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Crane Boy and commemorative postal stamps launched during 17th Black-necked Crane Festival



Executive Director of RSPN Dr. Kinley Tenzin, Diana Cohn and Youme launched the book

The 17th Annual Black-necked Crane festival was celebrated in the courtyard of Gangtey Gonpa, in Gangtey-Phobji valley on 11th November 2015. Since 11th November, 2015 was also the 60th Birth Anniversary of the Fourth King

of Bhutan, this year's Black-necked Crane festival was also very special. It was jointly organized by the two Gewogs of Gangtey and Phobji and the local Environment

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Strengthening conservation of critically endangered White-bellied Heron



Participants at the WBH feeding site at Phochhu in Punakha

The second international workshop, themed "Fostering international co-operation for conservation of the critically endangered White-bellied Heron" on conservation of White-bellied Heron was organized by the Royal Government of Bhutan in collaboration with RSPN from 1 to 6 December, 2015.

The organizers and the wider White-bellied Heron range countries recognized the urgent need and opportunity to take proactive steps to improve the conservation status of the critically endangered bird across its known current range countries

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A new record to Bhutan's bird list



Sharp-tailed Sand Piper (Calidris acuminata)

Narayan Ghallay/RSPN

The preliminary checklist on birds of Buli was conducted from 6 to 9 October 2015 as a part of the Biodiversity assessment of Buli Wetland, funded by GEF Small Grants Programme, UNDP, Bhutan.

A total of 71 species of birds were recorded in Buli and a lot more is expected to add to the list if observations are made throughout the year. It is interesting to note that Buli has a very rich biodiversity of birds, from the most common birds like sparrows and bulbuls to the less noticed Hornbills.

Sharp-tailed Sand piper (*Calidris acuminata*) was recorded during the assessment of Buli wetland. Mr Sherub, an ornithologist with Ugyen Wangchuck Institute for Conservation and Environment (UWICE), confirmed that it is a new record to list of birds of Bhutan.

The Sharp-tailed Sandpiper is only recorded in the Birds of Indian Sub-continent until now.

The First Conservation Film Festival



Honourable Agriculture and Forests Minister Yeshey Dorji launched the festival

Pema Gyamtsho/RSPN

Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN) in commemoration of the birth anniversary of the Fourth King of Bhutan showcased a number of National Conservation Films at the Clock Tower Square.

The purpose of the film show was to raise public awareness and at the same time to inspire personal responsibility among our people in the conservation of the kingdom's natural environment.

The festival included the launch of newly produced documentary film on Black-necked Cranes by Bayerischer Rundfunk (BR) in Germany, titled "*Bhutan- Birds of Heaven*", directed by Christian Herrmann and Udo A. Zimmermann.

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Strengthening conservation of critically endangered White-bellied Heron

of Bhutan, India, Myanmar and China.

The participants comprised of non-governmental organisations, government officials, academics from each range states, as well as international experts representing organisations such as the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC), Heron Specialist Group, the Asian Species Action Partnership, the SSC Species Conservation Planning

Subcommittee, BirdLife International and the International Crane Foundation. They agreed that international collaboration, based on adequate resourcing is vital for the survival of the species. It was agreed that the IUCN, SSC and White-bellied Heron Working Group would help to do this. It was financially supported by Synchronicity Earth, IUCN and SSC.



Opening session of the conference

Indra Prasad/RSPN

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Crane Boy and commemorative postal stamps launched during 17th Black-necked Crane Festival



Students performing crane dance during the festival

Management Committee. The festival is an occasion for the locals to rejoice and celebrate the arrival of the heavenly bird which becomes part and parcel of their daily lives during the winter months.

The festival included cultural programs such as folk songs and dances (some with black-necked crane themes) and mask dances performed by the local people, crane dance and environmental related drama and songs by the school children.

The highlight of this year's crane festival was the launch of the Children's book "Crane Boy" authored by Diana Cohn and the commemorative stamps on Black-necked Cranes and the White-bellied Heron (rarest heron in the world).



