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# RANGZHIN



Inspiring personal responsibility for environmental conservation since 1987

RSPN Bi-annual Newsletter | Vol. 16 Issue 1 | 2023

## Inside this Issue

In the news Pg. 2

Strengthening species conservation Pg. 6

Securing sustainable livelihoods Pg. 13

In conversation Pg. 17

Improving the lives of the communities Pg. 18

Species watch with RSPN Pg. 20

## Become a Member

We have over 2,000 members across the world supporting our conservation efforts. Keeping our mission at the core, the membership platform is another great way to inspire and get people on board to support the cause.

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## Greetings from RSPN

Warm greetings, esteemed readers! We are excited to present the 16<sup>th</sup> edition of our RANGZHIN newsletter, Volume 16, Issue 1, for the calendar year 2023. In this newsletter, we proudly showcase the remarkable progress of our conservation efforts and initiatives.

With your unwavering support, RSPN has been able to embark on several initiatives in 2023, contributing significantly to the preservation of Bhutan's unique biodiversity and sustainability of our precious ecosystem. This year, RSPN played a crucial role in enhancing the conservation of endangered flagship species, upscaling the livelihood enhancement activities and putting tremendous effort into enhancing and disseminating climate change knowledge in Bhutan.

The accomplishments made by RSPN were possible with the continued support and dedication from the government, donors, partners, and well-wishers. Your contributions have been instrumental in enabling RSPN to make a significant impact on sustainable development, including environmental conservation and livelihood enhancement. As we venture further, we look forward to maintaining and nurturing our valuable partnerships and exploring new collaborations. Collectively, we can continue to make a profound difference in preserving the unparalleled natural beauty and biodiversity of Bhutan.

We take this opportunity to acknowledge and extend our heartfelt gratitude to each and everyone of you for being an integral part of our conservation journey. We remain committed to uphold the principles of good governance: transparency, accountability, integrity, as always, in any endeavour that the RSPN pursues for a shared vision of a sustainable future.

Happy reading!

**RSPN Team**

*Rangzhin* is RSPN's bi-annual newsletter started in 2003. It is one of the communication tools to garner support for the organization. Through this platform, we inform, educate, engage and connect with our friends across the world.

## IN THE NEWS

### ▶ RSPN signs project agreement with the High Commission of Canada on climate resilience

Her Excellency Amanda Strohan, Deputy Ambassador of the High Commission of Canada to India, New Delhi, and Dr Kinley Tenzin, Executive Director of RSPN signed a Project Agreement on the 'Enhancing Climate Resilience of Marginalized Communities' on 8<sup>th</sup> May 2023. The project will be implemented in the remote eastern village of Lauri Community, Samdrup



Jongkhar. The project aims to enhance the local community's livelihood through climate change adaptation and mitigation. It is anticipated to benefit 330 households and 2,000 individuals with the implementation of sustainable farming and food production, water resource management, and marketing of farm products.

Her Excellency said; "She is happy with the partnership between RSPN and the Canadian High Commission and impressed the works of RSPN in environmental conservation, livelihood enhancement and climate change mitigation and adaptation". The project is planned to start from 2023 and complete by February 2024.



From Left to Right - HE Amanda Strohan and Dr Kinley Tenzin

### ▶ Green Climate Fund (GCF) team visits RSPN

The Independent Evaluation Unit team of the GCF had a bilateral meeting with RSPN on May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2023. The interactive session discussed on the relevance and effectiveness of the past GCF's Readiness and Preparatory Support Programme in Bhutan. RSPN shared its experiences on environmental conservation and a range of climate change mitigation and adaptation projects implemented in the local communities across the country.

Given the RSPN's relevance with GCF key results areas, RSPN also shared its near future plan of becoming GCF Delivery Partner for readiness program and

ultimately GCF Direct Access Entity (DAE). The brief meeting between GCF and RSPN, the first of its kind, was a major landmark in strengthening goodwill and partnership

between the RSPN and GCF. The GCF team also made a field visit to the RSPN project sites on May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2023.

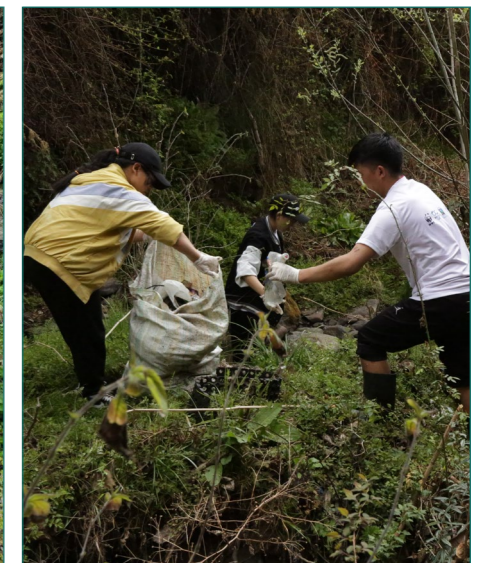


### ▶ Observing World Water Day 2023

To observe the World Water Day for 2023, RSPN organized a Cleaning Campaign for the Chubachhu Stream with the support of 132 volunteers mostly residing along the Chubachu Stream. The Campaign was also aimed to sensitize and create awareness on the hazardous impact of polluting water bodies through solid waste dumping indiscriminately and damaging river ecosystem.

The campaign team covered 2,000 meters of stream stretch and collected a total of 2,667 kg of solid waste.

The campaign was organized with the financial support from WWF Bhutan, Bhutan for Life, and Bhutan Trust Fund for Environmental Conservation.



