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RANGZHIN



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Royal Society for Protection of Nature

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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!

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Or Scan the QR code to apply online



White-bellied Heron found in a new Habitat



Photo: Pema Tobgay

On October 9, 2018, a lone White-bellied Heron (WBH) was sighted at Kurichhu by Pema Tobgay, Park Range Officer of Phrumsengla National Park (PNP). He continuously observed the bird from October 9-27.

Consequent to the sighting, the RSPN WBH team visited the site on October 23 to verify its presence and assess the surrounding environment. The team also observed the same heron for three days along with the park ranger and found using the same feeding area along the shallow river of Kurichhu.

Management Training

A three-day management and refresher training to Visitors Information Center Management Team, homestay owners, souvenir group and local guides of Haa Community-based Sustainable Tourism (CBST) group was conducted from July 20 till August 1, 2018. About 22 participants attended the training as a part of a project activity to enhance skills for CBST group and center management group.

During the training, the CBST group reviewed the Visitor Information Center Management Plan. The group also discussed on issues and challenges of not receiving an equal number of guest by homestays due to lack of centralized coordination and information sharing. On the second day, the group members were trained on the importance of basic record keeping, book keeping, maintaining stock register, cash book updates, filing and documentations.

On the final day, the group members were provided the refresher training on making cookies from locally available buckwheat flour, hot-stone bath, walnut butter lamp, key chain from yak hairs and perfumes from dried artemisia.

It was observed that there is a huge potential for generating income by the CBST group members through the sale of these local products once the Visitor Information Center starts functioning.





REDD+ readiness Knowledge Sharing Workshop

A two-day knowledge sharing workshop on “REDD+ readiness” commenced from July 19-20, 2018 in Gelephu. Over 27 participants from Watershed Management Division (WMD), UNDP Bhutan, Zhemgang and Sarpang Dzongkhag Administration, Zhemgang Forest Division, and Nangkhor Gewog Administration attended the workshop.

The workshop focussed on sharing knowledge and lessons about REDD+ and related programs in Zhemgang district. It was also aimed to facilitate the dialogue between national REDD+ stakeholders and local communities, and enhance the engagement of local communities in REDD+ decision making.



Land Management Campaign



With an objective to upscale the past land management programs, RSPN through the fund support from GEF-Small Grants Programme, UNDP Bhutan, successfully conducted the land management campaign, first of its kind, in Digla Chiwog under Bardo Gewog, Zhemgang.

During the week-long program (July 22-28, 2018), around 30 acres of Stone bunding and Napier plantation programs were successfully implemented.

RSPN extends its gratitude to GEF-Small Grants Programme, UNDP Bhutan for supporting the project.



- 50** farmers from 40 households participated in the campaign.
- 13** acres of land managed through hedgerow plantation.
- 17** acres of land managed through stone bunding.

Running for a cause

Led by the Le Meridien team (Paro and Thimphu), over 120 individuals participated in the ‘Run to Give Marathon’ on September 22, 2018 at Paro to raise fund to help build a new rehabilitation center for Karma, an injured Black-necked Crane.

RSPN would like to thank Le Meridien Paro, Le Meridien Thimphu, and Marriot International for initiating the program. A total of Nu. 127,745 was raised.





White-bellied Heron awareness program

A White-bellied Heron (WBH) awareness program was conducted at Karmaling gewog, Dagana on December 8, 2018, by the RSPN research team. A total of 20 community people from Karmaling and Homa, and 6 foresters from Lhamoizingkha range office took part in the program. The program included a presentation on WBH, its conservation importance, and mapping of threats and disturbance to WBH along the Sunkosh river.



All set for welcoming the feathered winter visitors

The Annual Black-necked Crane roost maintenance was carried out in Phobjikha and Chhumei in October 22, 2018.

Cranes in general prefer shallow water bodies for roosting. Movements on the surface of the water by the predators and other animals alarm the cranes and they fly away. The restoration work involved uprooting of grasses, pooling water and clearing. Streams flowing into the wetland were diverted to the cleared spot to create shallow ponds.

The work was supported by the Gangtey Amankora, Gangtey Lodge and Bumthang Forest Division.



Phobjikha



Chhumei



RSPN presented SDG Achievers and Leaders Award



Royal Society for Protection of Nature was honored with the SDG Achievers and Leaders Award during the SDG's & NGO's Achievers & Leadership Awards 2018, held on December 23, 2018, at Taj Tashi, Bhutan.

The SDG's & NGO's Achievers & Leadership Awards presented by World CSR Day recognize Leaders & Organisations who have contributed value & made a change as a strategic tool for sustainable growth.