His Eminence Gangtgy Trulku and Dr. George Archibald launch commemorative postal stamps



All people offered longevity prayers for the Fourth Druk Gyalpo



Various cultural programs were presented by schools and local community

Buli Environment Management Committee members visited Gangtgy-Phobji conservation area

A total of 20 members from Buli Environment Management Committee (BEMC), Zhemgang successfully completed the wetland conservation and management study tour in Gangtgy and Phobji from 19-23 December 2015.

The study tour raised awareness on wetland conservation and management.

During the study tour, the participants were exposed to the past and current wetland management mechanism in Gangtgy-Phobji valley, importance of wetland management and interacted with the Gangtgy-Phobjikha Environmental Management Committee and the local women's group.

In addition, presentations and discussions on Royal Society for Protection of Nature's activities such as the Community-based Sustainable Tourism, solid waste management and the Black-necked Crane conservation were also conducted.



RSPN field officials introduced Gangtgy-Phobji conservation area and projects to the members.

Signing of MoU with Samtse Dzongkhag on WASH project



The meeting was attended by DASHO DZONGDA and RSPN's Executive Director

The meeting presented the project and its status, discussed on the implementation of water activities and signed MoU between RSPN and Samtse .

The signing of MoU were based on the following:

1. to ensure efficient utilization of the project resources,

2. to provide clear directives for coordination and implementation of project activities, and
3. to recognize the mutual interest and understanding on the overall objectives of the project.

RSPN has been implementing the SDF funded project on “Strengthening Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) services” in two Gewogs of Phuntshopelri and Yoeseltse under Samtse Dzongkhag since 2014.

The meeting educated the participants about the overall goal of the project “improve the quality of life of rural populace by providing safe, convenient and sustainable water, sanitation services and better hygiene”. It comprises of three main components of water, sanitation and hygiene, which encompass the development of infrastructures, capacity building/skill development trainings and awareness programs.

Communities in project areas in Samtse trained on masonry



Local community members being trained on basic masonry skills

As part of the Rural Sanitation and Hygiene Programme (RSAHP), technical skill training (masonry training) on construction of improved toilet was conducted for interested communities in the project areas in Samtse with technical support from PHED of the Ministry of Health.

The participants were engaged a day long in-house theory class on general background on how the rural water supply and sanitation had began. They were trained on basic techniques of construction to address its common problems. They were also taught on ensuring standard quality of construction materials.

GPP Bhutan in tertiary educational institutes for awareness programs

In October 2015, the Green Public Procurement (GPP) Bhutan Project teams presented to around 1200 students and faculty of the Gaedu College of Business Studies (GCBS), the College of Natural Resources (CNR), and College of Science and Technology (CST) as part of raising awareness about sustainable public procurement.

At CNR, the talk was led by the Royal Society for Protection of Nature with major focus on sustainability of the natural capital and sustainable development.

At GCBS, the Bhutan Chamber for Commerce and Industry team focused the presentation on economic benefits through business and preferential treatment of

Cottage, Small and Medium Enterprises, creation of green jobs, innovation, promotion of entrepreneurship, practice of fiscal incentives and improvement of local economy as espoused through GPP practices.

At CST, the team led by Royal Institute of Management focused on the roles of engineers specifically in mainstreaming GPP into infrastructural development, research and development in renewable



In one of the awareness programs at Gaedu College of Business Studies

energies, green buildings and green roads, energy efficiency, urban planning and sustainable hydropower development.

Second Working Group Meeting on CBST held in Haa

The second working group meeting of the local stakeholders for the community-based sustainable tourism (CBST) project in Haa was held on 15 October 2015 at the National Centre for Riverine and Lake Fishery.

The group members were introduced to newly established Haa Valley Cooperative as one of the potential partners for agriculture based product development. Mr. Nobuo Nakagawa, CEO of Prima Inc., an organic product marketing firm in Japan was also introduced to the participants.

They were updated on the progress and the ongoing activities of the CBST project and the quarterly work plans. They were also updated on the baseline survey report, recent assessment of local crafts in Haa and potential sites identified for



The committee members

development of a Visitor Centre and a concept of Michino Eki (roadside station) in Fukushima, Japan, as a potential

inspiration for development of a Visitor Centre in Haa.

Mass Handwashing Station installed at Yoseltse MSS in Samtse



Students wash hands at newly installed facility.