### ▶ Collective efforts towards saving White-bellied Heron (WbH)

Recognizing the importance of the active participation and engagement of local communities and relevant stakeholders, a consultation workshop introducing the project for 'Enhancing the conservation of White-bellied Heron in the Lower Wangchu River Basin' was held engaging the local communities, Local Government officials, Agriculture and livestock supervisors, Forestry and Dzongkhag officials from 12-13 June, 2023 in Chhukha Dzongkhag.

The two-day meeting was followed by a training workshop of socio-economic status and conducting inventory in Lower Wangchuk River basin.



► **GCF Executing Entity (EE) workshop for CSOs**

The two-day workshop for relevant Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) that have a potential of becoming Executing Entities (EEs) to Green Climate Fund (GCF) Readiness and Preparatory Support Programme was held in Haa from 8<sup>th</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup> June 2023. The objective of the meeting was to identify the strengths and gaps of CSOs in becoming GCF EE to execute GCF projects. The identified CSOs as EE will later help in implementing GCF-funded projects in the country. A total of 17 CSOs attended the workshop. The workshop was organized by the RSPN as an aspiring Delivery Partners of the GCF with the financial support from the GCF readiness program.



► **Building capacity of GCF EE to address Climate Change and disaster-related risks**

RSPN has organized a GCF capacity building training workshop from 5-6 July 2023 in Haa for three CSOs namely Bhutan Ecological Society, Bhutan Youth Development Fund, Tarayana Foundation and RSPN. These CSOs have been found relevant and meeting GCF parameters in becoming GCF EE and implementing its projects. The objective of the workshop was to orient EEs on GCF strategic results areas, policies, including social, environment and gender

► **Write-shop for developing a GCF Readiness proposal**

In partnership with the National Designated Authority (NDA) for GCF in Bhutan and the Ministry of Finance, RSPN conducted a training workshop on July 13, 2023, on GCF readiness proposal. This was further followed-up by a in a Write-shop held at the Black-necked Crane Education Center in Gangtey-Phobjikha from July 17-19, 2023 to develop a Readiness Proposal to GCF.

The three-day Write-shop was intensive, engaging and participated by relevant stakeholders: Tarayana Foundation, Bhutan Ecological Society, Bhutan Youth Development Fund, National Centre for Hydrology and Meteorology, and Office of the Attorney General.



► **Eco-restoration of degraded lands**

RSPN observed the Social Forestry Day 2023 with the communities who received the funding support for carrying out the restoration of degraded areas by planting trees.

During 2023, RSPN is supporting 16 Community Forest Groups and 21 private individuals restoring more than 12.5 hectares of degraded land areas. By the end of five-year period, RSPN targets to restore 50 hectares of degraded land

especially in White-bellied Heron habitat areas. The tree species supported includes high value timber species and wild fruit trees that may have economic benefits to the community.

The restoration activity is part of the ongoing project funded by the Federal Ministry of Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV), Germany through the International Climate Initiative (IKI) and co-funded by MAVA foundation, Switzerland, and RSPN.

**12.5**

Hectares of degraded land restored



## STRENGTHENING SPECIES CONSERVATION

### ► WbH annual population survey, 2023 - Tshering Tobgay, Project Officer, RSPN

A total of 27 White-bellied Herons (WbH), including 24 individuals in the wild and three individuals in the WbH Conservation Center were recorded during the Annual WbH population Survey, conducted from 1-5 March, 2023. The survey was conducted across the major River Basins of Punatsangchu, Mangdechu, Chamkharchu, Kurichu, Kholongchu, Drangmechu, Manas, Wangchu, and major tributaries, covering current potential WbH habitats.

The River Basins were divided into 18 zones and 74 survey sites for the annual count and more than a hundred surveyors were deployed from the Department of Forests and Park Services (DoFPS), Local Conservation Support Groups (LCSGs), and RSPN to conduct the survey for five days.

Of the 24 individuals of WbH recorded in the wild, 67% were found in the Punatsangchu Basin, 16% were in the Mangdechu Basin, and 16. % was in Wangchu Basin. Four herons were sighted in Wangchu Basin (Wangchu and Piping rivers) this year. During the survey, no herons were sighted in the Chamkharchu, lower Mangdechu, Manas, and Kurigongri Basins. A total of 271 birds and 23 mammal species were recorded during the survey.

