

## Inside this Issue

01

In the News

02

Strengthening Species Conservation

03

In the Conversation

04

Species watch with RSPN

## BECOME A MEMBER

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

Support us by becoming a member!

## Greetings from RSPN

Dear **Friends of Nature**,

Welcome to **Volume 18, Issue 1** of Rangzhin, our newsletter that brings you closer to Bhutan's conservation journey. Each edition showcases how we protect biodiversity and support communities living in harmony with nature.

This issue highlights the growing reach of our work, the resilience of our communities, and the impact of collaboration. We also celebrate the transformative support of our donors and partners, whose contributions drive meaningful change.

As we explore new paths in conservation, our commitment remains strong: fostering partnerships, inspiring positive change, and advancing a sustainable Bhutan.

Thank you for your continued support. We hope you enjoy this edition and find inspiration in the stories of nature, communities, and people making a difference.

We wish you all happy reading!

**Editorial team**

### EDITORIAL TEAM:

Sangay Dema

### LAYOUT AND DESIGN:

Dechen Tshomo

Rangzhin is RSPN's 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 engaged national partners in Strategic Policy Review for Climate Financing

*February 07, 2025*

The Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN) organized a National Stakeholder Consultation meeting to review and update key strategic frameworks, including Environment and Social Safeguards (ESS), Gender Policies, Grievance Redressal Mechanism (GRM), and Anti-Money Laundering and Countering Financing Terrorism (AML/CFT) Policy.

This meeting is a crucial step toward Accreditation for Climate Financing and brought together key stakeholders, including representatives from Ministry of Finance, Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC), Royal Monetary Authority, Bhutan Trust Fund for Environment Conservation and CSOs like Bhutan Youth Development Fund and Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy.



### Drones uncovered new pathways for monitoring the White-bellied Heron

*February 12, 2025*

A weeklong feasibility study has opened new possibilities for using drone technology to monitor the critically endangered White-bellied Heron (WBH). With the species nesting in remote and rugged areas, monitoring has long been challenging and risky for field teams.

The study found that drones are safer, faster, and more cost-effective, allowing conservation teams to access previously unreachable sites with minimal disturbance. During the trial, drones successfully monitored active nests and even located a new WBH nest, marking a major breakthrough for conservation efforts.

As part of the initiative, RSPN conducted a capacity-building training on drone use for conservation, involving officials from the Department of Forests and Park Services, RSPN staff, and interns. The training was led by Serge Wich of Liverpool John Moores University, a leading expert in drone-based wildlife monitoring.

This advancement strengthens RSPN's commitment to integrating innovative technologies to secure the future of the White-bellied Heron.





### National Stakeholder Meeting on Ecosystem and Socio-economic Resilience Analysis and Mapping

February 27, 2025

The RSPN as a Delivery Partner to the **Green Climate Fund (GCF)** is implementing the Readiness and Preparatory Support Program with the objective of strengthening its capacity to access financing for climate-resilient initiatives and to enhance climate data and services in Bhutan. As part of this effort, RSPN is developing strategic frameworks through studies and research. The outputs from the study will provide better understanding of the socio-economic, ecological, and climate situation in the study areas but will also be utilized in formulating climate resilient interventions.

To kickstart this initiative, a national stakeholder meeting on Ecosystem and Socio-economic Resilience Analysis and Mapping (ESRAM) study was conducted at RSPN Head Office, Thimphu earlier today. The objective of this meeting is to introduce the proposed study approach and methodology and to solicit feedback and comments. RSPN extends its gratitude to all the stakeholders for their participation and continued support to this important initiative!



### Second Project Steering Committee (PSC) Meeting for GCF Readiness and Preparatory Support Program

March 05, 2025

The Second PSC Meeting for the GCF Readiness and Preparatory Support Program was successfully held at the White-bellied Heron Conservation Centre, Changchey, Tsirang Dzongkhag. The meeting saw participation from a diverse group of stakeholders, including members from the The Bhutan Youth Development Fund, Tarayana Foundation, Ministry of Finance, Royal Government of Bhutan and SELWA.

During the meeting, the committee reviewed the progress of the ongoing projects under the GCF Readiness and Preparatory Support Program. This included a comprehensive assessment of the achievements, challenges, and any deviations from the planned activities.

