



རང་བཞིན། Rangzhin

RSPN QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



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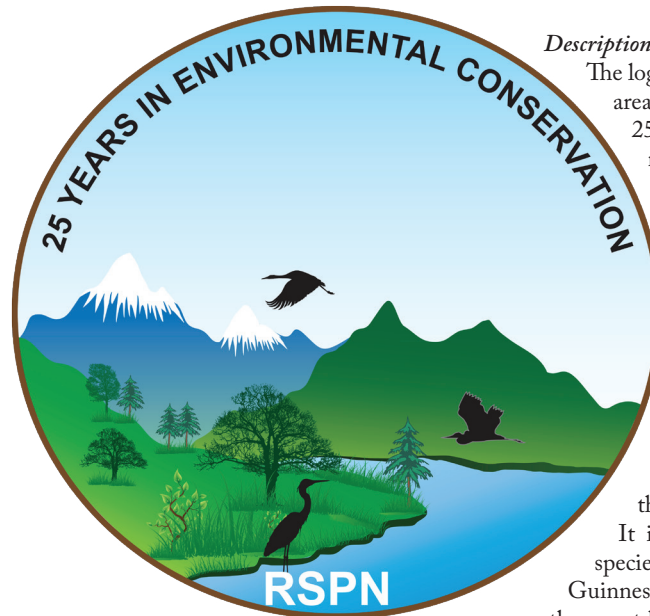
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Launching Silver Jubilee logo of RSPN



Description of Logo

The logo represents all the thematic areas RSPN worked in the last 25 years. The flying black-necked crane represents the flag-ship species that RSPN initially started its work in species conservation.

We have depicted White-bellied heron since we achieved a landmark in the history of White-bellied heron when RSPN artificially raised a chick and successfully released to the wild in September 2011.

It is also critically endangered species that has entered into The Guinness Book of World Records as the rarest bird. The mountains covered with snow represent RSPN's engagement in climate change projects. The river represents RSPN's project on water, watershed management and conservation of wetlands.

The logo, therefore, depicts all components of ecosystem which is interdependent on each other.

RSPN Silver Jubilee Logo

By end of 2012, RSPN will complete 25 years of service in conservation of environment in Bhutan.

To commemorate 25 years of RSPN's service to the environment, RSPN is pleased to launch its Silver Jubilee logo.

Asia-Pacific Climate Change Adaptation forum, Bangkok



Forum in session in Bangkok

The Second Asia Pacific Climate Change Adaptation forum was held in the United Nations Conference Center in Bangkok, Thailand from 12-13

March 2012.

The forum which was attended by adaptation practitioners at global, regional, national, and sub-national levels comprised of govern-

ment representatives from various ministries, researchers, practitioners, NGOs, international organizations, regional intergovernmental bodies, youth, media and the private sectors, and provided a unique opportunity to share frontline findings and innovations and also in knowing the opportunities and challenges in mainstreaming climate change adaptation into development.

The discussions mainly focused on the theme 'Adaptation in Action' with the change from deliberations to decisions; plans to policies and policies to practices, and saw a diverse range of plenary and keynote sessions, panel discussions, roundtables, thematic side events, market place, photo & poster exhibitions and film festivals. All the sessions are facilitated by eminent climate scientists, adaptation experts and development planners from the region.

Bhutan joins IUCN

The Royal Government of Bhutan has announced its decision to become a Member of IUCN and designated the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests as its liaison with the IUCN Secretariat. IUCN extends its warmest welcome to the Kingdom of Bhutan.

Bhutan's landscape ranges from sub-tropical plains in the south to the sub-alpine Himalayan heights in the north, with some peaks exceeding 7,000 metres (23,000 ft). The state religion is Vajrayana Buddhism, and the population of under a million people is predominantly Buddhist with Hinduism the second-largest religion.

Bhutan is known as a model for proactive conservation initiatives. The Kingdom has received international acclaim for its commitment to its biodiversity. Bhutan has committed to maintain at least 60% of its land area under forest cover and to designate more than

40% of its territory as national parks, reserves and other protected areas. Most recently, Bhutan identified a further 9% of land area as biodiversity corridors that link protected areas.

"IUCN is extremely honoured to have the Royal Government of Bhutan join IUCN as a State Member" says Aban Marker Kabraji, IUCN Regional Director, Asia. "Bhutan is a country which has thoughtfully embarked on a pathway of development which is extremely unique and as such provides a real source of inspiration to many other societies which are seeking to find a balance between human development and the sustainability of the natural environment."

