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RANGZHIN



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Celebrating His Majesty's 40th birth anniversary



We have succeeded phenomenally in the conservation of our natural environment, and our efforts and achievements have garnered international appreciation and recognition. If we are as successful in maintaining the places where we live, it will be a truly commendable achievement. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that where we live remain clean, safe, well organized, and beautiful, for all times to come.



~ His Majesty The King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck during the 109th National Day celebration.

The 26th Chubachu Stream cleaning was conducted on February 20, 2020, in dedication to His Majesty's 40th Birth Anniversary.

We pledge to continue working towards the conservation of our environment drawing inspiration and guided by His Majesty's noble conservation legacy.

The cleaning program was initiated in collaboration with the Agency for Promotion of Indigenous Crafts, GST Project Office (Dept. of Revenue and Customs, MoF), Rotary Club of Thimphu, and Centre for Environment and Development. A total of 532 kilograms of waste was collected from the stream.

Become a Member of RSPN

Become an RSPN Member and help give nature the home it needs. RSPN membership is a great way to get close to nature and get fantastic membership benefits. Show your support and join us today!

Visit <http://www.rspnbhutan.org/become-a-member-of-rspn/>

Or scan the QR code to apply online



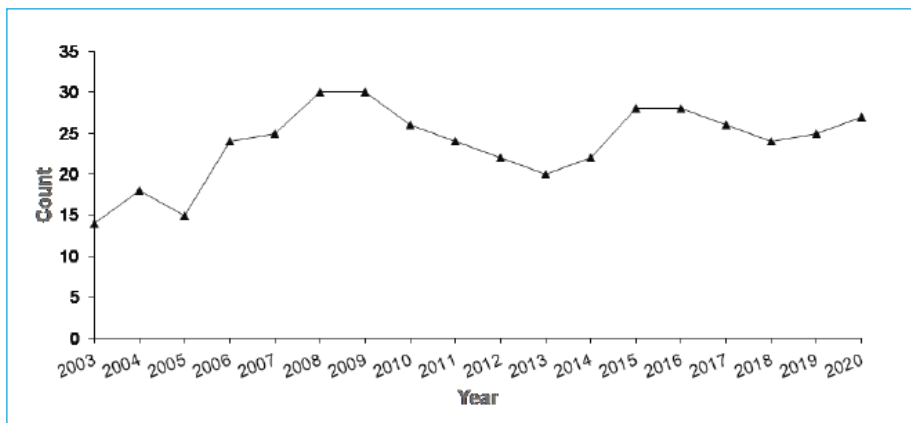


Annual White-bellied Heron population survey

A total of 27 White-bellied Herons (WBH) were recorded during the 18th annual population survey, which was conducted from February 27 – March 2, 2020. The survey confirmed 24 adults and three sub-adult individuals, which is two more than the previous year.

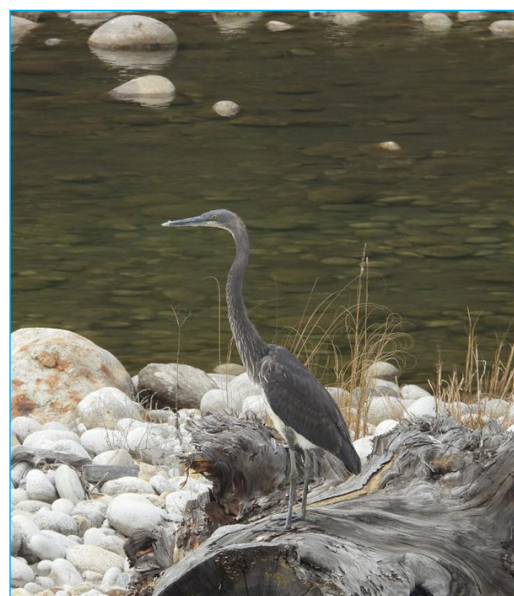
The first WBH population survey was conducted in 2003, and it has been an annual event of the RSPN's WBH Recovery Program since then. The survey covered all currently known and expected habitats along Punatsangchhu, Mangdechhu and Kurigongri basins. Habitats across Bhutan were divided into 41 priority zones and surveyors were deployed to look for the WBH from 6:00 AM to 6:00 PM across five consecutive days within their designated zone.