A significant portion of the discussions focused on strengthening institutional capacities, governance mechanisms, and planning frameworks to support long-term climate action. The members also reviewed the financial status of the projects, including budget allocations, expenditures, and any financial challenges faced during the implementation.

The meeting underscored the importance of continued collaboration and effective management to achieve the project's goals.



### Consultation Meeting on Development of Community Seed Banks

March 10, 2025

The consultation meeting organized by RSPN Bhutan aimed to discuss the development of community seed banks along the Mangdechhu and Punatshangchhu basins, one of the key habitats of the Critically endangered WBH.

The meeting brought together representatives from various government bodies; Department of Agriculture, Royal Government of Bhutan, Department of Livestock, Royal Government of Bhutan, National Seed Centre, National Biodiversity Centre Bhutan, ARDC, and Dzongkhag Agriculture Officers from six project districts (Dagana, Punakha, Trongsa, Zhemgang, Tsirang and Wangduephodrang).

The meeting's objective was to share ideas and foster collaboration to ensure the sustainability of community seed banks initiatives ultimately supporting the conservation and use of native/ traditional species and high yielding varieties. This initiative is part of the IKI Project, "Developing Ecosystem-based Solutions for Managing Biodiversity Landscapes in Bhutan," funded by the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV) through the International Climate Initiative (IKI), with co-funding from the MAVA Foundation, Switzerland, and the RSPN.



### Strengthening Conservation through Climate Smart Livestock Initiatives in WBH Landscape

March 16, 2025

RSPN hosted a two-day's consultation meeting focused on creating sustainable livestock initiatives along the Mangdechhu and Punatshangchhu basins, which are crucial habitats for the Critically Endangered White-bellied Heron (WBH).

The meeting gathered key implementing partners from various government agencies ; Department of Livestock, National Livestock Research Centre (NLRC), Dzongkhag Livestock Officers, and Agriculture Officers from the six project districts. The meeting focused on creating sustainable, integrated livestock initiatives like beekeeping and fishery that will both support local communities and strengthen conservation efforts for the WBH.

We extend our gratitude to all the participants for your valuable inputs.

This activity is part of the IKI Project, "Developing Ecosystem-based Solutions for Managing Biodiversity Landscapes in Bhutan," funded by the BMUV and co-funded by the MAVA Foundation and RSPN





### National Coordination Meeting 2025

April 24, 2025

RSPN successfully organized a two-day National Coordination Meeting, emphasizing the importance of collaboration for sustainable progress and environmental stewardship. The gathering reflected our shared commitment to fostering meaningful partnerships and driving impactful change. During the meeting, RSPN presented its Project Implementation Plan 2025, aligned with the 13th Five-Year Plan. The meeting also provided a platform to reflect on the challenges faced and areas for improvement in the implementation of RSPN project activities.

We extend our deepest gratitude to all our partners and stakeholders for attending and reaffirming our shared vision and commitment. Together, we move forward stronger!



### Integrating One Health in Scientific Training for Bird Conservation in Bhutan

May 18, 2025

As part of a major initiative to strengthen scientific research and conservation efforts for the critically endangered White-bellied Heron and other avian species in the landscape, the Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN), in collaboration with the Department of Forest and Park Services (DoFPS), has launched a basic training program. This program focuses on the fundamentals of bird mist-netting, handling, ringing/banding, tagging, and preliminary screening for some of the avian diseases.

This training not only strengthens local capacity in avian research and conservation but also aligns with the broader One Health approach, recognizing the interconnectedness of wildlife, human, and ecosystem health, especially in the context of monitoring and managing zoonotic diseases in fragile ecosystems.

The first batch of this training includes participation from local community members, forestry officers from selected Divisions, and field staff of RSPN. The sessions are jointly conducted by avian experts from Austria and Germany alongside the RSPN team.