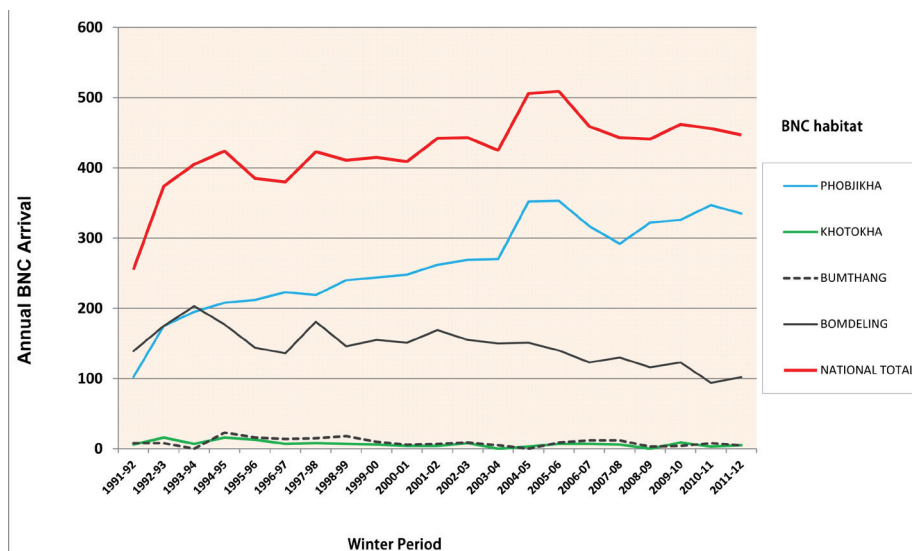
Bhutan was the first country to measure happiness under the guidance of the fourth King. His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck advocated a holistic approach to development emphasizing the protection of the environment, sustainable development, good governance and preservation of culture. In 2005,

the Royal Government of Bhutan decided to develop Gross National Happiness (GNH) indicators in order to move the concept of GNH from the point of academic discourse to a measurable one. The indicators aim to check whether programmes and policies are consistent with the values of GNH.

The diversity of Bhutan's natural resources, its strong commitment to the promotion and protection of the environment, its history and cultural diversity make IUCN proud to welcome this country as a new State Member of IUCN. In addition to the State Member, Bhutan is home to an IUCN NGO Member, the Royal Society for Protection of Nature.

The IUCN Asia Regional Office is currently discussing collaboration with the Royal Government of Bhutan on issues such as human-wildlife conflict and climate change adaptation in Bhutan and the Himalayan region, among other issues

Black-necked crane Population in Bhutan



Crane population statistics from 1992-1992 to 2011-2012 winter

The final Annual nation-wide Black-necked Crane (BNC) count for 2011-2012 was conducted at 0600 am on the 16th of January 2012. The count was simultaneously counted in all the major roosting sites of Bhutan with the support of Department of Forest and Park Services. Phobjikha recorded the highest count about 335 BNCs (including 51 Juveniles) followed by Bumdeling (102) and Bumthang and Khotokha (5 each). Paro, Lhunse and Gelephu received 12 BNCs altogether.

Beginning from 1991-1992 to 2011-2012 winter period (21 winter periods) annual average BNC arrival in Bhutan is about 424 BNCs. With only 225 BNCs visiting Bhutan in 1991-1992 winter periods to 447 BNCs visiting Bhutan this winter (2011-2012 winter period) there has been an increase of 75.29 % growth percentage. The average growth

rate of BNCs visiting Bhutan has increased by 3.58 % annually in the last 21 years. This would roughly translate into 9.1 BNCs per year.

