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Thai Government presents sewing machines to RSPN



His Excellency Mr. Chalernpol Thanchitt, Ambassador of Thailand to Bhutan (second from right), Mrs. Pema Choden (MD, BBS), Board of Trustees and Dr. Lam Dorji, Executive Director of RSPN

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FEATURED NEWS

Cranes return for the second time

In the so-called Valley of the Black-necked Cranes, Phobjikha, by March 11, people thought the last of the cranes had flown for good to their summer habitat in Tibet. Then, on March 21st, twelve cranes returned.

The exact reason for the return of these nine juveniles and three adults is not yet known. It is possible, however, that the juveniles were unable to make the long and harsh journey that covers great distances and crosses high elevation mountain passes to reach Tibet.

Of the 457 cranes who spent their 2008-2009 winter in Bhutan, 322 cranes were recorded in the Phobjikha valley. The others wintered in Bumdeling (Trashiyangtse,) Khotokha (Wangduephodrang,) and Gaytza, Thangbi and Chokhor (Bumthang.)

Nature camp for students



>> Participants of the nature camp

From 24 to 26 December, 2008, RSPN organized a nature camp at Geon Shari School in Jigme Dorji National Park funded by South Asian Youth Environmental Network (SAYEN).

The nature camp brought together nature club students from ten schools to give them the opportunity to share good experiences, talk about their local

environment, and enjoy a variety of activities. The participants included 4 teachers, 17 boys, 19 girls, two staff from RSPN, and a guest speaker.

The camp encouraged students to connect with the natural world. By involving students actively with nature, we hoped to build their understanding of the environment as our home and the ultimate

source of our livelihoods. In the process of learning, students become more aware of environmental impacts on the well-being of humans, wildlife, and the entire ecosystem.

From early morning to late evening, students were busy with discussions,

>> Contd. on page 2

RSPN Retreat 2009



>> Mr. Andrew conducting basic writing skill training for RSPN staff >> RSPN staff at Hokatsho, Kabji, Punakha



Although the duration for skills training was only two days, it covered important topics that are essential for people new to the research, and gave insights for old hands. With practical exercises, the staff honed their writing style, and much confusion over numbers was dispelled through group discussions.

To cool down after

The Royal Society for Protection of Nature conducts an annual retreat program for its employees in a different location each year. It allows RSPN staff to share and debate productively on issues, new resolutions, and decisions related to field and office affairs. When we all get together, every moment becomes an opportunity for a brainstorm! This year's retreat was conducted in Punakha from the 26th to the 30th of January.

It is essential for employees working

in an environmental and research organization to know the basic terminology, methods, and skills of science. Furthermore, project reports and proposals are very important for civil society employees to communicate with each other, the public, partners, and other stakeholders. Consequently, RSPN's 2009 retreat focused on basic statistics and writing skill development with help from an expatriate volunteer with RSPN, Andrew Bennett.

these brainy days, the staff blew off steam by bird watching, playing volleyball, and taking in the local archery matches coinciding with the Traditional Day of Offering. On the final day of the retreat, we especially enjoyed a day hike to Kabji Hokatsho lake, a truly magnificent work of nature. We appreciated the trees, birds, and mountain vistas on the way up, and on the way down all were actively involved picking up the trash which littered the trail and its beautiful surroundings.

>> *Contd. from page 1*

Nature camp for students

walks, games, and educational videos. Every morning, students explored the area and watched birds. With the guidance of a bird expert, students identified 56 bird species over the course of the camp. Everyone was very enthusiastic and several expressed a strong interest to continue birdwatching on their own.

The guest speaker's talk on Buddhism and the environment was eye-opening for most students. Many felt that there remains lots to learn about conservation from Buddhism, and that Buddhism had probably helped conserve Bhutan's environment for centuries. Students participated with interest and excitement in

lengthy discussions on issues like climate change, the waste problem, and biodiversity.

Perhaps the most important activity was a group discussion on the role and responsibility of Bhutanese youth to conserve the environment. The two most striking views were first that youth should strive to live as a model for others, taking actions like cleaning campaigns, and secondly that the youth should be educators and develop societal awareness, using methods like street theatre.

Undoubtedly, the activity everyone liked the most was a nature walk into the wilderness of Jigme Dorji National Park. Students had direct contact with nature and saw many things that they had never seen in their urban homes. The cool, broadleaved forest with giant trees, bush-

es, herbs, and wild flowers were some of the amazing things students experienced.

Students reported that the camp was a wonderful and unforgettable experience. They learned a lot about nature and many wanted to become part of conservation team. Chungla, of Lungtenzampa MSS, expressed it this way: "Past cannot be present, but present can be future. So, as a youth and a pillar of future Bhutan, it is my responsibility and daily duty to think of nature and act for nature in my small little ways"

As a focal organization of South Asia Youth Environment Network (SAYEN) in Bhutan, RSPN sets priorities for programs related to youth and environment.

