



**THE ANNUAL REPORT 2024**  
**WHITE-BELLIED HERON CONSERVATION CENTER**  
*The center for conservation breeding, research and education*

**Royal Society for Protection of Nature**

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Acknowledgement

White-bellied Heron Conservation Center (WBHCC) is entering its fifth operation year. The Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN) with the support of government and international partners and philanthropists, established the center in 2021 to initiate the conservation breeding program to save the critically endangered bird, the White-bellied Heron (WBH). Since then, the center has robustly put efforts into raising the WBH birds. For the last four years, the center has focused on collecting wild eggs and chicks of WBH from few of the WBH nests observed in Bhutan. The birds that are currently kept in the center will serve as breeding parents or founder population. Later, the birds that are bred at the center will be released to the wild to supplement the low population. Besides carrying out a conservation breeding program, the centre aims to secure a gene pool of WBH and serve as a place for conducting WBH research, a global education and information hub, and coordinating the conservation work of WBH in the region.

The WBH bird is extremely at risk of extinction with a global population of fewer than 60 individuals. The recent account of the population status of WBH from the three known WBH distribution countries, Bhutan, northeast India and Myanmar is far lower than estimated; Bhutan counted 25 individuals in 2024 from the annual population count, India recorded 10-13 individuals from the survey study conducted, and Myanmar accounted up to 5 individuals from the recent sighting records. There is great concern that this species will go extinct anytime soon without conservation efforts. Therefore, WBHCC serves as a critical lifeline to save this low population size species.

Today, reflecting 2024 and the past years, RSPN's constant effort to conserve the WBH has proven steady success with the increasing population trend observed. RSPN is proud to host five WBH at the center as of now. Without the establishment of center, these five herons would have been lost in the wild similar to other juvenile herons that hardly make up to adulthood. RSPN's effort to safeguard the WBH for more than two decades have observed and documented numerous WBH casualties, especially the lost of eggs to predation and death of juveniles. Considering the risk associated to eggs and juveniles, the wild eggs and chicks that were at risk were collected and brought to the center.

Over the years, RSPN will initiate numerous efforts of best practices to breed and care the herons. The first herons that were collected as chicks and brought at the center are now matured enough and their behaviour and plumage define possible breeding anytime soon. However, with more herons targeted to captively breed, there will be a need for additional resources. RSPN will constantly explore the resources to support the conservation works of WBH and continually strive to save the species until the heron population becomes stable.

This annual report of the center highlights the important achievements and activities implemented by the RSPN in 2024 and also shares the way forward plans and activities.

## ABOUT US

RSPN was established in 1987 under the Royal Command of His Majesty The Fourth King of Bhutan as a citizen based Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) devoted to the conservation of the Kingdom's environment.

His Majesty The King was the Royal Patron of RSPN from 1999 to 2012. Her Majesty The Queen of Bhutan is the present Royal Patron. RSPN is managed by a seven-Board Directors, the Executive Director is the head of the organization.

## CORE VALUES

- » Promote innovative technologies and methods.
- » Be proactive towards environmental issues.
- » Be accountable and transparent.
- » Be efficient and effective in delivering programs and services.

## VISION

To be the Leader in conservation ensuring future generations of Bhutan live in an Environmentally Sustainable Society.

## MISSION

To inspire personal responsibility and active involvement of people of Bhutan in the conservation of the Kingdom's environment through, Education, Community Engagement and Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities.

## WHERE WE ARE



The WBHCC is the first conservation breeding center for the WBH birds initiated by the RSPN with the support of hydropower agencies, the Royal Government of Bhutan, national and international partners, and individual philanthropists. It is one of the important wildlife ex-situ management programs RSPN has embarked for the country indicating the importance of innovative means to sustainably manage biodiversity.

The center is established within 18.224 acres of land located at Changchey Dovan, under the jurisdiction of Tsirang dzongkhag. Its geographical locations are; 27° 2'1.71"N and 90° 4'34.01"E at an elevation of 375masl. It is a state land acquired in the name of the White-bellied Heron Rehabilitation Center, approved vide letter no. NLCS/DoLAM/RD (14) 2016/003167, dated October 10, 2016. The National Environment Commission issued the environment clearance vide letter no. NECS/ESD/Dzo-Tsirang/3445/2017/100 dated January 18, 2019 and forest clearance from the Department of Forests and Park Services vide letter no. TFD/For/3-27/2015-2016/132 dated May 31, 2016. The National Land Commission has also issued the User Right Certificate (URC).