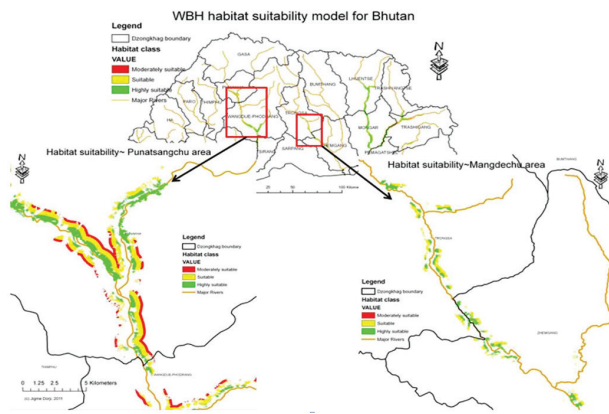
BNCs visiting Bhutan has steadily increased over the past two decades. There have, however, been changes in the number of BNCs visiting various places within Bhutan. Bumdeling which used to receive the highest numbers of BNCs in the first half of the 1990s was gradually experiencing decreasing number of BNCs visiting the valley. On the other hand Phobjikha received more BNCs year after year. Phobjikha valley received only 102 BNCs during the 1991-1992 winter period but 10 years later it received 248 BNCs (2000-2001 winter period). Again after 10 years, in 2009-2010 winter, the valley received 326 BNCs. For Phobjikha there has been an increase in about 228.4 % growth percentage

in the last 21 years with an annual growth percentage rate of 10.8 %. Annually, BNCs visiting Phobjikha has increased with an average of 11 BNCs per year.

In the past two years RSPN has reportedly informed about sighting of BNCs in various places in Bhutan. Four BNCs (2 Adults and 2 Juveniles) were seen in Karbithang – 200 meters away from Mau Khola- in Gelephu in November 2010 and in 2011 November, eight BNCs were sighted in Dawathang and upper Karbithang in Gelephu. Similarly a lone BNC was sighted in Kangpara on 14th December 2011 and three BNCs in Tshekhathang in the early hours of 16th December 2011. BNCs were also reportedly sighted in different places in Thimphu- Kabisa & Ramtokto- in December 2011. Though no scientific inquiry has been made on this unusual trend, it is assumed that BNCs might be looking for new habitat or lost during their flights. It could also be because of the increase awareness and reporting.

We want to thank respective Department of Forest and Park Services offices and volunteers who took part in the simultaneous count of Black-necked Crane in Bhutan and also those individuals who took pain in observing and reporting of BNCs in various parts of the country. RSPN solicits similar support in the future

Research on White-bellied heron



Habitat map

Copyright: Dorji, J. 2011

The year 2011 was a banner year for research on the critically endangered White-bellied heron (*Ardea insignis*). The year saw two important studies on the White-bellied heron (WBH): RSPN's captive breeding program on WBH and Mr. Jigme Dorji's B.Sc. research on the WBH's habitat, and people's perception towards its protection. At the international level, the White-bellied heron was enlisted in the

Guinness Book of World Records as the rarest heron.

Mr. Jigme Dorji's research on the WBH "Protecting White-Bellied Heron Habitat: Extent of anthropogenic threats and people's attitude towards their conservation in Bhutan" was conducted for Punatsangchu and Mangdechu basins. His study concludes that the birds are sighted between the altitudinal ranges of 600-1294 masl during monsoon season and that

matured chirpine forests were preferred for nesting. According to his habitat suitability model (GIS model), it is projected that about 347.95 km² is available as suitable habitat for the WBH, accounting for 0.9 percent of the total geographical area. Based on this model, the study suggests that Kurichu and Mangdechu basins could support some WBH population.

Punatsangchu basin was projected to have more significant threats than Mangde-

chu basin possibly due to the fact that the former basin has a higher population density, closer proximity to agricultural land and the construction of hydropower plants. Riverbed quarry and livestock grazing were listed as two major causes for current habitat degradation. The study also suggests that the local people view this bird as a rare and endangered water bird but without much social or cultural value. However, people are very supportive of the conservation of the bird.

The study made several recommendations; the two most important being: (1) a reassessment of country-wide WBH habitat based on the projected habitat model and confirmation of WBH population in Kurichu and Drangmechu river basins and (2) the Government's follow up on the listing of WBH under the Schedule 1 of the Forest and Nature Conservation Act of Bhutan (1995).

Mr. Jigme's field work was sponsored by RSPN, with modest financial support. He is from one of the first batches of in-service civil servants who recently graduated from the College of Natural Resources, Royal University of Bhutan. We wish Mr. Jigme the best of luck with his career.

Brief Summary of RSPN's 25 years in Environmental Conservation



RSPN engaged from providing clean energy to climate change in 25 years

This year, Royal Society for Protection of Nature celebrates its silver jubilee, commemorating the pioneer NGO's 25 years of work in environmental conservation and environment education in Bhutan.

