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RANGZHIN



RSPN Quarterly Newsletter

Vol: 12 Issue: 4

Royal Society for Protection of Nature

December, 2019

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White-bellied Heron recorded in Thimphu

October 29

White-bellied Heron was recorded for the first time in Thimphu. Sighted at 2230, this is the highest recorded elevation. Sherab Gyeltshen, an ardent birder spotted the heron at 1:40 pm at Olakha and called in his friend Tshulthrim, a birding guide, who confirmed that it was indeed a White-bellied Heron. Hishey Tshering, a travel agent, and a birder claimed to have spotted the bird around the same area at 8 am but could not confirm it as he did not have his birding equipment with him at that time. The RSPN team confirmed that it was a juvenile.



All set to welcome the feathered winter citizens

October 26

Locals of Uruk village, along with the staff of Chumey Forest Range and RSPN carried out the annual Black-necked Crane (BNC) roost maintenance at Uruk in Bumthang. The valley hosts few BNCs every winter and also serves as an important stopover site for internal migration of BNCs



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Orientation and training workshop for teachers

An orientation and training workshop for teachers on "Follow that Stream" was held at Hotel Pema Karpo, Bajo from October 28-31, 2019. A total of 16 Environmental Science teachers attended the workshop. 'Follow that Stream' handbook focuses on creating awareness

on the importance of environmental issues, especially the management of waste and streams. It includes samples of activities based on established research designs such that students and teachers can acquire knowledge and understanding

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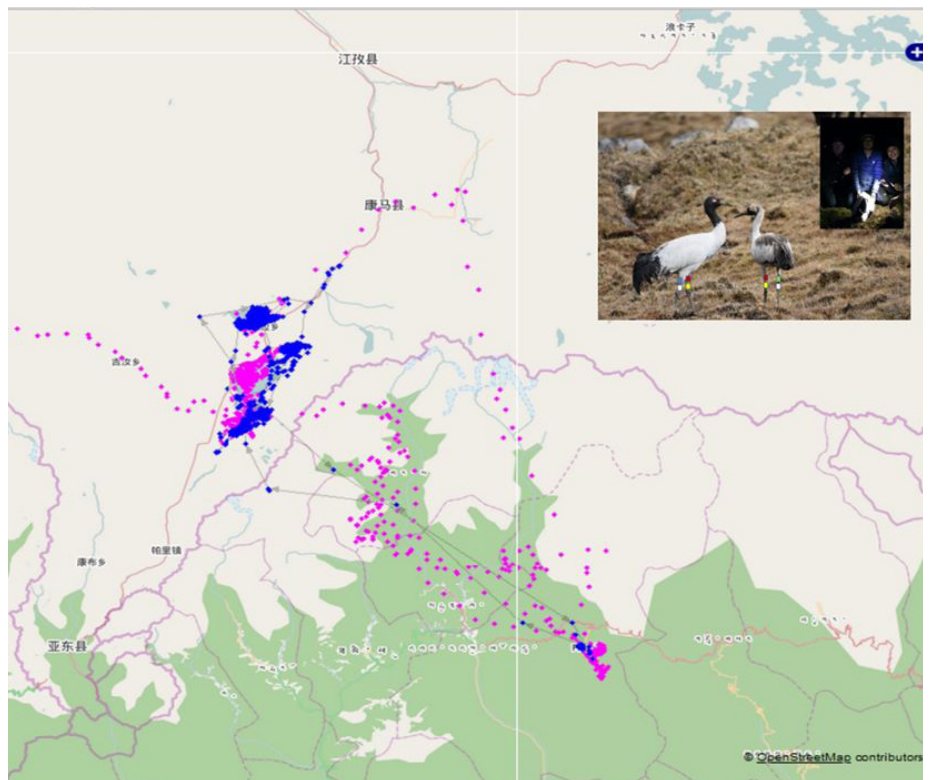
of the physical environment, the interdependency of people and all living things, and the cultural, economic and social processes which have an impact on the environment or local economy. It also provides an opportunity to develop skills to assess, evaluate, and deal with environmental issues through inquiry, application of scientific skills, scientific method, research methodology, and experiments.