Tshering Dorji, Chief of ADM/HR Division, RSPN accepted the award on behalf of the organization and said, "Our efforts have been recognized and we will continue to work collectively towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations"

The award was selected by the jury consisting of senior leaders, researchers and academicians such as:

1. Dr. Arun Arora, Ex-President, The Economic Times (The Times of India Group)
2. Professor Indira Parikh, President – Antardisha, India's Iconic HR Leader.
3. Dr Prasad Medury, Partner, Amrop India
4. Michael Wong, Global Head, Thought Leaders International
5. Jonathan Peters, Founder, Stars of the Industry Group



The 20th Black-necked Crane Festival

With the arrival of cranes, the people of Phobjikha celebrated the 20th annual Black-necked Crane festival on November 11, 2018. Local communities of Phobjikha, dressed in their best attires filled the courtyard of Gangtey Goenpa to witness the festival. The day also saw a record crowd of more than 800 international tourists and 1,000 local people.

Dasho Dzungda, Wangdue Phodrang Administration, graced the day as the Chief Guest. During the opening speech, the Chief Guest highlighted the importance of Phobjikha as a habitat of the Black-necked Cranes and urged the community of Phobjikha and the visitors to support the crane conservation in the valley. Cultural programs such as folk and mask dances were performed by the local community and the monks. The most amusing and entertaining part of the show remained the crane dance in which the school children enact the social behavior of cranes in the valley.

The event is organized every year by Gangtey-Phobji Environment Management Committee (GPEMC), a local community group composed of elected leaders, the government sector representatives, the monk body, and RSPN. The festival was first initiated by RSPN in early 1998 and it has now become a part of the local event in Phobjikha valley. Just as in



Phobjikha, a similar festival was organized in Bumdeling on November 17, 2018 to celebrate the arrivals of Black-necked Cranes in the valley. Over a hundred local farmers including local government officials, students and few foreign guests joined the celebration. The half day program involved dances by students and local farmers, quiz competition and signing of pledges to support BNC conservation in their locality. The festival was organized by the Bumdeling Wildlife Sanctuary and funded by the International Crane Foundation and the Black-necked Crane conservation project of RSPN.

Securing foraging habitats for the Black-necked Cranes

October 22, 2018

RSPN in collaboration with the Bumdeling Wildlife Sanctuary and the International Crane Foundation embarked on a project aimed at securing foraging habitats for the Black-necked Cranes in Bumdeling, Trashiyangtse.

Electric fencing were provided to curb abandonment of paddy fields by farmers due to crop damage by wildlife and restoration of degraded paddy fields along the Kholong Chhu flood plains.





From the Media



• Only one White Bellied Heron is spotted at the Phochhu in Punakha today (Photo: Phub Dorji)

Number of White Bellied Herons decline

Increasing disturbances are cited for the decline in the number of this critically endangered bird species

Conservationists and bird watchers are worried by the increasing disturbance of prime White-bellied Heron's (WBH) habitat and feeding site at Phochhu in Punakha.

The site was declared as an Important Bird Area in 2014. WBH is a critically endangered bird species. Bhutan is home to about half the world's WBH population. Twenty-four individuals and five juveniles out of less than 60 WBH in the world are in the country today, according to Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN). According to multiple surveys conducted by RSPN between 2003 and 2010, the river systems harboring potential WBH habitats are Phochhu, Mochhu, Punatshangchhu, Sunkosh, Dagachhu and its tributaries in the west, Mangdechhu and Bertichhu, among others. The bird was also recently sighted at Kurichhu. However, researchers from RSPN, birdwatchers, and rafting operators told Kuensel that the population of WBH at Phochhu and Mochhu has declined over the years. A regular bird watcher, Hishey Tshering from Thimphu, said that in 2001 he saw five WBHs along the Mochhu. "Now it is very rare to see

even a single WBH along the Mochhu. In 2016, there were three along the Phochhu. Today, we can see only one and that is also being continually disturbed," he said. According to the population count of WBH during nesting and non-nesting seasons between 2003 and 2010, two birds were counted from Tshekhathang Pochhu and one at the Phochhu-Mochhu confluence. Chief of communications and membership division with RSPN, Tashi Phuntsho, said that WBHs were secretive birds often intolerant of close proximity to humans. "Disturbance from humans and loss of habitat undoubtedly attributed to their extirpation over much of their former range. Threats to these birds are further intensified by the growing tourism activities like rafting and kayaking along the important habitats," he said. "There are more than three rafting companies operating along Phochhu and Mochhu rivers in Punakha." This situation of the birds being frequently disturbed by tourists and rafting activities caught the attention of a group of bird watchers in the country. Tshering Tobgay, one of the bird watchers wrote on a public group in social media called Birds of Bhutan, saying that it was the threats driven by anthropogenic causes. "We are getting late and it will be too late to wait for a few more years. There is a need for our support to bring back WBH in Punakha to a stable number." One of the rafting operators in Punakha said that river rafting at Phochhu was done only on the request from visitors. "It is unfair to hold rafting activities, which is our livelihood for a single bird. Moreover, I have not seen the bird in the last four

years." Kencho from Explore Bhutan said that his clients, after seeing the signage installed at WBH's habitat, did not stop for photography and other activities so as not to disturb the birds. He also said that there was no awareness related to the bird's conservation conducted with the rafting operators yet. RSPN monitors the daily behaviour of the bird by collaborating with the community through the Local Conservation Support Group. The initiative also helped reduce harvest of timber, collection of firewood, fishing, and picnicking at the bird's feeding and roosting areas. The executive director of RSPN, Kinley Tenzin (PhD), said WBH were ambassadors of a healthy ecosystem of rivers. "The extremely low population of the WBH along its habitat area is an indication that the ecosystem of the river and its surrounding is very unhealthy," he said. "If WBH goes extinct, it is an indication that the river and its surrounding ecosystem are also on the verge of collapsing. Therefore, conservation is not only about saving particular species but eventually it is all about saving ourselves." An ecologist and researcher with RSPN, Rebecca Pradhan, said that the population of WBH at Phochhu could not have declined but migrated to a better habitat where there is a minimum disturbance. "There is a need for collaboration among all the stakeholders because the conservation of the bird will benefit all in the long run," she said.