RSPN was founded in 1987 by Dasho Peljor J Dorji, commonly known as Dasho Benji, with the permission from the Fourth King, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck. In the early years, the Society focused on engaging youth through nation-wide art and essay competitions on environmental themes. RSPN also began an annual count of Black-necked Cranes, rare birds who make their winter home in Bhutan, primarily in the Bomedeling and Phobjikha valleys. Dasho Benji worked with friends in the government and

international organizations, especially the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) to strengthen the young Society.

In the '90s, RSPN primarily focused on Environmental Education. RSPN created a network of Nature Clubs, groups within selected schools that carried out environmental activities. In the absence of any formalized environmental curriculum, these clubs provided the main opportunity for children to learn about nature, and to identify and address issues in their own communities. RSPN supported the clubs financially and through teacher trainings and environmental camps. In 2009, the Nature Clubs were institutionalized with the Ministry of Education, ensuring that every school in the nation would have

this opportunity. RSPN worked to develop materials for the Clubs, and is still engaged with teacher trainings, most recently creating and Environmental Studies curriculum for the two teacher's colleges in Paro and Samtse. RSPN is also expanding its education efforts to monastic institutions, and will be working to establish Nature Clubs in Shedras throughout the country this year.

RSPN's other major program has been the Integrated Conservation and Development Program, now known as Conservation and Sustainable Livelihoods Program, initiated in 1999. The program aims to look for opportunities to combine environmental stewardship with community development initiatives. Focused initially in the Phobjikha valley, RSPN worked to serve the community even as it protected the primary home of the Black-necked Crane. Projects included biodiversity surveys, crane monitoring and a management plan for the Conservation Area; creating local environmental management and women in environment committees; providing solar panels and helping bring below-ground electricity to the region; capacity building and infrastructure development. Perhaps the most famous RSPN initiative is the Black-necked Crane Festival, held every year in November to celebrate the birds' arrival in the valley and promote ecotourism. In 2007, RSPN expanded its working area to Wamrong-Kangpara in Tashigang Dzongkhag, replicating and adapting the successful Phobjikha

>> *Contd. on page 4*

“Wetlands and Tourism- A great experience”

The World Wetlands Day was observed on 2 February 2012 in Phobjikha—the largest wetland in Bhutan. The day marked the adoption of the Convention on Wetlands on 2 February 1971 and ever since then, the day is observed to undertake activities focused on increasing awareness on the benefits of wetlands, both locally and globally. World Wide Fund For Nature (Formerly World Wildlife Fund) abbreviated as WWF organised the event in collaboration with the Watershed Management Division, Department of Forest & Park Services, Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, and the Roral Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN).

On 10th January, 2012 during the winter session of the parliament, the National Council of Bhutan endorsed Bhutan's accession to the Ramsar convention. Following the endorsement by the Council, the National Assembly of Bhutan on 18 January, 2012 also unanimously accepted the accession. Phobjikha, Khotokha and Bumdeling are three

potential wetlands recognized by the government to be declared for the Ramsar sites.

In Phobjikha, Wangduephodrang district, annually more than 300 Black-necked cranes are estimated to visit the valley making it the largest wintering site for the cranes in the country. By the same paradigm, not only the cranes, but annually Phobjikha also welcomes scores of tourists that flock the valley to view the mystical bird in action. Befittingly, Phobjikha valley is an ideal location to observe the day and highlight the impacts of tourism on wetlands.

Following the inaugural session, the event participants were taken on a guided tour along the Gantey Nature trail overlooking the picturesque valley. While on the trail, participants saw glimpses and learnt more of the marshy crane habitats, its feeding ground and artificial lakes managed by RSPN for roosting purposes. Government officials, local communities, hikers, trekkers, tour operators, hoteliers, students and media were some par-

ticipants during the event.

Chief Guest, Director General, Department of Forest & Park Services, Ministry of Agriculture & Forests Mr. Karma Dukpa, spoke about the importance of wetlands to the gathering. He said “Wetlands have a pivotal role in influencing the landscape dynamism to sustain life and safeguard the environmental integrity. Wetlands are valuable as wildlife habitat, for agriculture, for a rich biodiversity, for economics, for soil conservation, for climate change mitigation and also on a cultural and historical context”

“Once bountiful, the safe drinking water and water for farming are getting scare these days in Bhutan. Wetland and its streams are the main sources for these purposes. If we don't save these sources now it may be too late or very difficult to restore them in future. The loss of freshwater biodiversity from such areas is another concern altogether” said Mr. Vijay Moktan, Conservation Director, WWF-Bhutan.