Health Engineering Division of the Ministry of Health and fabricated and installed by Bumthang Chumey Technical Training Institute.

The installation of mass handwashing station will assure in promoting as follows:

1. Easy access to handwashing as a result of no need of queuing for handwashing;
2. Students can save time and have their hands washed within the recess time;
3. promotes handwashing among children as it is fun washing hands in group; and
4. Saves space and money for school as it can cater to large number of students at same place.

To commemorate the Global Hand Washing Day, a Mass Handwashing Station was installed and handed

over to YMSS on 15th October, 2015. This was also the first ever mass handwashing station, designed by Public

Black-necked Cranes arrive in Phobjikha



Black-necked Cranes in Phobjikha

After a long wait, the Black-necked Cranes arrived in Gangtey-Phobji valley in Wangduephodrang on 6th November 2015. Gangtey-Phobji valley is one of the largest non-breeding habitats in Bhutan.

A total of 13 Black-necked Cranes arrived that day.

In 2011-12 winter as well, the first group of crane arrived during the same time (i.e on 7 November).

Local conservation group formed for wetland conservation project



Buli Environment Management Committee (BEMC) members

The members were presented on the objective, provision, vision, purpose and principle of the institutionalization of such committee in Buli.

Its main objective is to develop mechanism for collective decision making within a committee for any environmental related activity taking place in Buli,

and to work in close consultation and common consensus in safeguarding rich environment of Buli.

With management plan nearing to completion, inception of local conservation group was formed. The Buli Environment Management Committee (BEMC) is a replication of local conservation group in Phobjikha.

RSPN's current project on "Wetland Conservation and Sustainable Management in Buli" broadly has four objectives, which are development of wetland management plan, institutionalization of protection and management of wetland through enhancing local capacity, awareness and advocacy program and watershed and wetland conservation activity.

Global Handwashing Day observed at Yoeseltse MSS in Samtse

Global Handwashing Day is an annual global advocacy day dedicated to increasing awareness and understanding about the importance of handwashing with soap as an easy, effective, and affordable way to prevent diseases and save lives. This year's theme for Global Handwashing Day was "Raise a hand

for hygiene".

Celebrated annually on October 15, Global Handwashing Day is an opportunity to design, test, and replicate creative ways to encourage people to wash their hands with soap at critical times.

The event was attended by officials from Samtse Dzongkhag, Yoeseltse Gewog

administration, Yoeseltse Dratsang, Ministry of Health, RSPN, SNV, students and staff of YMSS. Students presented various cultural programs and also demonstrated hand washing. Poster competition on handwashing theme by students of YMSS was also organized to commemorate the day.

Results of Art Competition conducted among students

RSPN announced the long awaited results of art competition organized among students on Black-necked Crane and White-bellied Heron conserva-

tion themes on 13th November, 2015. It was organized to commemorate the 60th Birth Anniversary of His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye Wang-

chuck.

RSPN congratulated all the winners and thanked the participants who took part in this competition.

1. Black-necked Crane

Category	Sl. No.	Name	School	RANK
Category 3	1	Rinzin Gyeltshen	Bayling HSS	1st
	2	Kinley Wangchuck	Bayling HSS	2nd
	3	Tashi Wangchuck	Sarpang HSS	3rd
	4	Tshangpa	Chukha HSS	4th
Category 2	5	Dewan Rai	Mendrelgang CS	2nd
	6	Rajesh Rai	Chukha HSS	1st
	7	Raj Kumar Rai	Sarpang HSS	3rd
Category 1	8	Durga Das Galley	Khandothang PS	1st
	9	Ajita Rai	Khandothang PS	2nd
	10	Namgay Yozer Karpo	Utpal JS	3rd

2. White-bellied Heron

Category	Sl. No.	Name	School	RANK
Category 3	1	Indra Bdr.Pulami	Dechentsemo CS	1st
	2	Tashi Tobgay	Drukgyal HSS	2nd
	3	Damchoe Dorji	Dechentsemo CS	3rd
Category 2	4	Tapash Mongar	Woochu LSS	2nd
	5	Radgol Yeshe Gyeltshen	Utpal JS	3rd
	6	Dorji Rinchen	Mendrelgang CS	1st

CS=Central School LSS=Lower Secondary School JS=Junior School HSS=Higher Secondary School

Bhutan adds 15 new species to its biodiversity

These include 11 plants, and a fish, a bird, a snake, and a moth each



A new pit viper emblazoned with an ornate yellow, red and orange pattern, at first glance looks like a carefully crafted piece of jewellery.
© Liang Zhang

A sneezing monkey, a walking fish and a jewel-like snake are just some of a biological treasure trove of over 200 new species discovered in the Eastern Himalayas in recent years, according to a new report by WWF.