Rural water supply and sanitation project in Lhuntse

RSPN initiated a Safe Drinking Water Project in Ladrong, Lhuntse, with financial support from the Bhutan Water Partnership. Despite having a good water source, the community of Ladrong has always lacked safe drinking water due to insufficient storage and distribution

infrastructure. Difficulties for the 600 community members are compounded by the lack of either a road connection or an electricity supply.

The project's main activities included the construction of water storage tank, tap stands in the community, and a num-

ber of HDP pipe connections to ensure a continuous water supply. The new system is expected to solve the water shortage and improve community sanitation. The project was initiated by the Principal of Ladrong Community Primary

>> *Contd. on page 3*

Training for LCSG members



>> *Participants engaged in a group activity*

Local Conservation Support Groups (LCSG) have recently been established in four dzongkhags (Trashigang, Bumthang, Zhemgang, and Sarpang) and two more dzongkhags are in the process of forming LCSGs (Paro and Wangduephodrang.) LCSGs are formed by individuals who share a genuine concern for the environment and a strong desire to support conservation through local action. The groups allow people to collect their talents to monitor problems and develop solutions. LCSGs actively involve Bhutanese in local environmental issues, are a community voice to raise concerns, and have a very important role to play in Bhutan's democratic future.

To help LCSG members develop their ideas, a training workshop was conducted in all the four dzongkhags. The workshop coordinator, Ugyen Lhendup, briefed participants on the purpose, functions, and responsibilities of LCSGs, and the potential to effect real change with these groups. The workshop allowed

participants to share plans and perspectives while developing their understanding of the new concept of LCSGs and their role in environmental advocacy. It also introduced materials designed by RSPN to help LCSG members monitor local environmental threats, develop support networks, and report problems to the community, the media,

other civil society groups, and the government.

In subsequent discussions, participants agreed that it is very important to establish grassroots environmental groups to influence political decisions. Many views were raised on the gap between the government's environmental policies and local actions. They noted signs of rapid environmental degradation in their villages and reflected on the need to bring this to the attention of the government.

Mr. Trinh Thang Long, a volunteer with RSPN, facilitated sessions on how LCSG members can identify local environmental issues, research causes and impacts, and propose solutions. In other sessions, discussion among the participants resulted in a number of recommendations to solve local problems.

Mrs. Rebecca Pradhan, an ecologist and researcher with RSPN, facilitated sessions on biodiversity and its importance for sustainable livelihoods. Most

participants did not have a background in environmental science and found this subject new and exciting. Participants enjoyed pictures of plants, animals, and birds, while the discussion emphasized the negative impacts of human activities on biodiversity and the potential consequences.

With their intimate local knowledge, burgeoning understanding of environmental science, and determination to engage society and political leaders to craft solutions that benefit all beings, we have great hope for Bhutan's new movement of Local Conservation Support Groups. We are heartened by this development, sure in our belief that the active, local involvement of Bhutanese is the surest way to sustainably conserve the Kingdom's natural richness in a way that also supports human livelihoods.

Mr. Kinley and his White-bellied Herons

Throughout the year, RSPN maintains a watchful eye on several of Bhutan's critically endangered White-bellied Herons (WBH). On the Phochu, one of our WBH hotspots, regular monitoring is provided by the service of Mr. Kinley and his family.

From November to February, Mr. Kinley works full time, from dawn until dusk, seven days a week. He walks up and down between Khawajara and the Phochu Bridge, noting how many WBH he sees, where they are, and whether they are feeding, resting, or flying. When they eat, he counts how many fish are caught. When they rest, he notes the particular tree they choose. He also keeps tabs on where the birds roost at night and lets us know when courting starts in February.

From March to October, the pace slows to morning and evening observations. From 6:00 to 9:30 every morning, and 3:30 to dark each evening, Mr. Kinley makes his rounds. The dedication of nature watchers like Mr. Kinley help us compile important data that contributes to our knowledge of WBH ecology. Such knowledge could be an invaluable tool to help us help the WBH fend off extinction, even as pressures rise due to human encroachment, frequent disturbances, and habitat loss.

>> *Contd. from page 2*

Rural water supply and sanitation project in Lhuntse

School and the Geog Leader. With 130 students, the school is the village's only major institution.

To achieve the project's goals, RSPN also partnered with local community members who contributed labor. Thanks to everyone's efforts. The project cost was very reasonable (Nu 62,000.00) and was completed by end of January 2009.

