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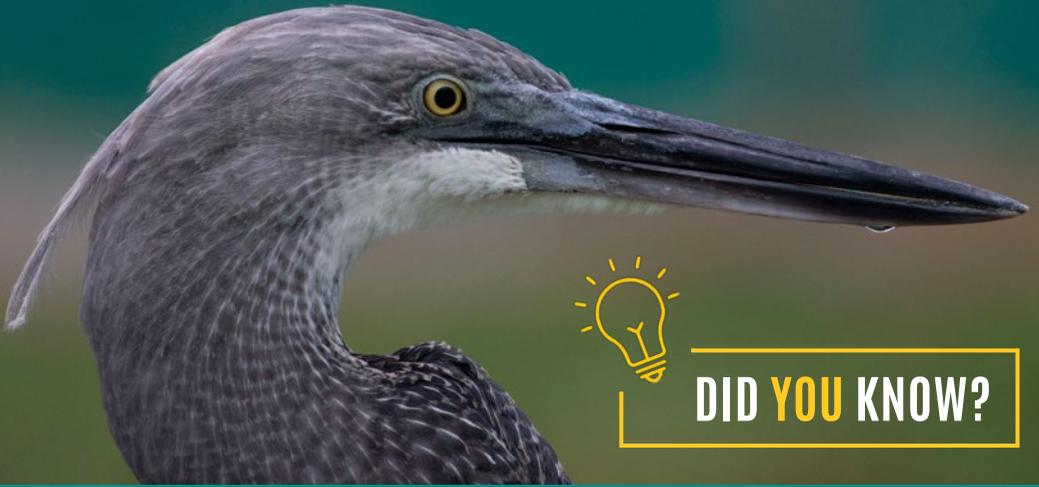
Schedule I (FNCA, 1995)

**White-bellied Heron** *Ardea insignis*



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**SAVE** RIVERS  
WHITE-BELLIED HERONS



## DID YOU KNOW?

Fewer than 60 of them are left in the world.

World's Rarest Heron - Guinness Book of World Records, 2013.

Conservation Center established in Bhutan - to secure ex-situ gene pool, breed and reintroduce to safer wild habitats.

Less than five known actively breeding pairs in the world

25-30 birds and four breeding pairs in Bhutan.

First nest in Bhutan was discovered in 2003 - it was also rediscovery for the world after more than seven decades of previous record.

Bhutan is home to 45% of global population.

Found in Bhutan, India and Mynmar - endemic to Himalayan foothills.

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## THE WHITE-BELLIED HERON

*Ardea insignis*

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**W**hite-bellied Herons are the indicator of the health of the Himalayan freshwater ecosystems. Their elusive and highly habitat specific habit in feeding, nesting, and food selection makes them great environmental sensors. Their presence in our ecosystem system indicates the health of the rivers, the environment, the fish population, water quality, health of freshwater biodiversity, level of disturbances, pollution, and above all the intactness of our nature. They are predators, they are prey, and they are players in food chains. They are our natural wealth, our pride, and our heritage. By protecting them and their habitats, we protect our ecosystems, rivers, waters, landscapes, biodiversity, food, and livelihoods.

The spiritual enrichment, recreation, education, and aesthetic value it holds apart from its ecological significance, warrant its protection and conservation.



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## STATUS

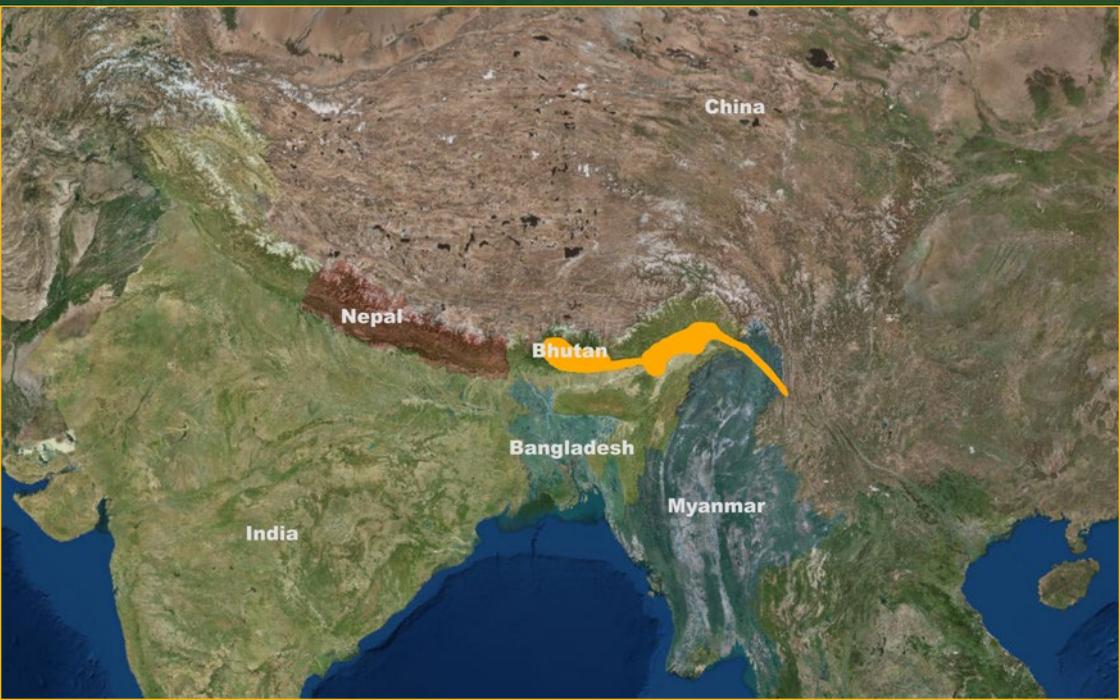
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**W**hite-bellied Heron is the second largest, one of the rarest and the most critically endangered heron in the world. It is one of the ten herons of global conservation concern. WBH is endemic to Himalayan freshwater ecosystems of the Indian sub-continent. Fewer than 60 are confirmed to exist today, spanned over the extent of 165,000 km<sup>2</sup> in Bhutan, India, and Myanmar and adjacent valleys in China. Active nests and breeding populations are rarer and only known from Bhutan and India.