A total of 63 surveyors from the RSPN, Department of Forests and Park Services (DoFPS) and Local Conservation Support Groups (LCSG) were engaged in the survey. For every bird sighted during the survey, observer, date, time, GPS location, count, age and activity were recorded to avoid double counting. All the data were recorded using the Epicollect5 mobile App and uploaded to the central WBH database and analyzed. Two live nests with three eggs each were also located in Punatsangchhu and Mangdechhu basins during the survey.



White-bellied Heron population trend in Bhutan, 2003-2020

LOCATION	COUNTS
Dagachhu	2
Goling	2
Kamechhu	1
Phochhu	2
Gewachhu	3
Toesang	1
Tsaidang	5
Mithuntar	2
Burichhu	2
Sunkosh	1
Yangbari	1
Balwani	2
Berti	1
Rangae Khola	2
TOTAL	27



25th Chubachhu Stream Cleaning

February 6



RSPN observed the 25th Chubachhu Stream Cleaning together with the Royal University of Bhutan, WWF Bhutan Program and Ministry of Labour and Human Resources to create awareness among the public about waste management. 35 members participated and collected 592 kilograms of waste.



From the Media

An official farewell to black-necked cranes

March 2, 2020

Bumdeling community celebrate BNC festival

Neten Dorji | Trashiyangtse

It is farewell time in Bumdeling, Trashiyangtse. Out on their balconies, residents, old and young, wave as the last of the black-necked cranes leave the village.

As the visitors soars above the village, make some circles and disappear over the hills, children shout “bye bye” and parents pray for the safe returns of the birds

It was an official farewell to the last batch of the eight birds that left Bumdeling on February 29. Villagers of Bumdeling gewog and others arrived dressed in fine ghos and kiras to see off the cranes that has for years become a part of the community and an important guest.

There is a celebration too with the students of Bumdeling Lower Secondary School performing a crane courtship dance donning costumes that makes them look like cranes. Students also sang a Thrung Thrung song. It is the first time they had come together to bid farewell to

the Black-necked cranes, the endangered species highly revered by local people as heavenly birds. They also believe that it is symbol of marital fidelity and lucky birds.

The official farewell highlighted the importance of conserving the species and improving its habitat along the banks of Kholongchhu in Bumdeling. It was also an occasion for villager to take the ownership and renew their commitment to conserve the cranes.

Officials from Bumdeling Wildlife Sanctuary said that in the past they celebrated BNC festival on arrival like in Phobjikha, the other popular crane roosting ground “We decided to celebrate BNC festival on their departure.”

Park Manager, Karma Tempa, said it was everybody’s responsibility to protect the endangered birds. “The farewell with a celebration was to create awareness on conservation.”

Karma Tempa said there were no injuries or casualties reported for about a decade while the visitors were in Bumdeling. “Every year, we protect them well and ensure they fly well to the Tibetan plateau, their summer habitat.” However, officials

said that the number of cranes visiting Bumdeling is decreasing every year and only about 93 birds came to Bumdeling this winter. This is down by 50 percent from 1987. “Disturbance of feeding and rooting grounds could have resulted in the decreasing number of cranes,” he said. “Within two years, we have restrained 10 acres of feeding ground.”

Trashiyangtse Dzongrab Gom, Lam Dorji, highlighted the importance of conversation and taking ownership of cranes. He said residents of Bumdeling are fortunate to be included in the conservation group as the bird is found only in Bhutan, India and China. He said the dzongkhag is planning to start an eco-lodge in Bumdeling in the current fiscal year. “We would hand over the public and employ the youth of Bumdeling.”

Local people said that bidding farewell to crane makes the occasion more special and exciting. A resident, 72 year old, Bumpa Tshering said that the birds hold special spiritual connection to the villagers. “Before the birds descend to Bumdeling valley on its arrival, they circumambulate the Rigsum Goenpa and fly over same place. They bring luck with them.”

Source: *Kuensel*



Bumdeling students perform a black-necked crane dance at the festival to mark its departure on Saturday



A debate on the benefits of BNC conservation was also held during the celebration