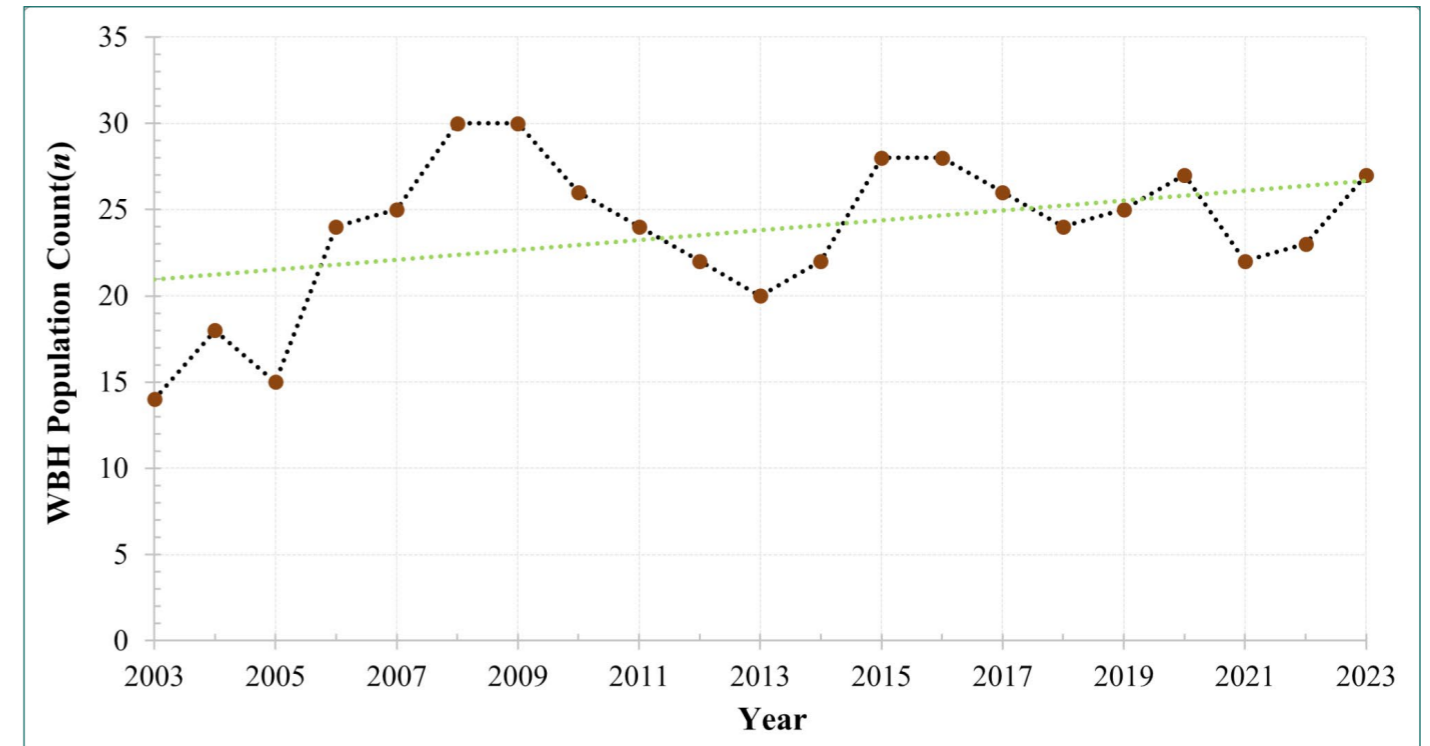
The survey also documented active WbH nests. Unlike other species of heron that breed in colonies, WbH breeds in solitary. During the survey, two active nests were recorded, one each in Mangdechu and Punatsangchu basins respectively. Since

2003, there is a record of WbH breeding in Bhutan annually with records of two-five active nests.

RSPN is appreciative of the Federal Ministry of Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV), Germany through the International Climate Initiative (IKI) for supporting the survey as part of 'Developing Ecosystem-based Solutions for Managing Biodiversity Landscapes in Bhutan' project.

In addition, we also acknowledge unstinted support provided in this regard by Synchronicity Earth, MAVA Foundation, International Crane Foundation, Alice C Tylor Perpetual Trust, Global Wildlife Conservation, Punatsangchu Hydroelectric Project Authority I & II, DoFPS, and to all our donors, partners and philanthropists. Also, we are indebted to the support and hard work of all surveyors from DoFPS, LCSG and volunteers in making the annual survey a success.

	WBH Habitat Zones	Places	Count
In-situ	Zone - I	Phochhu	1
	Zone - II	Adha, Nagzhina, Hararongchhu, Kisonachhu and Taksha area	3
	Zone - III	Burichhu, Sunkosh-Dagachhu, Relangthang, Wakletar, Balwani, Malbasey, Kalikhola and Middle Punatsangchhu area	6
	Zone - IV	Lamozingkha, Rangae and Gumti Lower Punatsangchhu area	4
	Zone - V	Phibsoo Wildlife Sanctuary	2
	Zone - VI	Berti and Upper Mangdechhu area	1
	Zone - VII	Goling and Tsaidang area	3
	Zone - XV	Jigmechhu and Wangchhu area	4
Ex-situ	WBH Conservation Center		3
<b>Total Count</b>			<b>27</b>



WBH population trend in Bhutan (2003-2023)

**27**  
WbHs recorded

**2**  
Active WbH nests recorded

**271**  
Birds species also sighted

**23**  
Mammal species also recorded

[Click here to read full report](#)

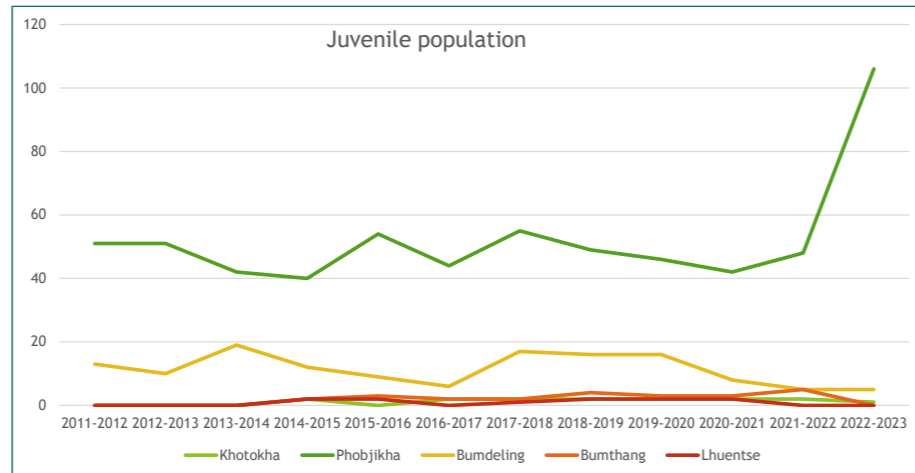
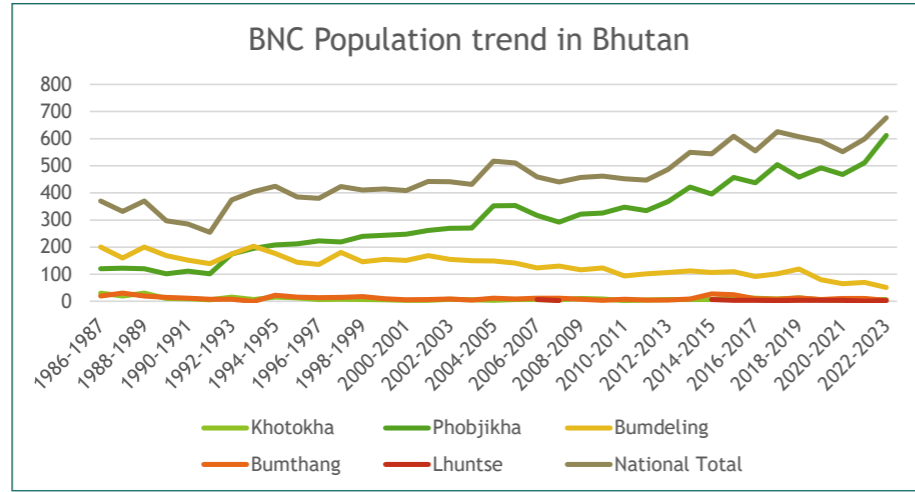
► **Black-necked Crane population count, 2023**