Crane Wangchen is back!!

Wangchen, then a juvenile, was tagged with GPS GSM transmitter at Phobjikha valley on January 26, 2019. The young crane left for its summer ground on March 8, 2019 from the valley. After spending more than 8 months along the wetlands of Duoqing Co and Gala Co in the Tibetan Autonomous Region in China, which is about 130 kms from Phobjikha, the crane returned to its winter home in Phobjikha on November 26, 2019 according to the data received from the transmitter. For individual identification, they were also colour banded.

This study is a part of RSPN's project "Research and Conservation of BNC in Bhutan" in partnership with Crane Conservation Germany, Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union (NABU) and Ugyen Wangchuck Institute for Conservation and Environmental Research (UWICER), funded by the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (BMUB), Germany.



Fourth zero waste hour

Joining the rest of the nation, RSPN together with Bhutan Toilet Organization, Rotary Club, and the Centre for Environment and Development observed the day to mark 'Zero Waste Hour' on October 2, 2019.

The members collected various types of waste, drained out stagnant water, cleared weeds around the office premises. This was followed by the monthly Chubachu stream cleaning.





Agro-ecological farming training

November 16-20

A five-day training on agro-ecological farming was organized in Digala chiwog under Sustainable land management project funded by GEF/Small Grants Programme, UNDP. The objective of the training was to support farmers to integrate agro-ecological farming approach for efficient land management and agroforestry basics in their farmlands

A total of 60 (20 M, 40 F) farmers attended the training program. The farmers were presented on the various agro-ecological farming techniques and their advantages of adopting such farming

at the village and household levels. The training was successful in introducing four vermicomposting and four vermishash prototypes at the household level. Farmers were also trained on cardamom and ginger farming. Additionally, during the training period maintenance of past electric fencing supported by project and installation of drip irrigation in greenhouse supported to farmers group were also completed.

The training was facilitated by a district agricultural officer and Mr. Wangyel, a farmer from Tali village under Zhemgang.



Farmers knowledge-sharing exchange visit

A knowledge-sharing exchange program on 'Agro-Ecological/Integrated Organic Farming at Kamaray and Budang Blocks in east Sikkim ' were held on October 2, 2019. 12 farmers from Zhemgang and Chukha visited the organic vegetable market in Gangtok. The objectives of the exchange program were:

1. Exposing farmers to some of the organic techniques that have been successfully implemented by the farmers of Sikkim.
2. To learn how the land management activities are carried out by the farmers of Sikkim.
3. To visit some of the centers where the

organic farming demonstration is carried out.

During the four-day program, the farmers were presented with the organic status of Sikkim and how Sikkim struggled to become an organic state. Farmers were also briefed on the state policy in organic farming and certification process. The farmers also witnessed the agriculture practices and basic organic techniques in the area.

The knowledge-sharing exchange visit was a success and the farmers shared that they could replicate some of the relevant organic techniques in their village.



WBH awareness program

A two-day White-bellied Heron (WBH) community awareness program was conducted at Changchey and Salamjee, prime habitats for WBH, from November 12-13, 2019. On the first day, people residing along Burichhu, Serutar and Changchey Dovan attended the program while on the second day, the program was



conducted with the Salamjee community. A total of 44 participants(male: 28 and female: 16) took part in the program. The team also monitored the WBH at Burichu Dovan for two consecutive mornings. Engaging local people is one of the prioritized activities in the White-bellied Heron conservation program.



Inter-School quiz competition

Young people are one of the most promising sectors of the society to address environmental issues and concerns. Therefore, to create consistent awareness for students on environmental conservation, an inter-school quiz competition was held on October 29, 2019, amongst the students from Phuntsholing high School, Yonten Kuenjung Academy, Norbu Academy, Phuntsholing middle Secondary School and Sonamgang Middle Secondary School.

More than 200 students and teachers from five participating schools made it through to the program. RSPN with joint collaboration with Thromde Education Office, Phuentsholing Thromde has organized the event.



Environmental education program

RSPN in collaboration with Shari Higher Secondary School (SHSS), Paro, organized an Environmental Education Program in Paro on October 9, 2019. During the program, a series of environmental programs like quiz competition, environmental-based presentations, exhibition, and outdoor event were organized.