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Thai Government presents sewing machines to RSPN



>> RSPN's Executive Director presents souvenir to His Excellency

His Excellency Mr. Chalermpol Thanchitt, Ambassador of Thailand to Bhutan, presented seven sewing machines to RSPN on February 8th, 2009. RSPN's Executive Director extended a warm welcome to His Excellency and introduced RSPN's plans and programs. The sewing machines will be handed over to communities in Phobjikha to help locals produce souvenirs to promote ecotourism and sustainable livelihoods in the area.

Speaking at the gathering, his Excellency said that his visit to RSPN and the contribution of sewing machines are the

“beginning of cordial and expanding relationship between the Thai Government and RSPN in the area of conservation.” He said that Thailand will continue to explore ways to cooperate with RSPN and support its conservation mission.

Biodiversity and socioeconomic surveys

The RSPN engages in biodiversity and socioeconomic surveys to help us better understand the social needs and natural resource base in these special areas. While the survey results are very interesting, we thought our members might also be intrigued to know more about what goes on behind the scenes, to learn something about the scientific methods themselves.

All our biodiversity surveys begin with a map of the entire area up to the geog's boundary, including villages, farms, forests, and rivers. Over the map, we lay a grid of “1-minute” squares. A “minute” is an angle used by geographers to divide the globe into sections. In Bhutan, a 1-minute square is roughly 1800 meters on a side. At random, we choose about 30% of these squares. Within each square, we randomly select 6 sites. Our preparatory work complete, we are ready to hit the field.

When we reach our sites, it isn't always feasible to sample our minimum area of 20 by 30 meters, so sometimes we don't sample all 6 sites. On the other

hand, if the landscape permits, we expand the site to an area as large as 100 by 50 meters.

Within each site, we locate every tree (including seedlings) and record the species, diameter, and height. We also record the species and percentage cover of every kind of shrub, herb, and grass.

Given that our time and resources are usually limited, we restrict ourselves to opportunistic observations of the area's fauna. By “opportunistic,” we mean that we record sightings of birds and animals as they come along. We usually don't see animals, but record signs of them such as droppings, scratches, and evidence of feeding. That said, for each area surveyed we do commit five consecutive days (from 5:30 to 7:30 each morning and for one hour each evening) to a bird count and search for animal signs.

The socioeconomic survey we use is the Participatory Rural Assessment (PRA) format, designed to identify the community's needs and how those needs are satisfied. The PRA is a series of interactive exercises with groups of 10 to

12 people with 2 to 3 RSPN moderators. There is quite a wide range of exercises, but most are discussion-based using themes or a starting question.

One exercise collects information on the harvest of forest products, including the type of products, the season, how much is harvested, how it is used, if it is sold, and how many people are involved. Another exercise fills out a seasonal calendar, looking at farming events and crop cycles around the year. The development history of the village is also explored, following major events such as landslides, new roads, hospitals, schools, and even the noticeable affects of climate change. The results of both the biodiversity and socioeconomic surveys are especially important to develop community-based natural resource management plans. These plans are vital to strengthen the legal status of conservation areas and to garner the support and cooperation of government institutions.

Previously, such plans have been very helpful in the Phobjikha conservation area, where the Ministry of Agriculture has approved the management plan now being implemented by the Wangduephodrang Territorial Division of the Department of Forest. RSPN is now engaged in similar projects in the Wamrong-Kangpara Conservation Area of Trashigang.

CONTRIBUTION FROM NATURE CLUBS

Water is very important for all living beings. We cannot imagine life without water. Water is lifeline to all of us because without water, we living beings cannot survive at all. Not only that, with the help of water, health can be healthy. We can be very clean student. We can have

very clean home to live. When we save water, we can save money. We shouldn't misuse water. Water can be used to generate electricity.

Nature Club
Changzamtog Lower Secondary School
Thimphu: Bhutan

Water supply for Gangtey and Drang



>> Before water supply scheme



>> After water supply scheme

Gangtey and Drang villages in Phobjikha are part of an important conservation area. Effective conservation requires the support of these communities, but it is impossible for the community to prioritize such efforts when basic needs such as clean water are not satisfied.

The 130 residents of Drang village used to wash their clothes and drink from a stream that ran beside them. There were a few old water posts in the village, but these have been dry for a long time. Dur-

ing the rainy season, the problems got worse as the stream swelled from runoff carrying many unsanitary items.

Similarly, Gangtey village had an acute water shortage that affected all 480 inhabitants, including some 250 monks. The high population completely overtaxed the few water posts in the village, in front of which people had to wait in line.

