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Celebrating World Water Day



Together with our partners, Faculty of Traditional Medicine, National Land Commission, UN Bhutan and Thimphu Thromde, the Royal Society for Protection of Nature successfully carried out a mass cleaning campaign along the half kilometre stretch of the Chubachu Stream to observe the day and also to mark the one-year anniversary of the stream adoption.

The Chubachu stream still remains highly contaminated with rampant dumping of waste despite several cleaning and

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Phobjikha valley bids adieu to the Black-necked Cranes



Spring is the season when nature awakens after the long winter gap. But for Phobjikha, the dawn of spring also carries with it a certain degree of sadness. It is the season whereby the heavenly and majestic birds, the Black-necked Cranes leave the valley. The first group of BNC, around 50 individuals, left the valley on February 27, 2018, to their summer/breeding habitats. Only one juvenile Black-necked Crane was spotted in Phobjikha valley in the last week of

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Phobjikha valley bids adieu to the Black-necked Cranes

March. Records show that the first cranes arrive in Bhutan in late October and the first group migrate to the north by February end. Most of the cranes arrive by December and leave by mid-March. During their time in Bhutan, more than four months, they forage in natural wetlands and harvested fields. Satellite telemetry studies of BNCs that winter in Bhutan indicated their breeding habitats which are spread across the autonomous region of Tibet. There, they breed in wetlands and lakes and fly south towards the end of autumn to avoid the harsh winter months. A total of 626, including 77 juveniles, were sighted in Bhutan this year, of which 504 were recorded in Phobjikha valley.



Team Satoyama Umi project from Japan visits RSPN

On March 26, 2018, Officials of the Team Satoyama Umi project from Japan visited RSPN headquarters, where an introductory meeting was conducted. Along with the partners, RSPN team visited the project site Phobjikha, Wangduphodrang from March 27-29. The visit was a fruitful one and provided the opportunity for the partners to gauge the progress of the project.





Building capacity on REDD+



The Royal Society for Protection of Nature with technical support from Watershed Management Division (WMD) organized a two-day REDD+ readiness capacity building workshop for the forest-dependent communities of Buli in Zhemgang, and other stakeholders of project area from Zhemgang district and Nangkhor Gewog Administration at Gelephu. During the workshop

the participants were introduced on concepts of REDD+ readiness program in the country, its status, challenges and opportunity under REDD+ program in Bhutan, national REDD+ strategy process, options and Policy and Measures (PAMs). Additionally, REDD+ readiness safeguards in Bhutan was also presented and group works on Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment (SESA) were also

carried out. The workshop was aimed at increasing knowledge of stakeholders on REDD+ readiness program in the country and to enhance their participation in REDD+ decision making in future.

The workshop was funded under capacity building fund from Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) and a total of 18 participants attended the workshop.

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awareness campaigns initiated in the past. It was also found that there is an increase in toilet outlets drained into the stream and at the same time, the Chubachu stream is being used as the source of water by many communities. The present scenario is an urgent call to the general public and the concerned stakeholders to take actions and collectively protect the stream. Let us all put in an extra effort to improve the health of the stream. 1170 kilograms of waste was collected by 136 participants.

Similarly, RSPN together with a group of Japanese volunteers from Thimphu City Corporation successfully carried out the ninth monthly cleaning of the half kilometre stretch of Chubachu stream on February 28, 2018. A total of 270 kilograms of waste was collected during the campaign.

We would like to thank our partners Faculty of Traditional Medicine, National Land Commission, UN Bhutan and Thimphu Thromde for their efforts rendered in the cleaning program and we look forward to your continued support and collaboration in future.





Exchange program under REDD+ for community forest

An exchange visit to community forest under Sarpang district was organized with an objective to understand management practices of different Community Forests (C.F). The visit provided an opportunity for the participants to learn about the best management practices of C.F and its potential benefits. The Community Forests under Sarpang district were chosen as the visit sites in consideration of the fact that the community forest groups here have been able to generate better income and improve their livelihoods through the adoption of good management practices. During the two-day tour, members visited popular community forest management sites such as Singay Gewog Yargaythang C.F, Jemicholing C.F, and Tashiling C.F. These community forests mainly focus on income generation through the management of Non-Wood Forest Product (NWFP). The exchange program was an eye-opener for the participants with several take-home lessons on better forest management and its potential benefits. A total of 18 members from project area participated in the exchange programs.