## Garden of Peaceful Learning Inaugurated in Honor of Her Majesty The Gyaltsuen's Birth Anniversary

June 02, 2025

In a heartfelt tribute to Her Majesty The Gyaltsuen Jetsun Pema Wangchuck on the occasion of her Birth Anniversary, the Royal Society for the Protection of Nature (RSPN), under the Royal Patronage of Her Majesty, joined hands with students and teachers of Changangkha Middle Secondary School to develop and adopt a **"Garden of Peaceful Learning."**

The newly inaugurated garden, envisioned as a vibrant outdoor learning space, is designed to foster environmental education and reflection. It features a diverse array of climate-resilient, improved fruit saplings symbolic living gifts honoring Her Majesty's unwavering commitment to environmental conservation and sustainable development. Each tree planted in the garden represents a solemn promise to protect and nurture the natural environment, in alignment with Her Majesty's vision of a harmonious society that values education, ecological preservation, and compassion.

RSPN officials expressed their hopes that the "Garden of Peaceful Learning" will flourish as a sanctuary for knowledge, inspiration, and reverence for nature. The initiative not only promotes hands-on environmental learning for students but also stands as a lasting tribute to Bhutan's natural legacy and the Gyaltsuen's leadership in conservation efforts.

The garden is expected to serve as a model for similar educational green spaces across the country, further strengthening Bhutan's commitment to Gross National Happiness and environmental stewardship.







# Strengthening Species Conservation

## WBH Annual Population Survey, 2025

-Tshering Tobgay, Project Officer, RSPN

An expedition unveiled 25 White-bellied Heron (WBH) with 3 currently under the care of the White-bellied Heron Conservation Center. This marked a decrease of 7.4% compared to last year. The mission spanning for 5 days from March 1-5, 2024 has seen over 80 dedicated nature enthusiasts ventured into the rugged terrain to carry out the annual WBH population survey.

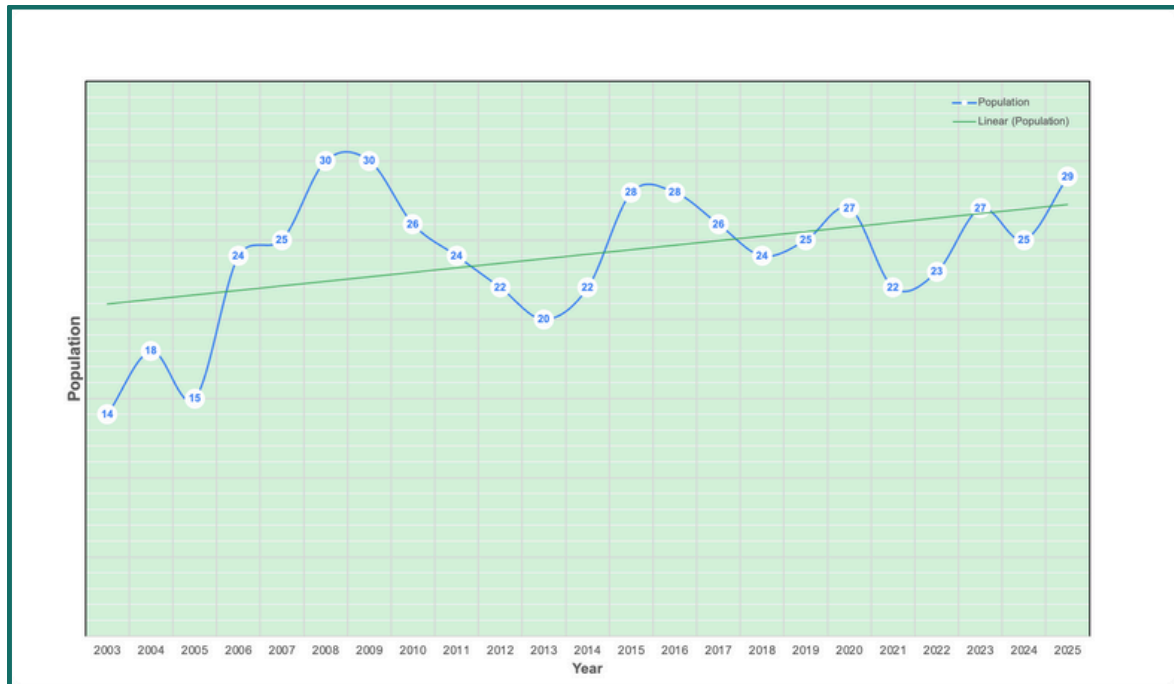
With 18 designated zones through major rivers and tributaries ranging from 150 m to 18000 m above sea level, the team embarked on a journey and explored WBH Habitats in pairs and groups including representatives from the Department of Forests and Park Services (DoFPS), Local Conservation Support Groups (LCSG), and RSPN, came together to unravel the mysteries of the White-bellied Heron (WBH) population.