- Jigme Tshering, Interim Chief, RSPN

We are ever grateful to our partners in the field, Forest Division Offices and others, for their participation in the count as well as in maintaining the habitats for the Black-necked Cranes.

Such annual count has been conducted since 1986-1987 to monitor the wintering population trend in Bhutan

Location	Count (Year 2023)
Bumdeling	51 (5 juveniles)
Bumthang	4
Gangtey-Phobji	612 (106 juveniles)
Khotokha	7 (1 juvenile)
Lhuntse	3
<b>Total Count</b>	<b>677 (112 juveniles)</b>



► **Avifauna assessment along the Punatsangchhu River, 2022**

- Lungten, Intern with RSPN

The avifauna assessment along the Punatsangchhu River was conducted in December, 2022 and March 2023. The study was aimed to determine species composition, diversity and waterbird habitat preferences. The study used point count method to sample birds in the predefined transect route along the river and other habitat variables. Two rounds of surveys were carried out. A total of 3,114 individual birds were recorded from the ten transects belonging to 12 orders, 36 families and 78 species.

Birds belonging to the Anatidae family (Ruddy shelduck and Bar-headed Goose) wererecorded the highest (30.89%, N=962), followed by Pycnonotidae (25.43%, N=792) and Falconidae and Laridae (0.03%, N=1) respectively. The species richness composition per family was highest for Muscipidae with ten species (S=10), followed by Anatidae with seven species (S=7). Red-vented Bulbul, Brown dipper, Plumbeous water Redstart and White-capped Redstart were the most abundant species recorded in all transects.

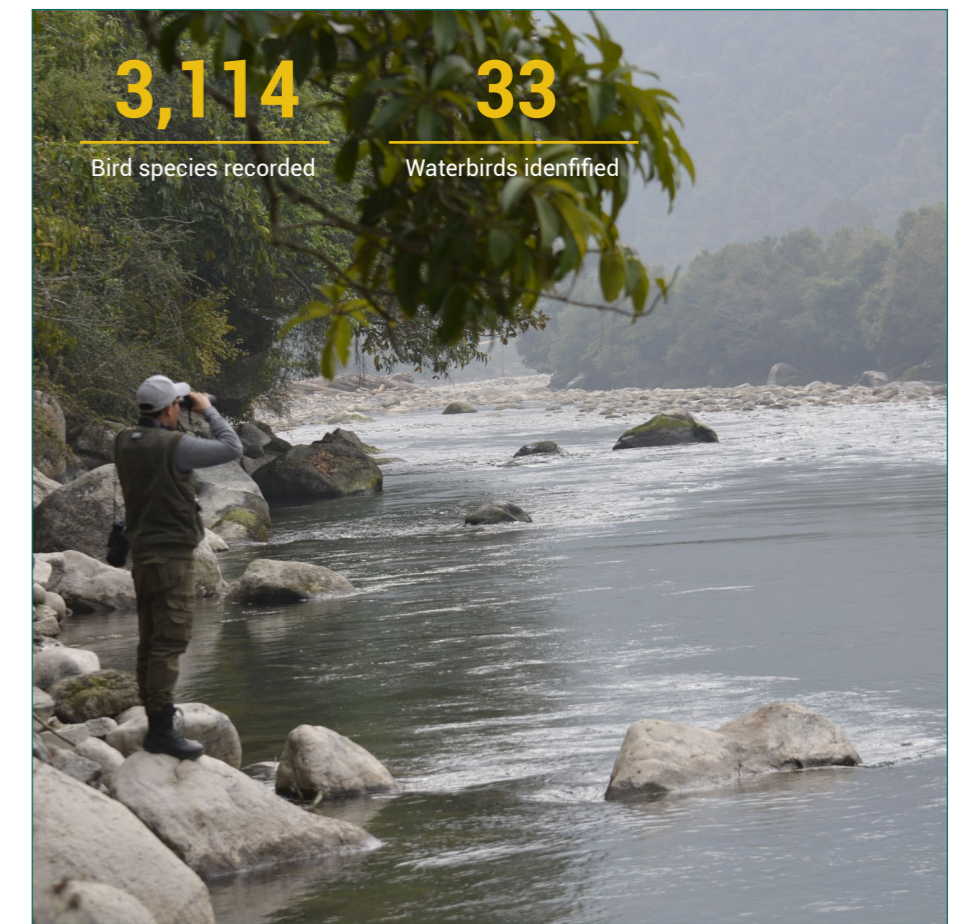
Of the 78 species, 33 species were waterbirds (42 % of total recorded species) representing 1,595 records (51% of total bird records). The waterbirds typically prefer open valleys with shallow slow flowing rivers, riverbanks covered mostly with sand bars and small pebbles.