Later, the students were taken to the stream adopted by SHSS to conduct a stream flow activity. The students were made to identify the stream type and sampling methods. They were also made to note the macroinvertebrates observed in the particular stream, which can be a method to gauge the water quality of a particular stream.





From the media

Source: BBS, October 22

Asia's biggest wildlife quiz held in Thimphu

Sixty-six students from 22 schools of Thimphu, Paro, Haa, Punakha and Wangdue Phodrang took part in the Wild Wisdom Quiz in Thimphu yesterday.

It is Asia's biggest wildlife quiz created by World Wildlife Fund (WWF) India as a platform to promote the understanding of the value of biodiversity with young school children in 2008.

This is the second time Bhutan hosted the quiz programme. The theme for this year's quiz was "Exploring Our Planet." It was organised by WWF Bhutan in partnership with the Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN) and Zhiwaling Group.

"It is a growing concern that our young Bhutanese children are becoming more and more disconnected from nature. The Wild Wisdom Quiz, because of its fun and entertaining format, is an excellent platform to reach out to young minds during their formative years and sensitise them to the brilliance of the natural world. We hope that this exposure will then elevate their environmental consciousness and motivate them to care about conservation," Sonam Yangchen, the Communication Officer of WWF Bhutan, said.

In the middle secondary level, Kuenga Palmo from Changzamtog Middle Secondary School won the first prize.

Dorji Ngawang Choden from the Sersang Primary School bagged the first position in the primary level. Prizes were also awarded to the top five participants.

The WWF Bhutan will also take the top 10 participants for a winter nature camp in January 2020.

Yeshi Dorji

WBH sighted at Dagachhu Hydro Power dam site

Two White-bellied Herons (WBH) were sighted at Dagachhu Hydro Power dam site on October 22, 2019, at around 10:32 AM when a team comprising of officials from Dagana Forest Division and Dagachhu Hydro Power Corporation (DHPC) visited the dam site at Gewthang under Kana Gewog for inspection of sand deposit in the dam area. However, the team couldn't take the picture as the birds shied away or flew away to inaccessible areas. The forestry officials requested

DHPC to monitor the bird through the management's closed-circuit television (CCTV) camera installed at the dam site for security purposes. On October 31, 2019, DHPC while checking the footage found the image of WBH being captured on October 28, 2019, at around 08:50 AM at the same site.

Earlier in 2018, the image of WBH on the rooftop (Figure 2) claiming to be from the Dagachhu area was being shared among the forestry officials and

the bird enthusiasts. However, it was left unreported since the source of the image and location of the sighting was not confirmed. This is the third sighting of WBH around Dagachhu dam site.

In Bhutan, the sightings of WBH are reported from Punatsangchhu and Mangdechhu river basins and their tributaries. The country is also known to host the highest number of WBH

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populations encompassing more than 42% (25 individuals) of the current global population. The presence of WBH along Dagachhu catchment has extended its habitat area in Bhutan.

Report prepared by: Sonam Yangden (Forestry Officer)

Submitted by: Kencho Dukpa (Chief Forestry Officer) Dagana Forest Division, Dagapela, Dagana Department of Forests and Park Services



“Know your stream” and “Welcome to Bird Study Tour”

As a part of ‘Environmental Education and Public Awareness (EEPA), SATOYAMA UMI project’, Royal Society for Protection of Nature conducted the environmental education activities with the Nature Club and Environmental Studies students from Rameychen Primary School on November 27 and with Bayta Primary School and Phobjikha Central School on November 27-28, 2019.

Living Tips”. On the last day, the students partook in the “Welcome to Bird Study Tour” activity at Pelela. During the bird watching tour, students were taught the basics of birding like how to identify the birds, parts of birds, etc. More than 15 birds were recorded by students on that day.



The three-day event focused on waste management, Black-necked Crane behavior, and origami and also carried out the project experiments from “How safe is your drinking water?” All the activities were from the RSPN publications titled, “Follow that Stream”, “The Environmental Education Guide book” and “Smart



WBH educational trip

In an effort to create consistent awareness on the conservation of the critically endangered White-bellied Heron (WBH), 21 RSPN members participated in the educational trip made to the habitats of the WBH in Tsirang on December 14 - 15, 2019 .