Guided by collective experience, WBH were spotted through common perching spots like Tall trees, large rocks, and potential foraging ground, and river confluence acted as a guide for the team.

The finding unraveled the Punatsangchhu basin as a hotspot with 55% of WBH sighted, followed by Mangdechhu and Wangchu basins contributing 18% and 14% respectively. Notably, the Phibsoo Wildlife Sanctuary hosted 9% of the total WBH population. However, WBHs were absent from the Kuri-gongri river basin and Jomori in eastern Bhutan during the survey period.

In addition to WBHs, surveyors identified four active WBH nests—one in the Mangdechhu basin and three in the Punatsangchhu basin. A 25% increase compared to the previous year providing hope for the species future.

SI No	WBH Habitat Zones	Places	Count 2025
In-situ	Zone - II	Adha, Nagzhina, Haraongchhu, Kisonachhu and Taksha area	2
	Zone - III	Burichhu, Sunkosh-Dagachhu, Relangthang, Wakletar, Balwani, Malbasey, Kalikhola and Middle Punatsangchhu area	9
	Zone - IV	Lamozingkha, Rangae and Gumti Lower Punatsangchhu area	1
	Zone - V	Phibsoo Wildlife Sanctuary	4
	Zone - VII	Goling and Tsiadang area	2
	Zone - IX	Chamkharchhu	2
	Zone - XV	Jigmechhu and Wangchhu area	4
Ex-situ	WBH Conservation Center		5
Total Count			29



WBH Population trend (2024-2025)



**29**   
WBH recorded

**04**   
Active Nests

**178**   
Bird Species  
Observed

**16**   
Mammal Species  
Observed



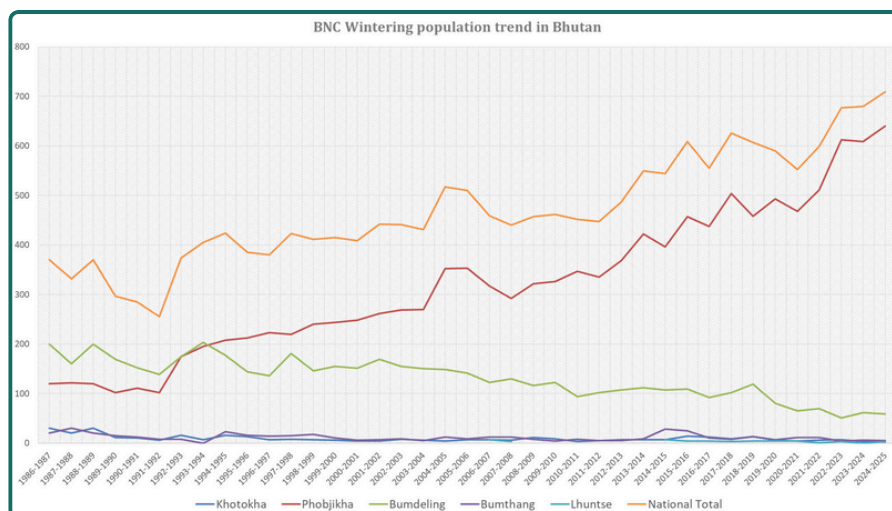
**Black-necked Crane Population count, 2025***Jigme Tshering, SCD Chief, RSPN*

A total of **709 Black-necked Cranes** were recorded in Bhutan during the winter of 2024-2025. The annual count, conducted on February 14, 2025, was carried out by RSPN in collaboration with the Department of Forest and Park Services and local partners, covering all known wintering sites in the country.

While Bhutan has seen an overall rise in Black-necked Crane numbers, largely driven by the increasing population in Phobjikha, some wintering sites, such as Bumdeling, have experienced a decline in crane numbers over the years.