Source: WWF Bhutan

>> Contd. from page 3

Brief Summary of RSPN's 25 years in Environmental Conservation

Phobjikha program to a new region. Programs in the East include afforestation and reforestation efforts; environmental education activities; community forest establishment; and a new approach to community response to the human-wildlife conflict. Expansion of similar holistic programs to Zhemgang Dzongkhag is in the plan for this coming year.

Since its days as a one-man show operat-

ing from Dasho Benji's living room, RSPN's capacity as an organization has grown considerably. Throughout the '90s, RSPN struggled to define itself and raise funds – as a pioneer NGO, it struggled with legal and mission definition. Executive Director Dr. Kinlay Dorjee, and later his successor and current director Dr. Lam Dorji, made great strides by obtaining legal status, initiating strategic planning

processes and the creating a one million US dollar endowment fund. RSPN expanded its network of national and international partners and donors, making it more effective at home and more vocal abroad. These steps, along with staff recruitment and capacity training, earned the organization a MacArthur Foundation “MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions” in 2010. As Bhutan faces new and increasing environmental threats and transitions to democracy, RSPN will have to continue its hard work to identify and address conservation challenges. The silver jubilee provides an opportunity to celebrate past triumphs while renewing RSPN's commitment to being a strong environmental advocate going forward, continuing the mission of inspiring personal responsibility and involvement in nature conservation among the citizens of the Kingdom of Bhutan.

RSPN's history and achievements will be documented in a book to be released at the time of the celebration, in October 2012.

Black-necked crane in Trashiyangtse



Cranes in Trashi Yangtse

More than 45 black-necked Cranes were seen feeding in wetland paddy field in the morning of 09.01.2012 at lower Bayling in Trashiyangtse. This area is a popular non-roosting feeding area for the BNCs in Trashiyangtse. Ngawang Tshering, a 53 year old native farmer owns this more than three acres of terraced paddy field on a gentle slope facing south at

lower Bayling in Trashiyangtse. His paddy field Litonshing (located above the Trashiyangtse Dzong-named after the pear tree grown right at the centre of the field- picture) at Khebertse is a very popular spot for the Black-necked Cranes to feed around. The cranes come all the way from north (Bumdeling). According to Mr. Ngawang, usually the

cranes come at around 06:00AM and leave the field at around 05:00PM on a regular basis. He proudly says that the BNCs “dances” at times and makes majestic calls



Shifting Cultivation: A Case of Forest Degradation in Rural Areas



Photo: ©Pema Gyamtsho

Shifting cultivation in eastern Bhutan

Shifting cultivation, locally known as tseri, is extensively practiced in the remote places of Bhutan, predominant in the eastern and central region. It is an agricultural system where cultivation is done temporarily, and then left barren for another few years, after which the growths are cleared and burnt for cultivation again.

Every year thousands of trees are being felled and huge areas under forest cover are thrown naked to the space. People are less aware of the policy of maintaining 60% of the land under forest cover for all the times to come. Pristine natural resources are majorly being depleted. If the current trends of smearing forests are not curtailed at the earliest, the question is, will Bhutan have 60%

forest coverage and remain green forever? It's a case of major concern where one should see beyond years while chopping down even a single tree.

A study done by the government in 1986 found that the total land area under shifting cultivation was about 40,600 ha. Another survey conducted by Ministry of Home Affairs in 1993 attributed 200,000 acres of tseri owned by 25,126 households in Bhutan. To curb down such practice, people need education and awareness about the pros and cons of tseri cultivation.

People practice tseri cultivation hoping for better yields as the land left fallow becomes more fertile over the years by accumulating humus that supports better growth

for crops. Otherwise, the land with repeated harvest over the years becomes less fertile to support growth of crops. Chemical fertilizers are beyond the means of most people either because of the economic situation or the villages are far from the markets. Therefore, the easiest and feasible option left for the people is to clear away the forest, grow crops and produce their food, endangering the whole area with high possibility of forest fire.

Villages with dominant tseri cultivation whose premises were once covered by thickets are barren today. Shifting cultivation has sent all huge trees to their own destinies. The barren lands are left open for the summer rain to wash away. There are cases where a number of disastrous soil erosions occur. When the fertile lands are being eroded, people become poorer. Yet we talk about poverty elevation and giving happiness. The mega-philosophy of GNH all starts from our meager actions like planting a tree for securing future, but not out of tseri cultivation. In order to carry out these tasks, concerned agencies must reach to the far flung villages before more destructions come into the scene. If and only we intervene on time, future can be saved. The ecological consequences are often deleterious, but can be partially diminished if at least new forests are not invaded. Taking care of forest is not just a responsibility; it is a privilege for all Bhutanese.