The study revealed that the riverine habitat along Punatsangchhu river harbours high diversity of terrestrial and waterbirds, partly because of habitat suitability with wide open valley, shallow slow flowing rivers and wide river bank mostly with sand bars and small pebbles. The study also recorded six threatened bird species thriving in this area: critically endangered species White-bellied Heron (*Ardea insignis*), endangered species Palla's Fish Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucoryphus*) & Steppe

Eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*), vulnerable species Great Hornbill (*Bucerosbicornis*) & Common Pochard (*Aythya ferina*) and near threatened species River Lapwing (*Vanellusduvaucelii*). However, the study found that the riverine habitat within the study area is slightly degraded mainly due to anthropogenic interventions such as ecotourism, sand extraction and hydropower development.

**Limitation of the study:** The above discussed findings were documented from a monitoring carried out for two seasons only: early winter and early spring. For a comprehensive study to understand all species, its threats and population dynamics in the area, we recommend conducting a study with constant or increased frequency of monitoring of bird population in the area.

The study was supported by HKBWS Asian Conservation Fund.



► **Bumdeling celebrates the Crane festival**

- *Jigme Tshering, Interim Chief, RSPN*

As Black-necked Cranes (BNC) prepare for their spring migration to the summer home in Tibet, farmers in Bumdeling and Yangtse in Trashiyangtse Dzongkhag begin preparing their farm land for another new farming season. For the last four months, these harvested farmlands have been the important foraging habitats for the Cranes. After spending a night at the bank of Khulongchu river, the cranes fly to the nearby paddy fields in Bumdeling and Yangtse. The Cranes indirectly help the farmers by feeding on waste grains and insects. This relationship between the farmers and the cranes existed since time immemorial.



Over the past five years, RSPN has been working closely with the farmers of these two gewogs and Bumdeling Wildlife Sanctuary to augment the habitats of the Cranes through restoration of flood affected paddy fields, provision of electric fencing, roost maintenance and stray dog population management.

This year on February 8, through the financial support of the International Crane Foundation, based in the USA and UNDP in Bhutan, a Black-necked Crane festival was celebrated in Bumdeling. While the crane festival in Phobjikha valley every year on 11<sup>th</sup> November is organized to welcome the cranes into the valley, the festival in Bumdeling isto bid farewell to the cranes. The festival is also being organized to boost the local economy through tourism. Close to 100 locals, students, government officials and a few local tourists attended the day long engaging crane festival. Dasha

Dzongda of Trashiyangtse Dzongkhag graced the occasion as the guest of honor. Local students, dressed in crane costumes, performed dances mimicking the behaviours of the cranes, while women dressed in beautiful hand woven kiras showcased traditional Bhutanese traditional dances. An art competition with the theme "People for Cranes, Cranes for People" was organized among the students of three schools in Bumdeling and Yangtse. Further, a quiz competition was also organized among the local farmers. Local products like bamboo baskets, bangchung (bamboo plate), wooden cups, embroideries and food and beverages were displayed for sale in the stalls.

Finally, the day-long festival ended with the traditional Trashi Lebey and prayers for a bumper harvest for the farmers of the valley and wishing a safe journey for the Cranes to Tibet



Black-necked Crane dance by the students



Dasho Dzongda interacting with local community at the stall



Cultural program by the local community women



Artwork evaluation



► **Great backyard bird count in Bhutan**

- Tshering Tobgay, Project Officer, RSPN

The Annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) began from 17 to 20th of February for the year 2023. GBBC is the citizen-science initiative for gathering the wild bird data worldwide. It was launched by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society. The event with four days of count is held every year in the month of February.

During the GBBC, each participant or group count birds for any time duration (but at least for 15 minutes) and enters the birds they identify at any location.

The GBBC assist to document the data of bird species distribution across the world and enables conservationists to develop plans for declining species. It also provides access to information and data on; pattern of distribution, weather and climate change influence to bird population, effect of diseases to birds in different regions, migration timing and status of bird species: whether on decline, increasing, or holding steady in the face of habitat loss, climate change, and other threats.

It is an opportunity for the Bird and nature lovers around the globe to collectively tally as many of the world's bird species as possible over these four days. Bhutanese bird watchers began GBBC since 2016.

For this year's GBBC, 45 bird watchers were able to contribute the records of birds from Bhutan.

Bhutan, acclaimed for its rich forest coverage and biodiversity, is also well known to the birding fraternity of the world for its rich diversity of birds. Today, there are records of 769 bird species observed in Bhutan of which 14 bird species are globally threatened and 11 are range restricted species. The new species recorded recently were mostly waterbirds. So far, the country has recorded 153 waterbird species, mostly belonging to the anatidae/duck family. These waterbirds are both residents and migratory ones.



