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Partnership for Organic Agriculture in Bhutan.



In pursuit of attaining the national vision of 100 percent organic agriculture by 2020, the Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN), in partnership with Danish NGO, Organic Denmark (Økologisk Landsforenin), which is an association of promoters of organic agriculture, organic farmers group and consumers in Denmark will develop a long term organic agriculture program in Bhutan. The partnership program will commence with the preparatory phase which seeks to strengthen the relation and understanding

between our two organization and to initiate dialogue on long term partnership program on promoting organic agriculture in Bhutan.

The long standing efforts of the two organizations on organic agriculture in Bhutan finally became a reality, with the initiation of eight days' visit to Denmark by RSPN team in August this year. During the exchange program, RSPN team visited several agencies involved in promoting organic agriculture and individual organic

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Haa Summer Festival



The fifth edition of the Haa Summer festival held from July 5 to 6, 2016 was modest but a unique event. DASHO DZONGDAG (Governor), the Chief Guest, inaugurate the festival acknowledging smallness and remoteness of the Dzongkhags (District) in Bhutan. He proudly mentioned, "Haa is one of the richest of regions in Bhutan; not economically but also bestowed with natural and cultural wealth". He also commended the communities for their selfless efforts in preserving the pristine environment and cultural heritage. The Dzongda reiterated that such festivals are a perfect way to showcase the richness and right time to reap the benefits from tourism based activities. Ensuring sustainability of such festival calls for the active participation from the communities. Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN) participated in the festival with the main objective of creating greater awareness on conservation and to raise funds for the White-bellied heron and Black-necked crane conservation in Bhutan. The festival

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Haa Summer Festival

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provided ample opportunities not only to promote RSPN's products but also to showcase the ongoing Community-based Sustainable Tourism project (CSBT) in Haa. Nine officials of RSPN promoted the newly adopted slogan, "I am a Friend of Nature". The first day recorded around 100 tourists and 700 locals and about 60 tourists and 550 locals on the second day. Bhutanese dances, traditional songs, solo songs, and folk dances of Haa dotted the festival. Some enthusiastic tourists partook in the local cultural programmes and traditional games such as archery, degor (similar to discuss) and sogsom (javelins). RSPN awarded 16 books entitled "Natural Heritage of Bhutan" to the student performers as a token of appreciation for their contribution to the festival. The food stalls with a wide variety of delicacies, especially Hoentoe (a special dumpling of Haa District with turnip leaves stuffing), and the coveted yak meat



dominated the event.

Several tourists mentioned that they were staying at the homestays in the three Gewogs (Blocks) of Bjee, Kartsho and Eusu. The homestays are part of the CSBT project services reinforced by RSPN and represents the replication of the RSPN's successful CSBT program in Phobjikha. The main objective of the project is to provide ample opportunities for the communities to generate additional income. The project also trained several local guides. The Dzongkhag organized the festival at the Dzongkhag's sports ground with funding from Tourism Council of Bhutan (TCB).

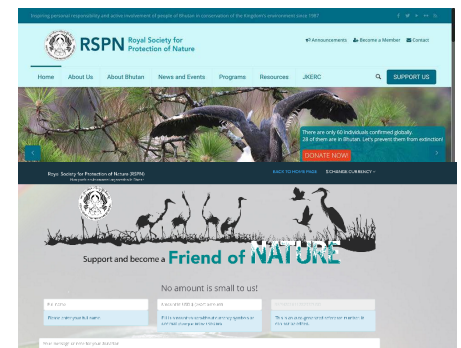
Class X Environmental Science Review Workshop



The reviewing committee

The review workshop on Class X Environmental Science(ES) textbook was held at the Khangkhu Resort in Paro from September 29 to October 2, 2016. The objective of the workshop was to review and finalize class ten Environmental Science textbook through discussions with the reviewing committee comprising of Environmental Science teachers and other stakeholders, and to build and implement effective teaching and learning of ES. The reviewing committee comprised of four ES teachers from four different schools, two Curriculum Development Officers from Royal Education Council, a representative from Bhutan Trust Fund for Environment Conservation (BTEFC) and RSPN. During the workshop, the shortcomings in the textbook were highlighted and changes were incorporated accordingly. The final text book will be distributed to schools by the first week of December 2016. The participants voiced their concerns about not having continuation of the ES subject for classes XI and XII. It was apprised that a proposal on the ES textbook for class XI and XII will be proposed to the BTEFC.