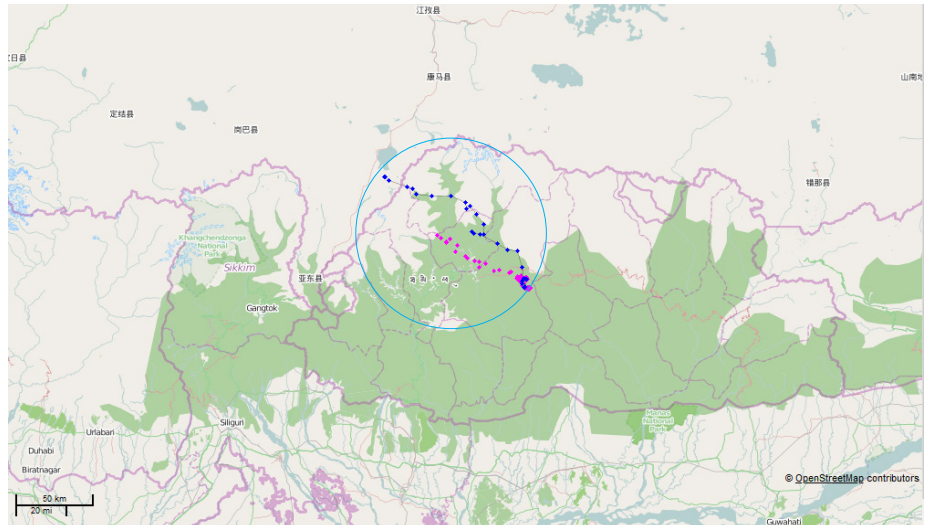


Crane Tshayphel is on the move!!

January 16

Crane IDed 7117 and named Tshayphel, was GPS tagged on January 16, 2020 at Phobjikha by researchers from RSPN, Ugyen Wangchuck Institute for Conservation of Environmental Research (UWICER), Crane Conservation Germany and NABU. The crane flew from Phobjikha on March 8, 2020 to its summer home in Tibetan Autonomous Region in China, about 100+ Kms NW of Phobjikha.

Crane Tshayphel will be monitored through the data information emitted from the transmitter which would broaden our knowledge of the crane's ecology.



Completion of Environment Education and Public Awareness (EEPA) project

RSPN successfully completed 'Environment education and public awareness - Sato Yama Yumi Project' on March 31, 2020 in Gangtey-Phobjikha under Wangdue Phodrang district. This three-year project was implemented in partnership with Japan Environmental Education Forum (JEEF) and BirdLife International (Tokyo), and was funded by Keidanren Nature Conservation Fund (KNCF). The overall objectives of the project were:

- To develop environment education materials for public awareness
- To build capacity and create awareness on the biodiversity, environment, ecosystem services and goods, and livelihoods
- To facilitate and organize the environment education activities for the Nature Clubs in the schools
- To publicly announce about globally biodiversity important and ecosystem value of Phobjikha
- To have need assessment on environment education materials development
- To develop Environment Education materials

Achievements/Outputs

- A documentary titled "Echoes of the Wetland" was produced
- Produced a song on Black-necked cranes with messages on wetlands conservation and its linkages on the livelihoods of the Gangtey-Phobjikha communities
- Developed and distributed 300 brochures and 400 bilingual posters on "wetland and its benefits to community" to the community
- 300 T-shirts with a conservation messages on wetlands and Black-necked Cranes were produced and distributed to schools and relevant stakeholders
- Conducted 7 Environmental education programs for students, monks, and communities.
- Developed and distributed three environmental education books to schools:
 - i. Follow that Stream, Edition 2019 – 3200 copies
 - ii. Environmental Education Guide Book, Edition 2020 – 50 copies
 - iii. Smart Living Tips, Edition 2019- 3200 copies



Know your stream activity for students



Birdwatching program for students



EE books



WBH new habitat inventory

Summary

There were occurrence records of White-bellied Heron (WBH) in Chowki, in Indian side bordering to Deorichhu and adjacent areas as recent as 2011 according to WBH International meeting 2015. Although the areas towards Indian site is highly disturbed today, the stretch of river towards Bhutan remains intact and unexplored. Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN) in 2016 conducted a brief inventory along the upper catchment of Deorichhu and found the area suitable, although no herons were sighted. Considering high probability of WBH presence in the area and past occurrence records in adjacent sites, RSPN in collaboration with Samdrup Jongkhar Territorial Forest Division, (DoFPS), conducted another rapid habitat inventory along Khalatsho and Deorichhu basin from March 4 – 10, 2020. The team surveyed more than 6 kilometres along Khalatshochhu, and 18 kilometers along Deorichhu catchment. Although no WBH were sighted during the survey, a significant evidence; droppings, track marks, footprints resembling to WBH were encountered. The topography, vegetation and river flow were also very similar to most of currently occupied WBH habitats and the area was found still intact and less disturbed, at least in Bhutan side. The team also recorded common associated species like little egret, little cormorant and other water birds in the area. Although no detailed assessment was done during the survey, past assessment by STFD found a healthy thriving fish population in the river.