60% of suitable WBH habitat has been lost over the last century. It has extinct from Nepal and perhaps Bangladesh.

Bhutan is home to 45% of the global population and 90% of currently known actively breeding pairs.

The population is rapidly declining across the range. The wild population is extremely low. The bird is disappearing from most of the previously known sites, many of the older nests have been abandoned and nest failures are increasing.



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## THREATS & CONSTRAINTS

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**H**abitat loss and degradation because of hydro dams, mining, quarries sand, and gravel dredging, the network of transmission lines, extraction of timber and exploitation of natural resources, construction of roads and bridges, and infrastructure expansion are the biggest threat to the survival of WBH.



Illegal fishing, water pollution, irresponsible ecotourism and recreations, human disturbances are putting pressure on already a few remaining habitats.



It is constrained by the impact of climate change, natural calamities, diminishing food resources, national priorities and politics and limited knowledge on its ecology and biology.



Indirectly, lack of awareness, lack of knowledge, and negligence is also driving the species to the edge.



A handful of breeding populations with extremely low genetic diversity and restricted distribution and resultant prolonged isolation could drive the species to extinction sooner than expected.

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## CONSERVATION EFFORTS

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Over the last two decades, we have mapped the distribution range, identified key feeding and nesting habitats, closely monitored the populations, nests, and juveniles. We have educated, inspired, and engaged local communities, students, researchers, institutions, and policymakers in its conservation. We now have a better understanding of its genetic diversity, ecology, biology, threats, and challenges. We have developed strategies, action plans and built a network of citizen scientists, conservationists and experts and the determination to save the bird from extinction.

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## WHITE-BELLIED HERON CONSERVATION CENTER

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The White-bellied Heron conservation center, the first of its kind in the world, exclusively for conservation & breeding of this species has been established in Bhutan. The purpose of the Center is to secure an ex-situ gene pool; rear, raise and breed herons, and supplement the wild population by reintroducing them into safer habitats. It will also serve as the center for WBH research, a global information hub and coordinate WBH conservation in the region.



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## WAY FORWARD

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**M**oving ahead, conservation of White-bellied Heron will require a parallel effort in upscaling in-situ conservation of wild herons and protecting wild habitats and supplementing wild population through ex-situ conservation breeding and release program.

**In-situ:** Enhance the protection of key nesting & foraging sites and flight routes, restore degraded habitats, address major threats, and maintain key habitats ensuring development and livelihood activities are consistent with the species' conservation strategies across the range. Effectively take care of wild herons and their habitat through the implementation of the conservation action plan 2022 – 2031.

**Ex-situ:** Establish a secure ex-situ gene pool, breed and mas produce maintaining the highest possible genetic diversity and reintroduce back into safe areas where our research indicates herons should thrive. Disseminate information, improve public awareness, enhance interdisciplinary research, and strengthen regional and global coordination for the conservation of WBH.



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## PLEASE SUPPORT US

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Approximately US\$ 250,000 are needed annually to support the operations & management of the conservation center and monitor the wild population and habitats.

The conservation center has facilities just enough to kickstart the program. Approximately US\$ 500,000 are needed over the next five years to build additional aviaries, fishponds, public education, information amenities, breeding and veterinary equipment and build capacity to carry out conservation breeding work.

Additional US\$ 1.5 million is needed over the next 10 years to effectively implement the ten-year conservation action plan (2022 – 2031) focusing on securing the future for wild herons. We need your support to ensure a brighter future for the White-bellied Herons and a richer biodiversity.

Please support us!



**Donate Now!**



# RSPN

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environmental conservation since 1987*

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**Royal Society for Protection of Nature**

P.O. Box: 325, Building No.: 25

Lhado Lam, Kawajangsa | Thimphu 11001, Bhutan

Tele: +975 2 322056/326130 | Fax: +975 2 323189



[www.rspnbhutan.org](http://www.rspnbhutan.org)



[rspn@rspnbhutan.org](mailto:rspn@rspnbhutan.org)



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