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RSPN and JICA signs a Minutes of Meeting



The Minutes of Meeting was signed by JICA Resident Representative and Executive Director of RSPN

The Royal Society for Protection of Nature signs a Minutes of Meeting with Japan Environmental Education Forum (JEEF) to start a three year project on community-based sustainable tourism in Haa Dzongkhag. The Minutes of Meeting was signed on 22nd Decem-

ber 2014 witnessed by the Japan International Cooperation Agency and the Civil Society Organizations Authority.

The project is funded by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) under the JICA Partnership Program. This is a scale up of the community-based sustainable tourism project implemented in Phobjikha, Wangduephodrang from 2011 to 2014 which was also funded by JICA.

The project will focus on developing Haa as one of the destinations for community-based sustainable tourism in Bhutan. It will focus on introducing and developing different tourism products and building the skills and capacity of communities in sustainable tourism management. The project will be implemented with guidance of the steering committee representing Tourism Council of Bhutan, Association of Bhutanese Tour Operator, Guide Association of Bhutan, Nature Recreation and Ecotourism Division, Dzongkhag Administration and other tourism stakeholders.

Flying towards summer habitat



Phobjikha is one of the largest winter habitats of Black-necked Cranes in Bhutan

The Black-necked Cranes started flying back to their summer habitat on 25th February 2015 with 68 of them taking off from Phobjikha. The next day, 30 BNCs took off and on 27, yet another large number of 200 BNCs took off. Since then there have been regular sight of BNCs taking off to their summer residence. As of 3 March 2015 evening less than 30 BNCs were seen in the valley with one injured crane.

Before the flight, the BNCs usually make unison calls, take spiral upwards flight and then fly north-west towards the Pelela mountain pass and over the mountains. Last year the BNCs left the

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Flying towards summer habitat

valley starting 9 February consisting of ten adults. Cranes started to fly on various dates in groups of two to 50.

The local people consider the departure of the cranes as a sad moment since they won't see and hear their calls until October. For them the cranes making spirals and circumambulating the Gangteng Monastery in the air before they fly towards north-west is indeed a precious and sad moment.

Black-necked Crane Census

This year Phobjikha received 396 BNCs with 40 Juveniles. Over all Bhutan received a total of 544 BNCs with 75 juveniles. Bumthang saw an increased number of BNCs with a total count of 28 birds, while Khotokha received only six birds. Kurtoe in Lhuntse had seven numbers while Bumdeling received 107 birds including 12 juveniles.

Black-necked Crane Annual Count: 2014 - 2015			
Location	Adult	Juvenile	Total
Chumey (Bumthang)	20	2	22
Tang (Bumthang)	4	0	4
Thangbi (Bumthang)	2	0	2
Phobjikha (Wangdue)	356	40	396
Khotokha (Wangdue)	4	2	6
Kurtoe (Lhuntse)	6	1	7
Bomdeling (Trashiyangtse)	95	12	107
Grand Total	487	57	544
National coordinated count conducted at 0630 hours on 18th January 2015			

BNC Observatory in Phobjikha

In 2014, RSPN built a small eco-friendly bird hide on a slope facing the two major Black-necked Crane (BNC) roosting ponds in Phobjikha. The semi-circle

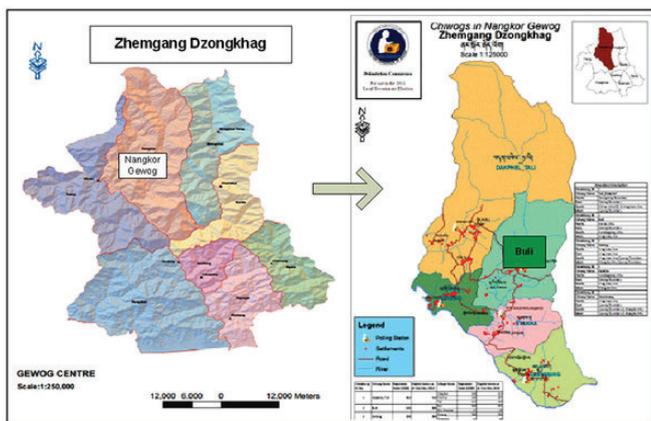
bird hide have elongated narrow window providing panoramic view of the valley. It can accommodate about 15 people and watch the birds quite well without any

binoculars or spotting scopes. It is about 100 meters away from the roost. From here BNCs can be easily observed without any disturbance. During winter when temperatures are below freezing point, such shelters keep the birders quite warm from the cold, frost and frequent winds.



Black-necked cranes at their roosting site in Phobjikha

Wetland Conservation in Buli



Map of Buli in Zhemgang

RSPN has entered into a 1.5 years agreement with UNDP, GEF, Small Grants Programme to implement a wetland conservation project in Buli under Nangkor Gewog in upper Kheng,

for the downstream vegetation. Other wetlands include paddies and Buli Lake which is considered sacred by locals and an important water source for wildlife. Maintaining healthy wetland

Zhemgang. The project of little over USD 47,000 comes as a rescue to the wetland in Buli that is under increasing anthropogenic pressure and likely to deteriorate if timely action is not taken.