Introduction

Punatsangchu and Mangdechhu river basins and their tributaries are the two confirmed habitats of the critically endangered White-bellied Heron (*Ardea insignis*) in Bhutan (RSPN, The Critically Endangered White-bellied Heron, 2011). The current findings indicates

that distribution of WBH is restricted to central and western regions of Bhutan until 2015. In 2016, a lone WBH was spotted in Doksum, Drangmechu (Karma Wangdi, 2017) and another at Kuri Zampa in 2018 (RSPN, White-bellied Heron sighted in Kurichhu, 2018) suggesting a significant increase in distribution of the bird in the country. However, there are no regular occurrence in the Doksum area but Kurigongri basin is a recently discovered habitat in the country. However, there are lots of undiscovered potential river basins in the east that could probably provide safe foraging habitats for WBH and moreover, the juveniles and sub-adult

WBH have been observed foraging longer distance and into new habitats in search of suitable place to rely on.

At times, it is found crucial to prioritize and conduct habitat inventory in new and potential areas to understand the habitat preferences with increasing threats and disturbances in the existing habitats.

Deorichhu has high potential to harbour WBH and there were also information on sighting of WBH along Deorichhu in the border areas with Assam, India in the past. Thus, a team from RSPN and Samdrup Jongkhar TFD jointly conducted a rapid habitat inventory along Khalatsho





and Deorichhu basin to assess suitability of the area and ascertain its presence.

Area and Methodology

The team surveyed more than 6 kilometres along Khalatsho River (GPS location), and 18 kilometers along Deorichhu (GPS location) basin from the Indian border till the base of Jangchubling village under Orong gewog. The altitude of the area ranged from 142 to 613 masl. The vegetation in both the river basins were similar, comprising of mixed tree species with *Daubanga grandiflora* as dominant species. The team consistently walked along the river to document all dominant flora and fauna species. River width, depth deep runs, shallow and pools were also measured frequently to understand the rivers cape. Potential threats to WBH and its habitat were also recorded during the survey. To verify the past presence of WBH and sighting records, social interview were conducted besides river basin assessment.

Results

- No WBH were sighted and no confirmatory evidence found to ascertain presence of WBH in the area.
- The area highly resembles the currently occupied WBH habitats and it is potential to host given the past records of its presences in the adjacent Indian side.
- The team surveyed approximately 24 kilometers of the two rivers and mapped the area using a mobile app, SW maps.
- The team documented 17 dominant tree species, 13 species of birds and 9 different species of fish.
- The vegetation is mainly mixed broadleaved forest and dominant species were mostly *Daubanga grandiflora* and *Macaranga* spp.
- Little cormorant and Little egret were most common water bird species sighted along the river basin.

- Chocolate Mahseer (*Neolissochilus hexagonalepis*) dominated among the fish species and the diversity and abundance of fish species were comparatively greater at the upper course of the river.

- The average width of the river was 12.4 ± 5.0 m, which ranged from 7.9 to 19.5 m. The average depth (river side/bank) of the river was 0.23 ± 0.05 m which ranged from 0.15 m in shallows to 0.3 m deep in deep pools.

- Comparatively, the Deorichhu basin was found more suitable for WBH to Khalatsho River which has more deep gorges and narrow valleys.

- The team interacted with the members of Conservation NGO based at Chowki, Assam. The officials stated that WBH was sighted in 2006-2007 and the latest sighting was in 2011.

- They informed us that sightings were published in Aarayanak journal.

- As per the information, a lone WBH was sighted at 26.8202 N and 91.4158 E in 2011.

- The area is now dammed and water is diverted for irrigation purposes.

- They also pointed out that recent developmental activities along the border area and illegal fishing trend from the border residents has encroached into the previous WBH feeding habitats.

- The team also interacted with a few locals of Khalatsho Suzung, Orong villages.

- The locals of Khalatsho pointed out that they rarely see the bird along the river but the species they see seasonally was later confirmed as Black stork through photographs.

- A resident of Suzung claimed the sighting of WBH from a distant place while traveling along the river but could not confirm due to lack of valid evidence.

- Unlike in many other currently occupied habitats, no severe threats were observed along the two rivers besides prevailing illegal fishing trends at the border area at Chowki.