328

Birds species observed

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138

Bird checklists maintained

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45

Bird watchers participated

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18

District's bird list documented

Pallas's Fish-Eagle in Punakha/Tshering Tobgay

**SECURING SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS**

► **Capacity building on market linkage and cooperative management**

- Karma Wangchuk, Project Officer, RSPN

RSPN in close partnership with Gewog Extension Officers of Zhemgang Dzongkhag organized a four-day market linkage and cooperative management training from February 3-8, 2023 to the communities of Langdurbi and Phulabi chiwogs of Bardho Gewog under Zhemgang Dzongkhags. A total of 82 participants (47 female and 35 male) attended the training. The training was aimed to:

- Establish market mechanisms for agricultural products,
- Educate on cooperative function and regulations, and
- Educate and adoption of the management guideline/By-laws and marketing plan

With the successful conduct of the training, the communities were aware of the market opportunities for their produces and its linkages and post-harvest practices.



Communities learning post-harvest and packaging practises

*"My village is remote and opportunities to avail such training is limited. I am thankful to this opportunity. I am now aware of market opportunities both at the local and national levels. Further, on behalf of the Women Self-Help Groups, I have an immense pleasure and pride to extend our heartfelt gratitude to RSPN and CFLI for supporting us with packaging equipment's, reinvigorating us to work further"*

- Mrs Lekhi Dema, Phulabi Tshogpa



### ► Polyhouse for the community

- Karma Wangchuk, Project Officer, RSPN

RSPN advocate and promote organic farming practices across the country. Use of polyhouse as one of the modes to practise organic farming is picking-up among the communities. As part of the ongoing project 'Developing ecosystem-based solutions for managing biodiversity landscapes in Bhutan', funded by the Federal Ministry of Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV), Germany through the International Climate Initiative (IKI) with co-financing from MAVA foundation, Switzerland, and RSPN had successfully distributed and installed 36 sets of polyhouses in the communities (Dagana, Punakha, Tsirang, Trongsa, Wangduephodrang and Zhemgang districts) living within the project landscape of White-bellied Heron. One of the beneficiaries of the polyhouse.

"My village had to depend on others for seeds and saplings. With the polyhouse program supported by RSPN, we can now even supply saplings to others. Polyhouse is an opportunity to generate additional income for the community groups. Further the working together modality of RSPN had strengthened community cohesion and vitality."

- Mrs Tshering Wangmo,  
Kewana-Tshachuphu Chiwog, Punakha district.



Polyhouse in the project landscape

### ► Restoration of Peling-Tso and agriculture land

- Dr Lungten Norbu, Specialist and Tsheten Dorji, Chief, SLD

Peling-Tso is located towards the bottom of the valley at an elevation of 950 m covering an approximate area of 34.2 hectares (85.5 acres). It is the only perennial stream in the area and reliable water source for more than 200 households living downstream. Due to anthropogenic activities and climate change, the Peling-Tso, Peling-Ri and natural springs within its proximity are reportedly drying. Against this backdrop, RSPN successfully implemented and completed in April this year:

The project 'Improving wetland and agricultural land through integrated community-based land and water conservation innovations at Dechheling Gewog, Nganglam, Pema Gatshel',

supported by GEF-Small Grants Programme, UNDP. The project covers three Chiwogs of Gonpawoong, Shinchongri, and Kholomri of Dechheling Gewog, Pema Gatshel Dzongkhag.

The key objective of the project was to conserve wetland and agricultural ecosystems with a special focus in establishing a community-based land and water conservation and management system. The key project interventions include:

- Enhance restoration and protection of Peling-Tso to sustain wetland ecosystem services (water and biodiversity).
- Strengthen the capacity of communities/partners on the application of SLM activities, rainwater harvesting, agricultural commercial farming and production.
- Develop/ strengthen the capacity of communities on project

implementation and new technology application.

- Enhance environmental education and knowledge sharing on wetland conservation, climate change, and community engagement.



Rainwater harvesting

5

Acres of forest food garden around the Peling-Tso created - planting of native fruit trees, shrubs and bamboo.

39

Ponds constructed measuring 1 feet deep by 2 meters square at different locations around the Peling-Tso for improving rainwater storing and retention.

5

Kilometers of educational walking trail constructed around the Peling-Tso.

5

Zabo systems constructed in Kholomri and Gurburi to collect rainwater for enhancing the water retention capacity of Peling-Tso wetland and springs.

111

Sintex water tanks (500 liters) supported and installed Roof-top Rainwater Harvesting Systems.

58

Beneficiary farmers received four varieties of vegetable seeds and avocado seedlings to promote commercial production.

### ► Local actions to increase resilience to Climate Change

- Tsheten Dorji and Karma Wangchuk/RSPN

Zhemgang Dzongkhag is one of the poorest with one in every three persons living in poverty (29.4 percent headcount ratio poverty rate). Amongst the Dzongkhag's eight Gewogs, Bardo with poverty rate of 40 percent is the poorest Gewog. The report from RSPN 2021 socio-economic survey also show high incidence of food insufficiency in Bardo Gewog, 52.5% of households reporting food insufficiency. The Gewog has a total of 388 households with population of 1,734 of which majority of them practise subsistence farming with agriculture and livestock as the main source of livelihood. Farming in this Gewog is done on steep gradient making them vulnerable to top soil erosion and degradation especially during monsoon. The RSPN 2021 survey report highlighted soil erosion and landslide as the major issue in Bardo gewog with 56 households reporting soil erosion and 50 households reporting landslide. Given this situation, RSPN implemented successfully a

climate smart project 'Enhancing climate resilience through gender responsive agro-ecological farming in Bardo Gewog, Zhemgang', with the support of Canada Fund for Local Initiatives.

The project was aimed to strengthen community resilience to climate change and contribute to pandemic recovery by promoting environmentally, socially and ecologically sound agriculture through the improvement of agricultural soil and water

conservation for sustainable farming and food production; enhancement of resilience and efficiency in agriculture production through technology transfer and product diversification and improvement of market for agricultural produce through appropriate approach and mechanisms.