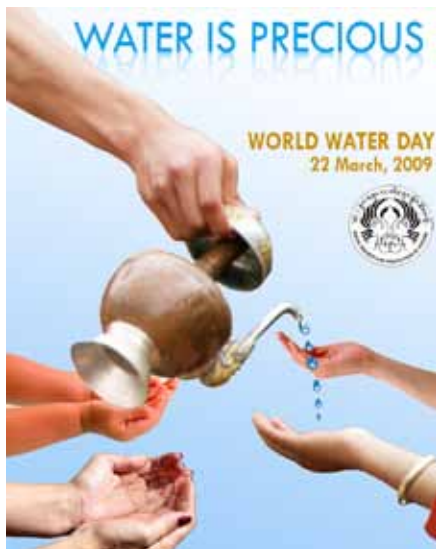
RSPN's Environment and Health Project consulted with the two Gups

to develop a budget to develop a safe and sufficient source of drinking water for the two villages. A total of eight new water posts with underground pipelines, four for each village, were constructed, and a number of old posts were repaired. Four 3000 liter syntex tanks were installed with proper fencing to supply the posts, one for Drang and three for Gangtey.

Since January of this

year, all 600 people in Drang and Gangtey have a clean, sufficient, and year-round water source. To ensure that the new water supplies are to be maintained, a man from Drang was elected and compensated with a monthly wage to oversee the source, pipes, and posts in his village. Gangtey already has a plumber to look after their water supply.

World Water Day Observed



The United Nations designated March 22 as World Water Day to raise awareness of the world water crisis. Each year, World Water Day highlights a specific aspect of freshwater. The table [position...below, above, ...?] gives the different themes that have been the focus of World Water Day celebrations in the

past.

This year's theme of "Shared Water - Shared Opportunities" advocates the sustainable management of freshwater resources, particularly transboundary water management. Organizers hope that raising awareness of this thorny issue, namely how districts and nations deal with the problems of sharing water, will help build mutual respect, understanding, and trust among countries. Water issues are often rife with conflict, and positive progress on them should promote peace, security and sustainable economic growth in the world.

Here in Bhutan, Shari Higher Secondary School, Paro Dzongkhag, made a special observance of World Water Day. Why are we just mentioning this school? What did they actually do?

Freshwater is the most important resource, as vital as it is rare. Only 2.8% of the world's water is fresh. Glaciers and snowfields lock up 2.1%, another 0.65% is held in the soil and groundwater, and the rest (less than 0.05%) is in lakes, rivers, and the atmosphere.

Worldwide, over 1 billion people

have inadequate access to drinking water, 40% of whom are children. 2.6 billion people have insufficient water for basic sanitation. Consequently, 1.4 million children die each year from from diarrhea and other preventable water-borne diseases.

On the other extreme, a mere 12 percent of the world's population use 85 percent of its water. Although businesses that own and operate water systems across the globe profit by US\$200 billion each year, they serve only 7% of the world's population.

The deficit in water and sanitation creates massive economic waste in developing nations. Costs associated with health spending, productivity losses, and labour diversions in sub-Saharan Africa, for example, amount to over US\$28 billion each year, a figure that exceeds the total flow of aid and debt relief to that region. (*The 2006 United Nations Human Development Report*)

WORD SAFARI

Bhutan is known for its richness in flora species, which some of them are endemic to Bhutan. In this issue, we have compiled some species of rhododendrons from *Wild Rhododendrons of Bhutan* by Ms. Rebecca Pradhan.

Please find names that are highlighted in **bold** in the table. We have encircled one to help you get started.

Species Name
*Rhododendron kesangiae
*Rhododendron pogonphyllum
*Rhododendron bhutanese
*Rhododendron flinckii
Rhododendron grande
Rhododendron falconeri
Rhododendron hodgsonii
Rhododendron kendrickii
Rhododendron arboreum
Rhododendron niveum
Rhododendron wightii
Rhododendron lanatum
Rhododendron tsariense
Rhododendron wallichii



R	S	P	N	K	I	N	G	V	L	P
I	L	G	N	E	I	H	S	A	R	T
H	O	D	G	S	O	N	I	I	O	S
B	H	U	T	A	N	E	S	E	J	A
P	E	M	S	N	D	P	T	G	L	R
K	F	W	O	G	R	O	N	F	F	I
E	N	A	E	I	O	G	U	L	A	E
N	O	L	R	A	R	O	I	I	L	N
D	C	L	I	E	S	N	U	N	C	S
R	P	I	T	M	C	P	N	C	O	E
I	R	C	E	K	E	H	L	K	N	G
C	E	H	I	H	F	Y	A	I	E	S
K	B	I	F	O	V	L	Q	I	R	A
I	N	I	D	T	B	L	W	R	I	S
I	T	N	I	V	E	U	M	E	Q	T
R	S	I	G	D	K	M	Z	D	W	A
A	R	B	O	R	E	U	M	K	X	H
E	F	L	A	N	A	T	U	M	O	U
W	I	G	H	T	I	N	Z	J	Y	G
W	I	G	H	T	I	I	D	S	T	K
S	M	B	N	X	V	C	Z	E	G	L

* Species that are endemic to Bhutan

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