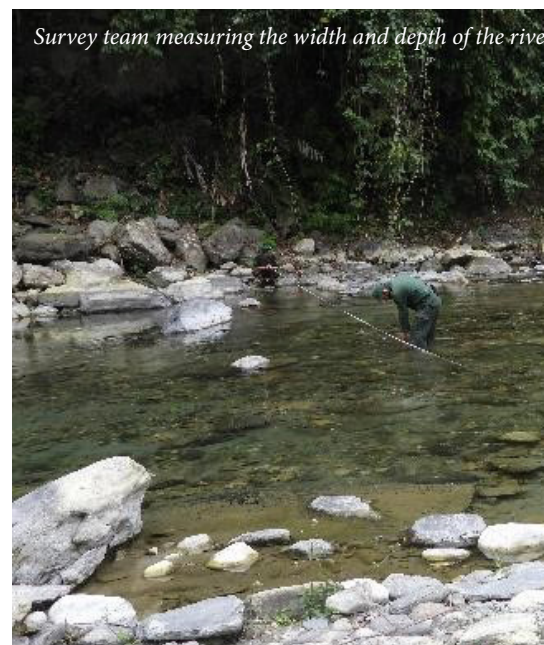
- Only two high voltage electric wires; one at the base of Deothang and another at base of Orong were found in the area.

- It was found that the border area now falls under the jurisdiction of counterpart conservation NGO, and they oversee all the conservation related activities in the area.

Way forward

Deorichhu basin has high potential to ground WBH with preferably suitable width of the river valley, river course landscape, vegetation and the population of the fishes in the river system. However, detailed inventory on the feasibility for the ex-situ conservation of the WBH is required in the future. The public conservation and protection awareness programs on this species are also felt necessary.

As the survey was conducted in a short time, more frequent monitoring is necessary to confirm regular or seasonal variation of bird diversity in the area.



Survey team measuring the width and depth of the river



Biodiversity details:

Dominant Tree species

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. <i>Dubanga Grandiflora</i> | 10. <i>Ficus roxburghi</i> |
| 2. <i>Macaranga spp.</i> | 11. <i>Debrigesea spp.</i> |
| 3. <i>Ficus spp.</i> | 12. <i>Engelhardia spp.</i> |
| 4. <i>Pandanus spp.</i> | 13. <i>Toona spp.</i> |
| 5. <i>Oroxylum Indicum</i> | 14. <i>Taulamo spp.</i> |
| 6. <i>Kydia spp.</i> | 15. <i>Syzygim spp.</i> |
| 7. <i>Albezia spp.</i> | 16. <i>Altingia spp.</i> |
| 8. <i>Termilia spp.</i> | 17. <i>Bombax ceiba</i> |
| 9. <i>Erythrina arborescens</i> | |



Water birds

1. Great Cormorant
2. Grey-backed Forktail
3. Crested Kingfisher
4. White-throated Kingfisher
5. White Wagtail
6. Plumbeous Water Redstart
7. Blacked-crown Night Heron
8. Lesser flame back
9. Brown Dipper
10. Little Egret
11. Sandpiper
12. Blue Whistling thrush
13. Tawny Fish Owl



Fish species

1. *Neolissochilus hexagonalepis* (chocolate masher)
2. *Cyprinion semiplotus*
3. *Devario spp.*
4. *Gara Spp.*
5. *Aborichthys spp.*
6. *Schistura spp.*
7. *Amblyceps spp.*
8. *Danio spp.*
9. *Barilius barna*

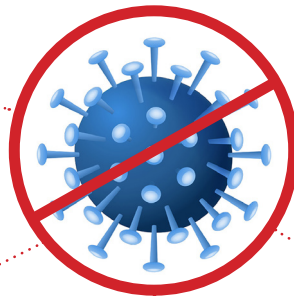




HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS FROM COVID-19



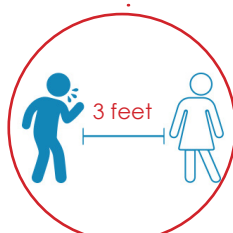
Wash your hands regularly and properly with water and soap at least for 20 seconds



Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands



Stay home when you are sick. Don't go to work or school



Maintain at least 1 metre (3 feet) distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing.



Cough or sneeze into the crease of the elbow or in a tissue

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?



Fever



Cough



Shortness of breath

Call **2121** for COVID-19 related queries
Visit www.health.gov.bt for COVID-19 related updates

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