*Ngawang Jamba,
Sherubtse College, B. Sc. Life Sci (6th sem)*

WWF Bhutan had been working closely with the Watershed Management Division, Ministry of Agriculture & Forests (focal contact for Ramsar) to build a case for Bhutan's accession in the convention. With funding support from Living Himalayas Network Initiative, Saving Wetland Sky High (SWSH) and Ramsar Convention, WWF Bhutan supported the division with a series of stakeholder meetings and wetland research which further expedited the accession.

Bhutan ratifies Ramsar Convention

On 10th January, 2012 during the 8th Parliament session of Bhutan, the government formally ratified Bhutan's profile entry in the Ramsar Convention, a high level inter-governmental treaty on wetlands. The global environmental treaty recognizes three wetlands— Phobjikha, Khotokha and Bumdeling— all wintering grounds for Black-necked Cranes as potential Ramsar sites in the country.

Introduced into the session by Agriculture and Forests Minister, Lyonpo (Dr) Pema Gyamtsho; he said that the decision is only going to further benefit the country in its effort to conserve wetlands. He highlighted that wetlands constitute a resource of great economic, cultural, scientific, and recreational value, the loss of which would be irreparable. Being a member of the Convention will result in Bhutan benefitting in areas of wetlands preservation such as fish and wildlife habitat,

natural water quality improvement, flood storage and mitigate against the affects of climate change.

During the session, the government also endorsed the three identified wetlands— Phobjikha, Bumdeling and Khotokha as Ramsar declared sites.

Some of the benefits entitled with the Ramsar designation includes increased support for:

- public awareness about the importance of the sites,
- participation by local stakeholder in its management,
- protection of the site and its surrounding (buffer) areas,
- conservation funding,
- opportunities for promoting scientific research and ecotourism

Be a Member of RSPN:

When you become a member of RSPN, you become a part of a dedicated network of individuals and groups working to preserve Bhutan's pristine natural environment and incredible biodiversity for generations to come. Whatever financial support you pledge will be used to aid our projects in schools, communities, and protected areas throughout the country. As the nation's first environmental NGO, we depend on the generosity of concerned individuals like yourself to enable our research and advocacy — we can't do it without you, and every bit counts!

www.rspnbhutan.org/be-a-member



We are on Facebook:

www.facebook.com/rspnbhutan

WORD SAFARI

In this edition, we have compiled other ungulates and lagomorphs and the park they are found in. We will publish this data in series of our next Rangzhin editions. (Source: *Bhutan's Natural Heritage - A Legacy of the Monarchs*, RSPN, Thimphu)

Find and encircle the words which are **bold** and underlined. We have encircled one to help you get start with.

IUCN Status	Major Herbivorous Mammals		Protected Areas**									
	Common name	Latin name	J D N P	J S W N P	B W S	R M N P	T N P	S W S	P W S	W C P	T S N R	K W S
Critically End.	Pygmy Hog	<i>Sus salvanus</i>				X			X			
Lower risk	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Endangered	Water buffalo	<i>Bubalus bubalis</i>				X						
Vulnerable	Takin	<i>Budorcas taxicolor</i>	X									
Vulnerable	Gaur	<i>Bos gaurus</i>				X			X			
Vulnerable	Serow	<i>Capricornis sumatraensis</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Lower risk	Mountain goat (goral)	<i>Nemorchaedus goral</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Lower risk	Blue sheep (bharal)	<i>Pseudois nayaur</i>	X		X					X		
Critically End.	Hispid hare	<i>Caprolagus hispidus</i>				X			X			
	Other hares	<i>Lepus spp.</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Vulnerable	Pika species	<i>Ochotona spp.</i>	X	X	X	X		X		X		



** **JDNP**: Jigme Dorji National Park; **JSWNP**: Jigme Singye Wangchuck National Park; **BWS**: Bumdeling Wildlife Sanctuary; **RMNP**: Royal Manas National Park; **TNP**: Thrumshingla National Park; **SWS**: Sakten Wildlife Sanctuary; **PWS**: Phibsoo Wildlife Sanctuary; **WCP**: Wangchuck Centennial Park; **TSNR**: Toorsa Strict Nature Reserve; **KWS**: Khaling Wildlife Sanctuary

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