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

Location	Count (Year 2025)
Gangtey-Phobjikha	565 (75 juveniles)
Bumdeling	52 (7 juveniles)
Khotokha	2
Chumey	2
Tang	2(1 juveniles)
Lhuntse	2(1 juveniles)
<b>Total Count</b>	<b>625 (84 juveniles)</b>



# Inconservation

## My journey with RSPN

*Ritwik Gupta, Intern*

### Q1. When did you first hear about RSPN, and what drew you to the organization?

I heard about RSPN when my father got posted to Bhutan. I looked it up, read about RSPN on the internet, and was fascinated to see the work they were doing in conservation particularly with the White-Bellied Heron and the Black-necked Cranes. When I got the opportunity to intern with RSPN in the summer, I had no second thoughts and I applied.

### Q2. Can you tell us about your experience with RSPN? What were some of the most memorable moments?

While I was interning with RSPN, I was under the species and habitat conservation division and was working under Tshering Tobgay. I had the privilege of accompanying Dr. Swen, Dr. Marcel, Tshewang, and Tshering to Ura for 12 days. This was the most memorable period for me. I have always been passionate about wildlife conservation and also like to photograph wildlife. In the field, I learned mist netting, handling, and ringing birds, etc. Also, on this field trip, I witnessed Bhutan's conservation model firsthand. I understood that the community always has to be at the center of conservation efforts, and Bhutan is the finest example of that. One of the most unique experiences that I had during this time was also diving into Bhutanese culture. I spent almost three weeks in the field, staying at local homestays. Some of the residents didn't speak English, which pushed me out of my comfort zone (I picked up some Bumthang and Dzongkha). I saw Bhutan in a way I wouldn't have as a tourist. I would like to thank the RSPN staff for providing me with such a unique opportunity.

### Q3. Is there a particular project or accomplishment during your time with RSPN that you are most proud of?

I went on a second trip to Phobjika where I could contribute to a book compilation on the Black-necked Crane. I learnt and read extensively about the species during this time, which was a meaningful accomplishment for me.

### Q4. Through your journey, what have you learned about nature, communities, or conservation? What kept inspiring you, and how has this experience changed you?

This journey taught me how closely nature, communities, and science are connected. Visiting Ura, the Black-necked Crane Centre, and the White-bellied Heron Conservation Centre helped me understand that conservation is not only about protecting species, but also about respecting ecosystems and the people who live alongside them. I never really thought. What changed me most was the cultural immersion. Staying in Bhutanese homestays for nearly three weeks, often without a common language, allowed me to experience Bhutan in a deeply authentic way.

### Q5. What do you think people should know about RSPN and its work?

Having interned with RSPN for almost two months, I can confidently say that the organization has made a significant impact by meaningfully engaging local communities in conservation. RSPN focuses on approaches where both nature and people benefit, and this balance is at the heart of their work. The conservation efforts they lead in Bhutan are truly commendable and reflect the uniqueness of the country's landscape and its commitment to protecting biodiversity.





## Species Watch with RSPN



**Name:** White-collared Blackbird

**Scientific Name:** *Turdus albocinctus*

**Conservation Status:** Least Concern

**Population Trend:** Declining

**Habitat Type:** subtropical or tropical moist montane forests and subtropical or tropical high-altitude shrubland.

**Place photo taken:** Royal Manas National Park

**Photo credit:** Tshewang Lhendup/RSPN



**Name:** Asian small-clawed otter

**Scientific Name:** *Aonyx cinereus*

**Conservation Status:** Vulnerable

**Population Trend:** Decreasing

**Habitat Type:** Shallow streams, rivers, swamps, marshes, and coastal areas like mangroves, estuaries, and tidal pools.

**Place photo taken:** Royal Manas National Park

**Photo credit:** Tshering Tobgay/RSPN

## ABOUT US

RSPN was established in 1987 under the Royal Command of His Majesty The Fourth King of Bhutan as a citizen based Non-Government 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 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 the Sustainable Development Goal (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".

## CONTACT US

### RSPN HEAD OFFICE

P.O. Box: 325, Building No: 25  
Lhado Lam, Kawajangsa Thimphu 11001, Bhutan  
Tele: +975 2 326130  
Phone No: +975 17746914 (Adm Officer)

### WHITE-BELLIED HERON CONSERVATION CENTER

Changchey Dovan Tsirang 36001, Bhutan  
Tele: +975 1733 2329 (Officer In-Charge)

### BLACK-NECKED CRANE EDUCATION CENTER

Gangtey - Phobjikha Wangduephodrang 14001, Bhutan  
Tele: +975 1793 8431 (Officer In-Charge)