Royal Society for Protection of Nature relaunches its website



RSPN relaunched its newly redesigned website with integrated payment gateway system on July 29, 2016. The new website incorporates a bold look and sees the integration of new and improved navigational tools complemented by rich informative content on the organization. With the integration of the online payment gateway system, conservation enthusiasts can now support our conservation efforts by making online donations. Likewise, for visitors who are interested to be a member of RSPN, they can fill up the forms and make online membership payment. It has an option for both USD and local currency (BTN/INR) payment. Any local supporters can easily donate by using their Bank of Bhutan's debit/ATM card. Now you can partner us and be a friend of nature with a simple click of a button.

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Partnership for Organic Agriculture in Bhutan.

farmers in Denmark. The team has also visited headquarters of Organic Denmark in Aarhus Denmark and met with the Chief Executive Officer, Members of the board and other stakeholders of Organic Denmark comprising of farmers, companies and individuals. This preparatory phase program will end by March 2017.

A team from Organic Denmark comprising of Mr. Per Rasmussen, International Consultant at Organic Denmark, Mr. Jesper Saxgren, Vice Chairman of Global Organic Committee in Organic Denmark and Mr. Tsewang Lhundup member of organic Denmark will visit Bhutan in October 2016.



Wetland education program in Buli

RSPN Field Office in Buli village, Nangkor Gewog, Zhemgang, with the assistance of stakeholders under project area conducted mass awareness on wetland outdoor education program on July 31, 2016 with the support of students of Buli central School. More than 200 participants mostly comprising of students from classes IX-X took part in the day long wetland education program. The principal, teachers, Gewog officials and other stakeholders of Buli participated in the program. The program included wetland specific education activity, focusing on botany (plant identification) and stream hydrology lessons, aquatic macroinvertebrate survey, bird watching, wetland water monitoring, wetland sensing and soil testing.

Demographically, Buli is a small community with approximately 600 people living in a pristine environmental. The locals have a strong spiritual attachment with the nature. As a result, the Buli village is dotted with the beautiful natural and man-made wetlands which color the already exquisite landscape of Buli. The wetlands which are of national and international importance is absolutely in pristine state without much anthropogenic pressure. However, the constant upscale on development has been an inevitable factor causing loss of wetland to infrastructure development. Towards safeguarding the rich wetlands of Buli, the wetland conservation and sustainable management project was initiated in Buli under Zhemgang Dzongkhag. The project is funded by GEF/Small Grants Program, UNDP, and is implemented by RSPN.



Students of Buli central School

The main objective is to protect and conserve the vulnerable wetlands by developing a sound management plan for sustainable utilization of wetlands. RSPN is constantly involved in imparting education on importance of wetlands and is striving towards achieving 100% wetland education to all the project beneficiaries. Such activities facilitated students to not only experience the wetland related educational activities but also helped them gain better understanding on wetlands, its functions and benefits to the community and biodiversity. It is encouraging to note that the students expressed their satisfaction for providing such a rich learning experience.



Hurray! Third Ramsar Site for Bhutan



It was a good news for Bhutan and perhaps, more so to the environment conservation society in the country to learn that Gangtey-Phobji wetlands has been designated as the third RAMSAR site in June 2016. The news comes after four long years since Khotokha and Bumdeling were designated as Site No. 2033 and Site No. 2032 respectively in May 2012. The news was made public in September 2016 by the Department of Forest and Park Services.

The Watershed Management Division under the Department has not only been the nodal agency in the study of wetlands and watershed in the country but also the lead agency to process the Ramsar Information Sheet through the government. In particular, RSPN received the news with great excitement.

RSPN has been involved in the conservation of the cranes and the wetlands of Gangtey-Phobjikha since 1987.

Gangtey-Phobji with 975 hectares Ramsar Site no. 2264 is the largest Wetland of International importance for Bhutan. The wetlands fall within the two Gewogs (Block) of Gangtey and Phobji and is the largest winter habitat for the vulnerable Black-necked Cranes (*Grus nigricollis*) in Bhutan and home to several holy Buddhist pilgrimage sites. The three sites together measure 1,226 hectares (12.26 km²). The sites were recognized purely on the basis of its fundamental ecosystem services, such as water regulation, filtering and purification, as well as on its numerous scientific, cultural and recreational values. The wetlands are often referred to as the “kidney of the landscape” and considered as water storage “sponge”.

