

James (Jim) Edward Corbett was born in Naini Tal India on 25 July 1875 and grew up in a large family of 14 children. Both his parents were married before and brought children from the previous relationship.

The family spent their summer in a spacious house with a large veranda in Naini Tal, a popular hill station situated on the foot hills of the Himalayas, and the winter months were spent in Kaladhungi, some 16 miles south. Kaladhungi was surrounded by forests where young Jim frequently encountered wildlife including the majestic tiger, leopard, both black and Himalayan bear, spotted deer, peacock, sambhar, langurs and monkeys, several hundreds of species of birds and python. He loved all the creatures except snakes, he did not have much tolerance for snakes, especially the deadly ones. Using a catapult, young Jim collected each species of bird that was seen in Kumaon, for his cousin Stephen Dease who was then compiling a book on Birds of Kumaon. In return, Dease gave him an old rifle and with it Corbett roamed the jungle accompanied by his jungle guru - Kunwar Singh - some times staying away two or three days and nights. One day when Jim was alone, he encountered his first leopard and bagged it with one bullet. He was 10 years old then.

His father, Christopher William Corbett had died when Jim was just 4 years old. Once Jim had the gun, it was his duty to provide meat for the family. His oldest brother Tom took him out and gave basic lessons in shooting, and with the help of his school master 'dead eye Dick' Corbett became a sharp shooter. Family obligations prevented him from continuing his education, and as a result, he had to quit school and find an employment before he was 18. Securing a job with the railways, young Corbett showed promise by being honest and exceeding his job description. Soon he was given the post of Trans-shipment Inspector and posted him at Mokameh Ghat with a salary of Rs.150 per month. Here Corbett worked very hard, sometimes 20 hours a day for several weeks without a day off. But every now and then, he managed to get away for a few days to spend with the family.

It was during one of these holidays in 1907, Corbett agreed to go after a most notorious tigress-known as the Chanpawat man eater which killed 438 human beings. Government had offered huge rewards to kill this beast and assigned a large number of hunters, shikaris, Gurkhas and other members of armed forces to hunt the man eater, but none could bag this clever animal. Jim agreed to go after the tigress on two conditions: Call back all hunters from the field and cancel the reward. Jim thought that killing a man eater is an obligation, and not for the money, and he didn't want the entire jungle is filled with men with their finger on the trigger of their rifles. Jim successfully stalked and killed the tigress, and for the next 32 years, a dozen more notorious man eating tigers and leopards were fell to his rifle, thus relieving the villagers from the sheer terror. In all, it is estimated that these man eaters killed over 1200 human beings in the Kumaon area.

During the first and second world wars, Corbett recruited men from hills, serving the country by fighting the enemy. During the 2nd world war, he was assigned to train soldiers in Jungle Warfare, seasoning them to fight the Japanese in Burma. Corbett himself was

exposed to the deluge of rain day and night and contacted tick typhus. He was forced to leave the Army in 1943, and spent the next several months confined to a wheel chair. He had written a small book titled *Jungle Stories* a few years before and printed 100 copies to distribute among his friends and relatives. After returning from the war, he expanded the contents of *Jungle Stories* and sent the manuscript to Oxford University Press in Bombay. Roy Hawkins, his editor suddenly realized that he hit on a gold mine. In 1944 the expanded version was published under the title "*Man eaters of Kumaon*" which became a runaway best seller and has been in print ever since. His second book was *The Man eating Leopard of Rudraprayag* published in 1948 in India, UK and USA.

By now India became independent and almost all British people left India. Jim and Maggie too, left India in November 1947 and settled down in Kenya. Jim had visited east Africa before, hunting lions with Percy Wyndham with whom he jointly owned a coffee farm - Kikafu Estate - on the slopes of Kilimanjaro, near the town Moshi in Tanganyika. Jim and Maggie stayed at the Paxtu cottage where Lord Baden Powell spent his last years. It was here, Corbett wrote his last four books: *My India* (1952), *Jungle Lore* (1953), *Temple Tiger & More Man eaters* (1954) and *Tree Tops* (1955). The last book was an account of Corbett's escorting the princess Elizabeth to a game lodge built on a ficus tree, and when she was there, her father King George V had died in sleep in Sandringham, thus making the princess a queen.

Jim Corbett penned his final book on 6 April 1955, and 13 days later he died after a massive heart attack. He was buried the next day at the St. Peter's Anglican Church cemetery. He was nearing 80. Throughout his life Corbett was very keen in helping the poor people. A strip of land he bought was divided into several plots and built homes and gave them to the homeless, built a stone wall surrounding this village - Choti Haldwani - to protect their crops from marauding animals, provided food, medicine and money to those who needed and listened to the villagers' problems and found remedy for them. The People in Kumaon still regard him as a saint. There has been no other white man who has done so much for the people of Kumaon with the exception of Sir Henry Ramsay.

After his death, Corbett's estate was divided and given bulk of it to the poor folks. Part of the royalty from his books still goes to St. Dunstan's fund for the blind, the rest goes to his blind nephew George Marshall. Eight years after Jim's death, his sister Maggie died on Boxing day, 26th December 1963. She was cremated and the ashes were interred to Jim's grave. Neither Jim nor Maggie were married. Their grave was practically neglected, and it was in ruins by 1994. After failing to convince Oxford University Press, the BBC (which made a film *Man eaters of India* in 1985) and National Geographic Society which distributed the film in the USA and Canada and a rogue publisher in California to repair and restore Corbett's grave, I went to Kenya on Jim's 119th birth day on 25 July 1994, and with the help of the late Kenya Game Warden and a great admirer of Jim Corbett, and restored the grave. From Kenya I went to England, and then to India, met some more friends and

relatives of Corbett, and established the Jim Corbett Foundation in 1994 which now enjoys worldwide membership. Membership fee is \$25US a year, \$100 for 5 years or \$250 for life, payable by bank money order in US funds to the Jim Corbett Foundation, 1306- 39 Street, Edmonton, Alberta, T6L 2M7, Canada. Members receive our quarterly newsletter Tiger Trails 4 times a year, also advise on travel to Kenya and India as well as generous discount on books and other novelties provided by the Foundation. The main objects of the JC Foundation are to keep Corbett's memory alive, to bring all Corbett fans and friends under one umbrella as well as to promote conservation. Our immediate plans include a Corbett museum to display various editions of his books, letters and photographs and other interesting items related to Corbett and a Library and Reading room featuring books on natural history and sport. In 1997, a concise biography of Jim Corbett titled Under the Shadow of Man eaters was published by the Jim Corbett Foundation, 172 pages with 16 pages of photographs and a slick covers featuring a colour painting of Corbett and a snarling tiger, members price is \$30 +\$12 postage to USA and Canada, and \$18 elsewhere via airmail.