The exchange visit was part of REDD+ readiness program in Bhutan, which is implemented with the objective to improve knowledge base, to enhance institutional capacity, to improve forest governance and to ensure continued stakeholder engagement, and to support the effort of Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB) towards mitigating climate change impacts through sustainable management of forest resources and improvement of livelihood of the communities. The

readiness program will also contribute to enhance the existing sustainable management of forest resources in the country. At present, communities across the country are involved in sustainable forest management through the program called Community Forest (C.F) management. Similarly, for the project area in Buli there exists two community forests. RSPN extends an appreciation to the Sarpang Divisional Forest Office for all the support rendered during the program.

Need Assessment workshop for the development of Environmental educational reference materials



The project on Environmental Education and Public awareness on Biodiversity conservation in Asia Pacific Region is the regional program implemented in various countries with the financial support from KNCF, Japan. In Bhutan, RSPN is the main implementing agency with the technical support from the Japan Environment Education Forum (JEEF) and Birdlife International Singapore. For effective and meaningful participation

of the communities and long term impact, enhancing the understanding of communities on the issues highlighted through education and awareness is seen crucial. This project seeks to do this through variety of awareness and education activities by using locally appropriate tools and methods. Programs like this will complement and support the ongoing conservation initiatives on

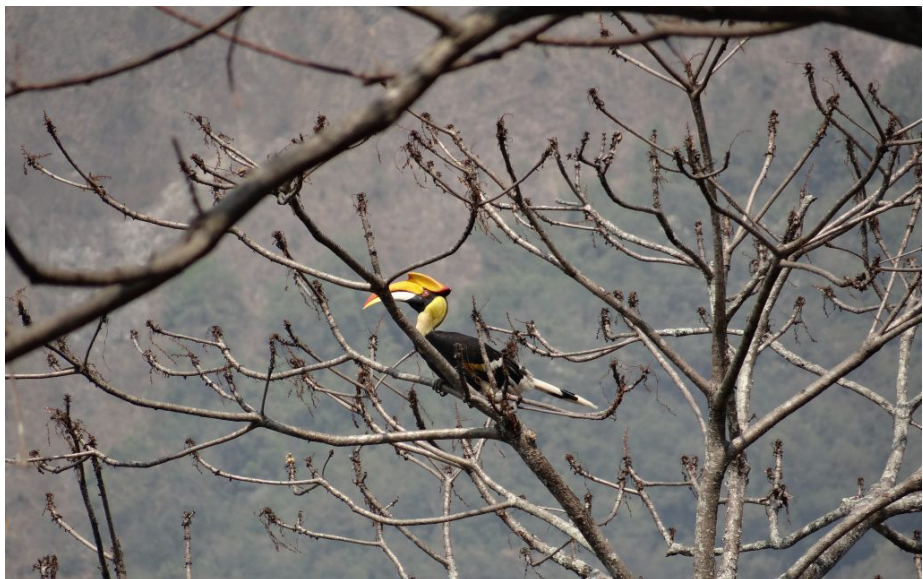
wetlands and Black-necked Cranes. A two-day workshop was conducted in Paro on March 2 and 3, 2018. It was a content validation workshop. Participants were Environmental Science teachers, science teachers and nature club coordinators. It was a two days thorough workshop, where the teachers reviewed the identified environmental educational reference materials.



Project familiarization visit

Along with the officials from Dzongkhag livestock sector, Bardo gewog extension, the project team of the Royal Society for Protection of Nature visited Digila and Langdurbi chiwog, the two for the GEF/ Small Grants Program (SGP) funded project area. The familiarization visit was also aimed at understanding the issues pertaining to farming, area landscape and scope of agriculture land development intervention through current project. RSPN with the fund support from GEF/ Small Grants Program (SGP), UNDP Bhutan, shall be implementing the project under Digila chiwog on sustainable land management and promotion of local agro-biodiversity for food security for the period of two years.

Digila Chiwog which falls under lower Manas basin landscape of Zhemgang Dzongkhag, has a high incidence of poverty attributed to degraded farmland, farm drudgery, the absence of mechanized farming and low soil fertility as reported in SGP country program strategy for Operational Phase 6 (SGP_OP6). The current project will broadly implement three major programs which are agriculture land development, pilot biogas program and agroforestry. Subsequently, project inception meeting will be organized to inform and bring together stakeholders on board.