The report, *Hidden Himalayas: Asia's Wonderland* released on World Habitat Day maps out scores of new species found by scientists from various organizations including 133 plants, 39 invertebrates, 26 fish, 10 amphibians, one reptile, one bird and one mammal.

The volume and diversity of discoveries, 211 in total between 2009 and 2014, highlight the region as one of the most biologically diverse places on Earth; the discoveries listed equating to an average of 34 new species discovered annually for the past six years.

"I am excited that the region – home to a staggering number of species including some of the most charismatic fauna – continues to surprise the world with the nature and pace of species discovery," said Ravi Singh, CEO of WWF-India and Chair of the WWF Living Himalayas Initiative.

Some of the most striking discoveries include a vibrant blue dwarf 'walking' snakehead fish, which can breathe atmospheric air and survive on land for up to four days, although moving in a manner much clumsier than a slithering snake. The report details an unfortunate monkey whose upturned nose leads to a sneeze every time the rain falls, and a living gem - the bejeweled lance-headed pit viper, which could pass as a carefully crafted piece of jewellery.



The vibrant blue walking snakehead fish can breathe atmospheric air and survive on land for up to four days.
© Henning Strack Hansen

The report also underscores the dire threats facing the vibrant ecosystems across a region spanning Bhutan, north-east India, Nepal, north Myanmar and the southern parts of Tibet. The report found that as a consequence of development, only 25% of the original habitats in the region remain intact and hundreds of species that live in the Eastern Himalayas are considered globally threatened.

The region is currently facing a wide range of threats and pressures, with climate change by far the most serious. Population growth, deforestation, overgrazing, poaching, the wildlife trade, mining, pollution and hydropower development have all contributed to the pressures on the fragile ecosystems in the region, the report says.

"The challenge is to preserve our threatened ecosystems before these species, and others yet unknown are lost," said Sami Tornikoski leader of the WWF Living Himalayas Initiative.

"The Eastern Himalayas is at a crossroads. Governments can decide whether to follow the current path towards fragile economies that do not fully account for environmental impacts, or take an alternative path towards greener, more sustainable economic development," said Tornikoski.

The stakes are high as the Himalayas are home to at least 10,000 plant species, 300 mammal species, 977 bird species, 176 reptiles, 105 amphibians and 269 types of freshwater fish. In addition to this, between 1998 and 2008 in the Eastern Himalayas, at least 354 new species were discovered.

In a bid to protect the region's rich diversity of flora and fauna, WWF is actively involved in supporting the countries of the Eastern Himalayas' progress towards green economies that value ecosystems and the services they provide to the millions of people in the region. Located in one of the most ecologically fragile regions on Earth, the WWF Living Himalayas Initiative urges a strong regional collaboration to ensure that people in this region, live within the ecological means and remain within the boundaries of one planet.

WWF continues to develop and support programmes in the region that help secure a brighter future for the region's people and biodiversity, including its rich array of species – those that we already know and those still waiting to be discovered.

Source: <http://wwf.panda.org>

Birds of Bhutan

In commemoration of the 60th Birth Anniversary of His Majesty the Fourth King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, we will publish collection of pictures of birds found in Bhutan. His Majesty was awarded Champion of the Earth in 2005 for his exemplary leadership in environmental conservation.

Bhutan ranks in the top 10% of countries with the highest species density on earth, and it has the highest fraction of land in protected areas as well as the highest proportion of forest cover of any Asian nation.

- (<http://www.unep.org/champions/laureates/2005/DrukGyalpo.asp>)

Common name: Blue-capped Rock Thrush
Scientific name: *Monticola cinclorhynchus*

Photographer: Koji Tagi



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