The center landscape has a plateau formed by the ending mountain hill of Tsirangtoe at the confluence of the Punatsangchhu and Changcheychhu. The small plateau is well above risk of inundation from flood waters and is bordered by undisturbed forest. In addition, it falls within the currently occupied habitat of WBH and remains close to some of the most frequently used feeding areas. The area is close to three currently known nesting sites, which would be easily accessible for the collection of founder population for the center. The Changcheychhu which flows within 50 meters of the center will serve as a site to prepare birds (soft release) for release to the wild.



Figure 1. WBHCC

The center is now in its fifth year since its establishment with five herons that are currently being taken care. The center has basic facilities established to support the breeding and rearing of captive herons. There are five regular staff employed at the center with overall coordination and support provided by head office staff.

## WHAT WE DO

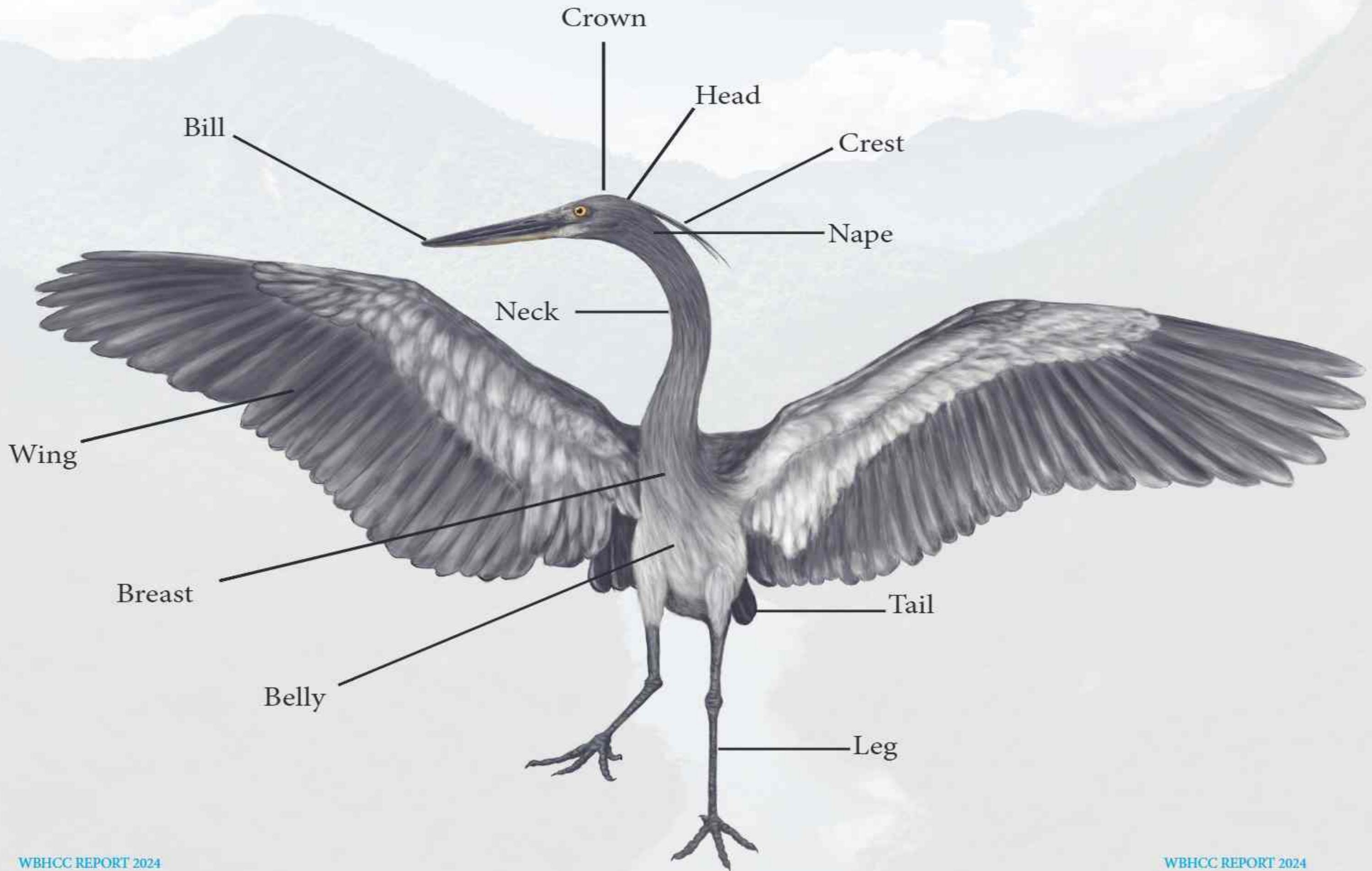
The mandala represents our systemic approach and efforts, geared to implement sustainable solutions to emerging environmental challenges through, innovation, citizen engagement, education, and empowerment. The six thematic areas are initiated based on national and international priorities that are aligned to address the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Using this approach, it affirms our belief and commitment to addressing the global issues which are interdependent in nature to support our goal of an 'Environmentally Sustainable Society'.