Interim handing over of Water Supply Infrastructure to Yoeseltse Gewog

During the one week Strengthening Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) project monitoring and evaluation visit, the interim handing over of Water Supply Infrastructure to Yoeseltse Gewog was completed.

RSPN through SDF funding with technical support from Engineering Cell of Samtse Dzongkhag constructed the two Rural Water Supply Infrastructures through gravitational technology to the people of Yoeseltse Gewog and submersible pump technology to the people of Dumsidara village in Phuntshopelri Gewog.

The Water Supply Infrastructures constructed through the project shall benefit more than 500 households in Yoeseltse and 42 households in Phuntshopelri providing access to 24 hours safe and clean drinking water. The water supply is designed to fulfill the requirement for next 15 to 20 years.



Observing Earth Hour 2018

To observe the Earth hour on March 24, the WWF Bhutan and RSPN Bhutan co-organized an inter-school quiz competition and launched WWF Bhutan's wildlife board game Kaadoo to encourage young Bhutanese to connect to nature by "re-connecting" to their knowledge of Bhutan's amazing biodiversity.

Students and teachers from Early Learning Centre Thimphu, Druk School, Thimphu Primary School, Rinchen Kuenphen Primary School, Changangkha Middle Secondary School and Babesa Primary School took part in the event. We look forward to conduct similar environment conservation programs in future.





RSPN's Annual Program and Review Meeting

A week long RSPN's Annual Program and Review meeting noted a remarkable and worthwhile trip celebrating the major achievements in recognition of 30 years in its journey towards the conservation. The Review meeting was held in two different regions, Gelephu and Pangbang from January 22-28, 2018. The purpose of the Annual review meeting is mainly to discuss and update ourselves the year end effort and achievements in different programs. The meeting discussed several important agendas including the review of the year's meeting minutes. Besides days of meeting, the annual retreat offered RSPN staff a perfect break to immerse themselves in the nature-based activities, games and sports. RSPN was also presented with an opportunity to partook in the festival of the Foothills with the main objective of creating awareness on environment conservation. RSPN staff also explored the organic local agriculture products and the varieties of authentic local food showcased in the festival. The festival was organized by Sarpang Dzongkhag officials.



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The Last Herons of the world

White-bellied Heron

Ardea insignis



TOTAL COUNT IN BHUTAN

26 Individuals

GLOBAL POPULATION

Less than **60** confirmed individuals

HEIGHT

127 cm (50 in)

WINGSPAN

2 m (6.6 ft)

KEY THREATS

Widespread habitat loss, degradation and disturbance of forest and wetlands

HABITAT

Sand or gravel bars, usually with adjacent broadleaved forest, from lowlands up to elevations of around 1,500 metres



BE A PART OF THE MISSION

Helping save the herons involves creating a “species bank” of captive birds from which reintroductions might be possible, and several in situ conservation activities need to be executed in parallel to conserve the remaining herons in the wild. To sustain and consistently embark on conservation programs RSPN requires an estimated amount of US\$ 150,000 annually to meet both in situ and Ex situ WBH conservation programs. This can only be made possible with a White-bellied Heron endowment fund of US\$ 3 million.

The Mava Foundation in Geneva has most generously provided a grant of US\$ 1.5 million to RSPN. The interest income generated will meet the operation cost of the captive breeding program. RSPN is seeking for a matching amount of additional US\$ 1.5 million to be added to the endowment fund for the White-bellied Heron, to consistently support conservation efforts outside of WBH captive breeding program. Bhutan Trust Fund for Environment Conservation has provided US\$ 300,000 and we still need to raise US \$ 1.2 million. Become a part of RSPN’s mission to protect these birds and restore their global populations by providing them a safe haven in Bhutan.

Contributions should be sent to RSPN and earmarked, White-bellied Heron Endowment Fund or scan the QR Code to make your contributions online.



CONTACT INFORMATION

Royal Society for Protection of Nature
Post Box : 325, Lhado Lam , Building # 25
Kawangjangsa , Thimphu - 11001, BHUTAN
Telephone: +975 2 322056 / 326130 Fax : +975 2 323189
E-mail: rspn@rspnbhutan.org
www.rspnbhutan.org