Source: Kuensel (December 1, 2018)

WWF Bhutan and RSPN bring Asia's biggest wildlife quiz to Bhutan

WWF Bhutan and the Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN) introduced Asia's biggest wildlife quiz, Wild Wisdom Quiz in Bhutan.

Winners from the middle secondary level at the national-level quiz, Kuenga Palmo (Class 6, Changzamtog Middle Secondary School) and Rigden Kuenga (Class 6, Etho Metho Primary School) will be representing

Bhutan to compete in the grand finale in New Delhi, India in October, which will be hosted by the pioneer of Indian quizzing, Mr. Siddhartha Basu.

WWQ is a program created by WWF-India as a platform to reach out to young school children and to promote their understanding of the value of biodiversity through a fun-filled and interactive

learning experience.

Now in its 11th year, WWQ has seen the participation of more than 50,000 students in 800 schools in India and Nepal.

Being the only international conservation organization in Bhutan, WWF Bhutan is committed to elevate the environmental consciousness of our young citizens.



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WWQ is a fantastic platform to reach out to young minds and promote the value of biodiversity and thereby inspire them to care for conservation because of its fun and interactive format,” said Sonam Yangchen, Communications Officer of WWF Bhutan. In Bhutan, WWQ was carried out in 15 schools in Thimphu through two phases. In the first phase, individual schools administered a school level quiz for primary level students (class 6 to 8) to select the top 2 scoring students from each level to participate in the second phase, a general-level quiz.

The general level-quiz was organized by WWF Bhutan and RSPN at the Royal University of Bhutan. Six Senses Bhutan, an upcoming luxury resort that focuses on sustainable practices collaborated to sponsor the prizes.

Source: Kuensel (September 12, 2018)

Waste Sensitization Campaign



Considering public awareness a key to successful waste management, RSPN also carried out a waste sensitization program on August 30, 2018. The hotels and communities including the construction workers residing near the stream were advoated on the waste management issues.

Welcome to RSPN



Mr. Phub Dorji, CEO, Bhutan Development Bank as the new Board Director of RSPN

Mr. Damcho Yonten
ICT Officer



Our Institutional Members





Karma needs a safer home



In the winter of 2016, an injured juvenile Black-necked Crane, Karma, was left in the lower valley of Phobjikha. Karma was alone and helpless with complete fear of predation. RSPN field staff, upon hearing the information, immediately rushed to the scene and brought Karma to the Black-necked Crane Visitor Centre (BNCVC). Karma was severely injured with its left wing unable to move. The medical examination by National Centre for Animal Health, Ministry of Agriculture and Forests revealed multiple fractures in its left wing with callus formation, rendering the bird flightless for life. It is said in the folklores that if an injured Black-necked Crane is left behind, few cranes would bring along medicine for the injured one. Likewise, few cranes did return and visit Karma at the Centre after few days and started celebrating when they knew that Karma was alive. However, the re-union was short lived as Karma's friends and family members returned to their summer

habitat. It was observed that, Karma was restless and constantly making calls. Two years on, Karma continues to live in the small enclosure built by RSPN. RSPN has professional dedicated field staff taking care of Karma. Karma, now an adult, has no means to tell us how much pain it has to go through. While we see a young Karma seemingly happy surviving in its new but small home, Karma will never be able to fly again. Far away in the Tibetan Plateau, it is most certain that Karma's parents must be feeling its absence, not knowing Karma is still alive. In order to make a permanent home for Karma, RSPN will build a proper rehabilitation centre. The rehab centre will not only provide Karma a safe, bigger and secure home, but also provide proper care, treatments, and rehabilitation for injured cranes in future, helping in releasing them back to the wild. The enclosure once completed will help in educating and creating awareness about Black-necked Cranes.

Karma still lives in the small temporary home which requires regular maintenance. Though it is a safe place providing protection from predators, its movement is limited by the small space.





Karma is perhaps the first Black-necked Crane that has spent two full summers in Bhutan, all alone.



Architectural drawing of Karma's home (front view)

HELP US BUILD A SAFER AND SECURE HOME FOR KARMA

The total cost for the Rehab Centre is estimated at **USD 56,000** and we have so far raised **USD 16,000**. Please support us to raise the additional **USD 40,000** to build a home for KARMA.

You can donate online at
<http://www.rspnbhutan.org/support/>
or scan the QR CODE



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