420

Kilograms of mustard seeds and 12 varieties of vegetable seeds supported to the villages of Phulabe and Langdurbe.

14

Households of Phulabe village supported with sintex tanks (500 liters) for harvesting rooftop rainwater.



Farmer receiving fruit sapling



### ► Reaching out to far-flung communities

- Tsheten Dorji, Chief, SLD

RSPN will implement a year-long project on 'Enhancing climate resilience of small landholders' communities to the impact of climate change' in Lauri Gewog in Samdrup Jongkhar Dzongkhag through the financial support of Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI). The project will benefit and increase resilience of over 800 individuals in two villages of Lauri and Momring.

The project primarily aims to enhance the community's resilience to climate change by promoting environmentally, socially, and ecologically sound livelihood options. To kick start the project, RSPN conducted an inception meeting on May 22, 2023, at Lauri Gewog Centre with the communities and Gewog Officials. 54 community people have attend the meeting. In addition to

project introduction, the meeting also deliberated and agreed on the project work plan and implementation modality which includes the implementation of the project by the Geowog functionaries with technical backstopping and oversight role provided by RSPN and Jomotsangkha Wildlife Sanctuary. During the meeting, the

Lauri Gup said "Besides the Government five-year plan programs, the Gewog has no other programs supported by any agencies/CSOs due to its remoteness and this is the first ever project under such support. We remain grateful to RSPN for reaching out to un-reached."



Community people at the introductory meeting



Momring village

## IN CONVERSATION

### ► My journey with RSPN

- Ngawang Tenzin, Range Officer, Taksha, Wangdue Phodrang

#### Q1. When did you first hear about RSPN?

I had no knowledge of RSPN until I met with late Tshewang Norbu who was then working as an Assistant Researcher of RSPN. He introduced it to me while he was on White-bellied Heron (WbH) monitoring at Adha in 2005. At that time I was serving as a Deputy Park Range In-charge at Adha village, Athang Gewog under Wangduephodrang district.

#### Q2. What was your journey with RSPN like?

In the mid November of 2005, I along with some students of Adha Primary School went for evening walk and to our surprise we saw a strange bird like Black-necked Crane near Adha lake. We called it Black-necked Crane for our own understanding and reference only to know it wasn't so after the visit of Late Tshewang Norbu at Adha. At our first encounter, he showed us the picture of WbH and inquired if we have seen it in the community. I was extremely excited then to know it was WbH, one of the critically endangered birds in the world. I have learnt a lot about the birds from him and to protect the bird we instituted a monitoring and reporting system thereafter.

#### Q3. Is there an achievement that you are most proud of?

My conjugation with RSPN was brief in the beginning, however, I am overwhelmingly glad that it turned out to be a huge impact to the community. Firstly, RSPN provided advocacy programs at the village, schools and institutes on the importance of WbH. Secondly, they installed fishery ponds, piggery and poultry to improve livelihood and to control illegal fishing. Thirdly, they provided a budget to conduct different types of research on WbH.

#### Q4. Through your journey with RSPN, what have you learned about and what kept inspiring you? How has this changed you?

It was WbH that united us with the community in diverse ways. The population of WbH in the Athang area was approximately around 10 to 12 before 2011. But it decreased gradually and a study and interview with the public was conducted to find out the causes. We learned that due to the developmental activities like construction of road, transmission line and bridges and human activities like cutting of trees, forest fire, illegal fishing and natural calamities like flood and landslide affected the livelihood of WbH. This is because WbH is a shy bird that only feeds on fish and can be attacked even by small birds. Therefore, it became a serious concern for RSPN, Department of forest and Park Services to take extra initiatives to take care of such endangered birds. Today RSPN has come up with a captivity breeding centre for WbH to maintain the ecosystem of WbH.

#### Q5. What do you think other people should know about RSPN?

Many people do not know about RSPN and the benefits of the organisation. Some believe that RSPN works towards the protection of birds and some believe it works in collaboration with the Department of forests and Park Services. But the organisation doesn't limit its services to a few agencies. It works in collaboration with other agencies like Agriculture, Livestock and Department of Power. RSPN provides solar fencing, improves seedlings and green house etc. to farmers and provides foddors, fishery ponds, piggery and poultry to the communities.

#### Q6. Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

In my 18 years of service to the nation, I am highly indebted and grateful for

the golden opportunity to be an active member of RSPN because firstly I got new knowledge such as habitation, behaviours and status about WbH through workshops, training and seminars. Secondly, I got the opportunity to work with the public to enhance their livelihood under the generous support of RSPN. Thirdly RSPN has also provided financial support in conducting research and studies about WbH, annual population census, monitoring and reporting of WbH daily.

Lastly, I would like to request RSPN Management to provide more advocacy programs and training to the public on WbH. Further, if RSPN could adopt at least one river stretch of Athang River to protect WbH conservation, it would be a great step towards protecting WbH.

- Compiled by: Sangay Dema



## IMPROVING THE LIVES OF THE COMMUNITIES

### ► High-end recreational fishing in Bhutan

- Letro, Nature Conservation Division, Department of Forests & Park Services

Bhutan is a much sought-after travel destination when it comes to nature-based tours and travel. While trekking the snow-clad mountains, the alpine hills, and the temperate forests across to immerse in nature are already very popular, Bhutan's pristine rivers and scared fishes could be another attraction for the worlds renowned anglers.

Recreational fishing in Bhutan is not new, but until recently fishing for the endangered golden mahseer is strictly prohibited. On the contrary, the Golden mahseer are the most preferred game for the anglers because of its large size, agile, lively, and the charisma. The prohibition for fishing of golden mahseer was imposed primarily due to the species

being globally endangered, and secondly, Golden mahseer are symbolized to the sacred Ser-nya, the Golden fish, one of the eight lucky signs in Buddhism.