Phobjikha valley, in general, represents exceptional natural beauty and holds outstanding universal value as a high altitude inland wetland. It is a significant natural habitat for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, especially for the vulnerable Black-necked Cranes, which is listed as protected bird species under Schedule I of Forest and Nature Conservation rules of Bhutan (FNCR 2006). It also represents Bhutan’s unique conservation style and integration of culture, science and sustainable livelihoods. The valley is also one of the most important tourism destinations in the country. The designation is a symbol of forward-thinking of the Bhutanese environment conservation sector and certainly deserves long term management and conservation in which every stakeholder is party starting from community to the government.

Mr. Nima Gyeltshen, an educated farmer



Nima Gyeltshen, 23 years old man from Tshogoenpa under Wamrong dungkhag of Trashigang Dzongkhag is the youngest of his four sibling. While all his elders chose to live in the urban centers, Nima, studied till the sixth grade in his village. He then went to Wamrong Central School to continue his studies, with the hope to serve the country as a civil servant after completing his studies.

His dream of becoming a civil servant shattered after tenth grade, when he didn’t qualify for further studies. He decided to make his livelihood by working for a construction company as a site supervisor, earning a monthly remuneration of Nu. 9000. Around that time Royal Society for Protection of Nature, started the Sustainable Agriculture Program in his village, which inspired him to leave his work

with the construction company and return to his native village to become a farmer.

Today, Nima as the first educated farmer from his village is looked up to as one of the young leaders. He is seen as an inspiration by the youth as well as older people in his village.

He produces vegetables, dairy products, meat and Napier saplings. The products from his farm are sold to the schools and neighbouring villages, earning him an average income of Nu.10000- Nu.15000/ month. Nima is the group leader for the Sustainable Agriculture Project of RSPN. He is also an active member of the piggery group of Tshogoenpa (Zhiten Phendey Tshogpa) and marketing representative of Tshogoenpa vegetable group (Tshogoenpa Momsay Tshogpa).

International honor for Rebecca Pradhan

Rebecca Pradhan was honored with the recognition as one of the 'Hotspot Heroes' by Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) at the sixth IUCN World Conservation Congress on September 4, 2016. The honors as "Hotspot Heroes" were conferred to 15 conservationists from around the world during the celebration of the 15th anniversary of the CEPF at the Bishop Museum in Honolulu, Hawaii, USA.



The 'hotspot heroes' were chosen from a pool of more than 2,000 civil society organizations who were the recipients of CEPF grants for conservation of biodiversity hotspots across the globe since 2001. The honor was in recognition

of the valuable contribution of Rebecca towards conservation of biodiversity hotspots in Bhutan and exemplifies her selfless dedication and hard work. Rebecca, at the age of 63, is one of the most senior staff at RSPN and a pioneer in the field of environment conservation in Bhutan. Fueled by an early interest in nature, she started her conservation career with the Royal Government of Bhutan. She served as the Head of the Herbarium and Forestry Research Library of Department of Forests and Park Services from 1985 till 1999. It was in 2000 that she joined RSPN, contributing immensely to the growth of RSPN, the oldest environmental CSO in Bhutan.

One of her most outstanding works has been in the field of conservation of the critically endangered White-bellied Heron (*Ardea insignis*) in Bhutan. Of the less than 60 confirmed global population of White-bellied Heron, 28 (population survey, 2016) are found in Bhutan. The conservation efforts for this critically endangered species were done in collaboration with Department of Forests and Parks Services, and the support from Felburn Foundation, WWF Country Office, Bhutan, CEPF, Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN), Punatsangchu Hydropower Project Authority (PHPA), Karuna Foundation (Bhutan Foundation), MacArthur Foundation, Small Grant Project, GEF, Bhutan Trust Fund for Environmental Conservation (BTFEC).

Some of the recent and major breakthroughs in the conservation of White-bellied Heron in Bhutan are the institution of a captive breeding center at Changchey (Tsirang), study through satellite telemetry, new habitat inventories, understanding ecology and its dynamics through scientific studies, and conducting consistent public awareness and advocacy programs in the country, which will be instituted through the support from several organizations like Punatsang Chhu Hydropower Project Authority, MAVA foundation, Bhutan Trust Fund for Environmental Conservation, International Crane Foundation, Synchronicity Earth, UK et al.

In her illustrious career, Rebecca also authored several publications. Some of her notable publications are the "Wild Rhododendrons of Bhutan" and "Threatened Birds in Bhutan." RSPN take immense pride in having one of the finest staffs recognized and honored as one of the 15 Biological 'Hotspot Heroes'.

