREE for both his skills and his quiet determination.

For Matt, the job with WWF was a dream come true. He assumed professional responsibility as a program officer and was immediately thrust into high level planning for integrated conservation and development in Nepal. For Matt to die on his first major assignment is tragic – not least for the loss the world has suffered of what would have been a brilliant career.

Matthew has now joined those who have sacrificed their lives in service of development and social change. He dedicated himself not only to humanity but to the survival and well being of all creation. His view, and ours, was not limited by the interests of one species alone.

Our hearts go out to his family. SID will be represented at a memorial service in Nepal and in Utah, his native state. We wish that Matt, like Mironda Heston and Guillaume Kakanou, the two other 2004 alumni who have now died on assignment, could have been with us longer, but we love him all the more for his selflessness, for his service, and for his love of the totality of life on earth

Matt's family has asked that in lieu of flowers, gifts may be sent in his memory to the World Wildlife Fund.

Sincerely,
Laurence R. Simon, Ph.D.
Professor and Director

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