The wetland in Buli plays a vital role as watershed and water recharge point

is therefore seen critical not only for healthy ecosystem but for the overall livelihood system of the area. Keeping this in mind, the project mainly seeks to lay ground for long term conservation of the Buli wetland ecosystem by putting in place long term management strategy and institutionalization of protection and management of the wetland at the local level. Part of the activities will involve baseline surveys that will give a clear understanding of the biodiversity and socio-economic status of the area and set the stage for long term interventions in the area.

This project will also allow RSPN to bring forth its vast experience of wetland conservation and management from Phobjikha to a new area.

An injured adult Black-necked Crane released after rehabilitation.



The injured crane

On 16th February at 0400 hours, on the eve of Lunar new year, two young local boys aged between 10 to 12 came rushing to RSPN’s Black-necked Crane Visitor Center (BNCVC) in Phobjikha. They had an important message for the officials there. They reported about an adult BNC lying in the open area at the valley floor at Phobjikha. The officials immediately reached the site at

0430 hours and saw few local kids gathered around the injured BNC.

The officials then dispersed the crowd and let the BNC alone in the wetland. It could neither stand and walk away nor make any noise. It then tried to walk for 10-15 meters and again fell down. It was then carried to the local Livestock Officer who examined for any physical injury (bruise or fracture). The sick bird was

injected with an analgesic (painkiller) for quick pain relief. The bird was then kept at BNCVC in a small makeshift house at 0530 hours and fed with wheat and water (The shed built with CGI sheet is located under few pine trees providing adequate shade and with no human disturbance).* Over the next four days the bird was constantly fed and observed by the officials under the guidance of experts. The bird was getting better each day and it would stand and walk around in the shed. It was also feeding well on the soaked wheat and plenty of water which were fed separately. A small window (1meter x 1meter) was made for the bird to escape in the event it got better.

On the sixth day (21st February at 0900 hours) after 64 long hours of captive rehabilitation and nursing the bird was seen walking in the open areas within the BNCVC campus. The bird was vigilantly watched by the officials for potential attack by stray dogs or other animals. It then walked into the nearby wetlands and then flew towards the valley at 0930 hours. It was indeed a relief to both the bird and the officials at the center.

Until then no BNCs have been spotted in similar condition. Such cases of BNC injury is quite rare in Phobjikha. A crane with injured leg was seen in the valley few years ago.

NOTIFICATION

Introducing Entrance Fees for Black-necked Center Visitor Center (BNCVC) from 1st March 2015

RSPN is pleased to inform the general public, tour operators and tourist guides that Black-necked Center Visitor Center (BNCVC) in Phobjikha have been renovated recently with additional facilities. The center is now functional and open to tourist and guests. Some of the important facilities include theatre room with mural narration and crane documentaries, photography spot with large dummy black-necked crane, observatory with spotting scope and information of Black-necked cranes, two managers to provide information about the center and the cranes etc.

For the purpose of sustainability of the center and to provide quality and reliable services, the center will introduce Entrance Fees starting 1st March 2015. The entrance fees will be charged as listed below:

Sl. No	Guest	Entrance fees in Nu.	Remarks
1	International Tourist	120	Free for kids below the age of 12*
2	SAARC countries	100	Free for Kids below the age of 12*
3	International Students	50	Above the age of 12. Students include non-stipend students.
4	Bhutanese (including Bhutanese Trainees and PG students, trainees)	15	
6	Bhutanese Students, monks and local communities, and RSPN members	Free	Students include non-stipend students. RSPN Members have to produce card which will be validated through RSPN’s membership list.

Birds of Bhutan

In commemoration the 60th Birth Anniversary of His Majesty the Fourth King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, we will publish collection of pictures of birds found in Bhutan. His Majesty was awarded Champion of the Earth in 2005 for his exemplary leadership in environmental conservation.

Bhutan ranks in the top 10% of countries with the highest species density on earth, and it has the highest fraction of land in protected areas as well as the highest proportion of forest cover of any Asian nation.

- (<http://www.unep.org/champions/laureates/2005/DrukGyalpo.asp>)



Common name: Hodgson's Redstart (female)
Scientific name: *Phoenicurus hodgsoni*

Photographer: Koji Tagi

CONTACT INFORMATION

Royal Society for Protection of Nature
Post Box: 325, Lhado Lam
Kawangjansa
Thimphu - 11001
BHUTAN

Telephone: +975 2 322056 / 326130
Fax: +975 2 323189
E-mail: rspn@rspnbhutan.org

www.rspnbhutan.org



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