RSPN's Conservation Mandala

# WHITE-BELLIED HERON





## White-bellied Heron

The WBH bird is associated with the fresh rivers of the eastern Himalayas. However, not every river that flows in the region harbours the species. The sparse population once known to be distributed in many of the South Asian countries is now restricted to a smaller distribution range. With the current rate of growing threats to biodiversity and if no measures of conservation are initiated, there is a high probability of WBH entering into the list of extinct species. The consolidation of WBH population from the three distribution range countries during WBH conference held in Bhutan in the year 2015 reported the last remaining population of only fewer than 60 individuals. In the year 2024, further validation of population status was made by RSPN, visiting India and Myanmar and holding a knowledge sharing workshop. It was found out that India has 10-15 individuals and Myanmar has recent sighting records of only 5 individuals.

Since 2003, RSPN played a critical role in reviving the WBH population. From understanding the basic ecology of herons to implementing diverse community conservation projects, the WBH status in Bhutan has been maintained at a steady state. Without the conservation initiative, WBH would have been extremely pressurized through the exploitation of habitats. For some Bhutanese communities, the bird has been also associated to a bad omen. Dispelling this thought in the communities, and uniting the whole communities including the global attention to save the species, RSPN has made a significant effort in conserving the species.

The captive breeding program established in Bhutan plays significant role in strengthening the conservation of WBH on a global scale. A few years down the line, there is greater hope in releasing few individuals from the center. The focus is prioritised on maintaining strong genetic diversity and producing a viable population.



25 White-bellied Herons counted in Bhutan during the Annual White-bellied Heron population survey 2024.



White-bellied Heron new habitat inventory conducted in lower Mangdechhu and Punatshangchhu river basins.



4 White-bellied Heron active nests found in Bhutan in 2024.



2 White-bellied Heron chicks fledged from the wild in 2024. One from Balwani nest and one from Kisonachhu nest



2 White-bellied Heron successfully raised at White-bellied Heron Conservation Center.



94 New LCSG members trained to engage in monitoring White-bellied Heron.



More than 700 people were advocated and educated on the importance of conserving White-bellied Heron.



12.5 Hacteres of degraded area within White-bellied Heron landscape restored.



Received laboratory equipment and physical support from Prague Zoo, Czech Republic, and JAZA Japan.



## Population Status

An annual population survey of WBH was conducted from date 1 - 5 March 2024, surveying across the major river basins in Bhutan. These major rivers with its tributaries are identified as either currently occupying populations or known as potential habitats of WBH. A survey this year observed the presence of 25 individuals of WBH in Bhutan, including three herons that are currently being reared at the WBHCC. The annual nationwide population count enlisted the efforts of over a hundred surveyors from the Department of Forests and Park Services (DoFPS), Local Conservation Support Groups (LCSG) and the staff of RSPN.

Each WBH sighting during the survey was carefully documented, capturing details such as observer, date, time, GPS location, count, age, activity, and prevailing weather conditions.

Additionally, all encountered wildlife species were recorded to assess the diversity and population trends of associated species within the WBH landscapes. The data collection process was facilitated through the use of the Epicollect5 digital platform, allowing for even offline recording, uploading to a central database, and subsequent analysis.

The count this year observed almost 55% of the total sightings from the Punatshangchhu basin, followed by Mangdechhu and Wangchhu basins, each contributing 18% and 14%. The 9% of the total population of the WBH was found present in the Phibsoo Wildlife Sanctuary. However, no WBHs were sighted during the population



Campus II of WBHCC is now equipped with five medium size aviaries, three fish ponds and connected with road and footpath.