Based on scientific recommendations, Bhutan has legalized the fishing of golden mahseer for exclusive catch and release through the concept of High-end recreational fishing in 2022. Bhutan's rivers are delineated into mahseer water and trout water and with high-end recreational fishing sites marked on each of the two types of rivers. With this concept of high-end recreational fishing, and particularly for fishing golden mahseers in the pristine rivers of Bhutan, the avenue of nature-based tourism in Bhutan is only expanding.

Through proper design, this ecotourism product can also contribute immensely to the conservation of fishes and aquatic biodiversity of Bhutan. Anglers are required to avail fishing permit from the

Department of Forests and Park Services and foreign anglers needs to be guided by certified fishing guide. These anglers could gather all the catch data and share with the Department, which will not only help generate scientific information on the fishes of Bhutan but also prioritize conservation actions.

Rivers and communities are closely intertwined. Currently, it is perceived that communities along the major river do illegal fishing thus jeopardizing the healthy fish population and riverine ecosystems. With the expanding recreational fishing programmes, its benefits should trickle down to the communities living along the rivers and they should become river conservation stewards. Through the collective efforts of community river guardians, conservation minded anglers and their guides, and the river rangers, high-end recreational fishing can become a boon for both conservation and livelihood enhancement.



## SPECIES WATCH WITH RSPN



**Name:** Gee's Golden Langur  
**Scientific Name:** *Trachypithecus geei*  
**Generation Length:** 12 years  
**Conservation Status:** Endangered  
**Population Trend:** Decreasing (6000-6500)  
**Habitat Type:** Forest, Artificial/Terrestrial  
**Threats:** Residential & commercial development, Agriculture & aquaculture, Energy production & mining, Transportation & service corridors, Biological resource use, and Human intrusions & disturbance

Photo courtesy: Tshering Dhendup/RSPN



**Name:** Himalayan marmot  
**Scientific Name:** *Marmota himalayana*  
**Generation Length:** 5 years  
**Conservation Status:** Least Concern  
**Population Trend:** Unknown  
**Habitat Type:** Shrubland, Grassland, Rocky areas (eg. inland cliffs, mountain peaks), Desert, Artificial/Terrestrial  
**Threats:** There are no major threats to this species as a whole. In South Asia, the species is locally threatened by hunting for food and ethnomedicinal use, mortality from domestic predators, habitat disturbance resulting from civil unrest, and overgrazing of its habitat by domestic livestock (Molur et al. 2005).

Photo courtesy: Sonam Dorji

**Name:** Eastern Spotted Dove  
**Scientific Name:** *Spilopelia chinensis*  
**Generation Length:** 4 years  
**Conservation Status:** Least Concern  
**Population Trend:** Increasing  
**Habitat Type:** Forest, Wetlands (inland), Artificial/Terrestrial

Photo courtesy: Tshering Dhendup/RSPN



**Name:** Leopard  
**Scientific Name:** *Panthera pardus*  
**Generation Length:** 7.42 years  
**Conservation Status:** Vulnerable  
**Population Trend:** Decreasing  
**Habitat Type:** Forest, Savanna, Shrubland, Grassland, Rocky areas (eg. inland cliffs, mountain peaks), Desert

**Threats:** Residential & commercial development, Agriculture & aquaculture, Energy production & mining, Transportation & service corridors, Biological resource use, Human intrusions & disturbance, and Natural system modifications

Photo courtesy: Chondu Dorji





## ABOUT US

RSPN was established in 1987 under the Royal Command of His Majesty The Fourth King of Bhutan as a citizen based Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) devoted to the conservation of the Kingdom's environment.

His Majesty The King was the Royal Patron of RSPN from 1999 to 2012. Her Majesty The Queen of Bhutan is the Royal Patron. RSPN is managed by a seven-Board Directors, the Executive Director is the head of the organization.

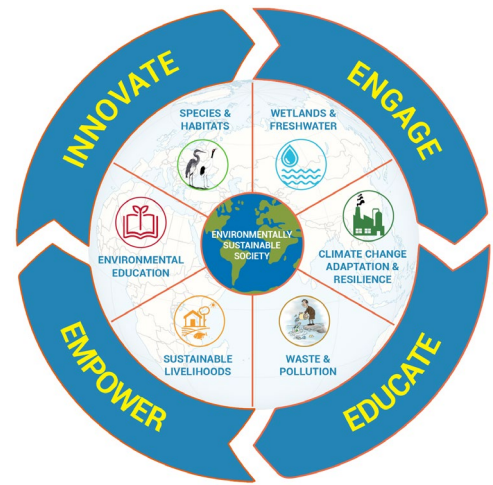
## VISION

To be the Leader in conservation ensuring future generations of Bhutan live in an Environmentally Sustainable Society.

## MISSION

To inspire personal responsibility and active involvement of people of Bhutan in the conservation of the Kingdom's environment through, Education, Community Engagement and Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities.

## WHAT WE DO?



RSPN's Conservation Mandala

The mandala represents our systemic approach and efforts, geared to implement sustainable solutions to emerging environmental challenges through, innovation, citizen engagement, education, and empowerment. The six thematic areas are initiated based on national and international priorities that are aligned to address Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Using this approach, it affirms our belief and commitment to addressing the global issues which are interdependent in nature to support our goal of an 'Environmentally Sustainable Society'.

## Want to Help?

We would love your support! The Royal Society for Protection of Nature is working across the country to protect our environment, providing HOPE to its people and the threatened species that they live and depend on.



**Donate Today!**

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