Tracking juvenile White-bellied Heron (WBH)



In 2016, six WBH chicks fledged from three nest in from Hararongchu, Bertichu and Burichu nesting habitats. Two juveniles at Burichu nest were tagged with GPS-GSM data loggers, during a rescue attempt. The chicks had fallen off the nest while attempting their first flight from the nest. The chicks were about 62 days old. Though in ad hoc manner, it was an attempt to better

understand distribution, mortality factors, and other life history information (age of first breeding, pair fidelity, philopatry) etc.

Around 10 days later, both chicks flew off the nest, this time more stronger and stable, being able to follow their parents. Though the transmitters (GPS-GSM tags) were expected to transmit regular movements

information, currently the data received is quite minimal. Based on our information, two chicks have moved south along the Punatsangchu, 23 kilometers away from nesting site. We hope to receive more data and add information to our limited understanding of this critically endangered gentle giants.

NORLHA visits Wamrong



RSPN team led by the Executive Director and Program Manager accompanied Mr. Tej Hari Ghimire of NORLHA on a 9 day field visit from September 29 -October 7,2016 to Wamrong, Trashigang. The objective of the trip was to gauge the progress of the field activities and to explore areas whereby the project could offer its support to promote organic farming in the region.

Sustainable Agriculture project (SAP) funded through NORLHA started in September of 2012 with 39 beneficiaries. Initial activities mainly involved awareness and capacity building programs. One such program was a study tour to Tsirang District,

which sees the incorporation of one the best land management practices in the country. Through the project, the farmers were introduced to preparation of bio-pesticides, napier hedgerows, construction of better animal housing and other modern day organic farming practices.

During the visit, the team found that the beneficiaries make use of the organic farming techniques introduced through the project. In the region, potatoes and chilies generate maximum revenue. Monsoons, marketing, human – wildlife conflict and knowledge on modern farming are the issues hampering farming in these regions.

Most farmers do not pursue livestock farming due to religious sentiments with the Tshogoenpa villagers who farm pigs being the only exception.

While the observations were positive, there are rooms for intervention or improvements, especially in areas of improving pig farming and bio-gas implementation, extending the project to other areas, advocating on extensive one crop/product farming to increase commercial value and marketing the revenue generating activities like indigenous crafts.



Fond farewell to Mr. Pema Gyamtsho

RSPN would like to bid a warm farewell to Mr. Pema Gyamtsho, Communications Officer who left the organization in August, 2016. Pema started his career as an Assistant Communication Officer in October, 2006. In his ten years of service, he multitasked as the ICT officer and a photographer proving to be one of the most dedicated, passionate, skilled and hardworking employee. He was truly an invaluable asset to the organization and we wish him a successful career and a fulfilling life ahead.

JICA officials visit Haa



Ms. Michiyo Hashiguchi and Mr. Norifumi Tomita from JICA Tokyo International Center and Mr. Masahiro Shiomi from JICA Bhutan Office visited the project sites of Community-based Sustainable Tourism (CBST) in Haa Dzongkhag from August 16-18, 2016. Project officers from RSPN and JEEF organized the trip as a mid-term evaluation of the project.

Having experienced the CBST products such as homestays and day excursion with local guides which was developed by the project,

evaluation team could further observe the positive impact of the project.

Mr. Sonam Wangdi, one of the local guides trained through the project, highlighted that local communities are more aware of the importance of environmental and cultural resources in the area because of the project. While the achievement of the trainings was appraised, the needs for improvement of the quality of the service and the establishment of proper management system was mentioned from the point of

sustainability.

Haa CBST is a three-year project funded by JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) and is being implemented in partnership with JEEF (Japan Environmental Education Forum). During the remaining project period of one year, activities such as local souvenir development, tourist visitor center development, CBST group establishment, marketing / promotion and carrying capacity study are planned to be implemented.



Meet our 800th Member

Congratulations! Mr. Jigme Norbu working with Bhutan Musk Travels, Thimphu Bhutan on becoming the 800th individual member of RSPN.

We would like to thank you for becoming a friend of nature and supporting conservation efforts in Bhutan.



be a part of RSPN conservation efforts by paying your membership fees online at <http://www.rspnbhutan.org/support> or you can also scan the QRCode to visit the donations page





DID YOU KNOW?

- 1) Dasho Paljor J. Dorji popularly known as Dasho Benji is the founder of RSPN.
- 2) In April 2003, the first nest of a White-bellied heron was discovered at Zawa village under Wangduephodrang Dzongkhag, Bhutan.
- 3) In 2012, RSPN initiated "Green Transport Project" funded by BTFEC in which , waste collection bags were distributed among the taxi drivers and public transport drivers in urban areas to reduce littering by commuters.

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