On the way back, the members hiked to Sunkosh village to learn more about the fishpond initiatives taken by WBH Local Conservation Support Group with fund support from RSPN.



The members were very lucky to have sighted WBH at different points which otherwise would be extremely difficult.

Led by Mrs. Rebecca Pradhan, Senior Ecologist with RSPN, the members also visited WBH Conservation Centre at Changchey in Tsirang.





WBH habitat inventory

December 4

With increasing anthropogenic pressure and disturbances, it has become crucial to assess and identify new habitats for White-bellied Herons (WBHs). Therefore, RSPN research team conducted extensive survey along Galey Chhu, Retey chhu and Mou-chhu. More than seven kilometers along each river basin were covered during the survey. No sightings of WBH were recorded during the survey.

All the rivers were enveloped with broad-leaved forest with river width ranging approximately from 6-20 meters wide. Interview with the local people about the presence of WBH in the area were also conducted. The record of WBH sighting was reported from Surey, a few weeks earlier. However, RSPN upon investigation found that the sightings were of Black Storks and the people due to limited knowledge mistook the storks for WBH.



World Soil Day observed

GEF Small Grants Programme, implemented by UNDP joined the communities of Lagdurbi Village, Bardo Gewog in Zhemgang on December 5, 2019, to Celebrate the World Soil Day 2019. The theme of this year's World Soil Day was "Stop Soil Erosion, Save our Future".

Hundreds of farmers and students joined the event. A video showcasing sustainable land management in Langdurbi and Digala, cultural items and awareness was created on the importance of soil on livelihood as a part of the world soil day celebration.

SGP in partnership with the Royal Government of Bhutan is currently implementing three micro sustainable land management projects in Bardo Gewog: Sustaining agro-ecological services in Langdurbi village through

sustainable natural resource management for biodiversity conservation and livelihood by Langdurbi Sa Gi Sungjab (LSGS), Sustainable Land management and promotion of local agrobiodiversity for food security in Digala by RSPN and Enhancing livelihood through medium-scale cardamom plantation in Bardo village by Khengrig Namsum Cooperative.

Lower Manas Basin is SGP's landscape for Operational Phase 6 (2015-2019) and supported 11 micro-projects in several gewogs of Zhemgang (Bardo, Phangkhar, Nangkor, Ngangla, and Trong)

The event was jointly organized by Zhemgang Dzongkhag Administration, Bardo Gewog, National Soil Service Center, MoAF, UNDP – SGP and Royal Society for Protection of Nature's field office based in Zhemgang.



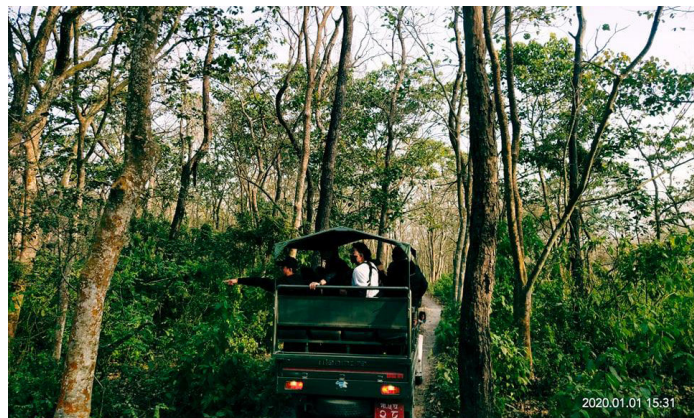


Annual review and planning meeting

The 2019 Annual Review and Planning Meeting was held in Kuzala Hotel in Phuntsholing on January 3-4, 2019. The meeting was preceded by a visit to Chitwan National Park and Lumbini Crane Sanctuary in Nepal.

It was an ideal time to reflect on the past achievements and plan for 2020.

The Executive Director, in his closing remarks stated, "RSPN will endeavor to make a greater impact and make best efforts for the conservation of our environment in 2020".



Our New Institutional Members



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