Exchange visit to India and Myanmar carried out for sharing the knowledge on conservation of White-bellied Heron.



Enhanced the professional capacity of 5 staff at WBHCC.

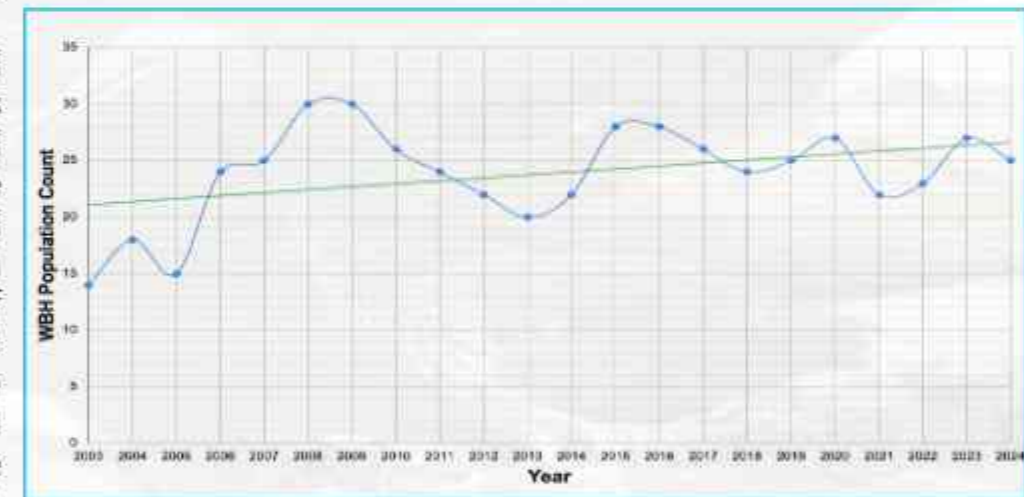


Figure 2. Annual Population Survey of White-bellied Heron.

survey period from Kuri-gongri river basin and Jomori in eastern Bhutan. During the survey period, surveyors also recorded four active WBH nests. One in Mangdechhu basin and three in Punatshangchhu basin. Overall, the survey documented a total of 207 bird species and 18 mammal species, providing valuable insights into the diversity of the species present in the WBH landscape.



### Adding two family members

The year 2024 saw two new members joining the WBHCC family. RSPN was able to successfully raised two herons in the year 2024. It is the first time an egg collected from the wild was successfully hatched from the artificial incubation. The other heron raised was collected as a chick from the wild.

In the year 2024, we lifted three wild eggs of heron from the only nest (Tsaidang nest) in the Mangdechhu river basin. The lifting was done with the risks of threat by the Monkey to the egg. The same breeding parents of the herons in the area have experienced predation of eggs by the monkey in the past year. From the three eggs lifted, one egg was found sterile. The two eggs hatched successfully after a week-long artificial incubation. However, one chick could not survive after a few days. The other chick, now turning almost 10 months old is growing very healthy. The chick was identified as a male bird.

The other chick we have at the center was collected from the nest located in upstream of the Punatshangchhu river basin (Kisonachhu Nest). This nest was observed with three chicks. After few days, one of the chicks was found dead on the ground below the nesting tree due to falling off from the nest. From the two chicks left in the nest, one of the chicks was lifted. The chick was two weeks old during the lifting time. It was brought to the center and raised. This chick was identified as female. Today, the two chicks are now kept together in the same aviary and found bonded well.



In 2024 year, four wild nests of WBH were observed, three nests along the Punatshangchhu river basin and one nest in the Mangdechhu basin. Two juveniles from these nests (Kisonachhu nest and Balwani nest) successfully fledged into the wild. The nest(Relangthang nest in Punatshangchhu basin) failed. So, the year 2024 saw two heron chicks add up in the wild and two chicks in the center.

The center now has five herons with the addition of two new herons.



### Development of Additional Structures

The year saw the construction completion of new aviaries, accessed road, fish pond maintainance, and new water pipeline connection. Now in Campus II, there are five large aviaries and in campus I there are two aviaries. The aviaries in Campus II will be used to rear the breeding parents and for campus I the aviaries will be used to keep new chicks.

Similarly, the footpath connectivity within Campus II and the access road from Campus I to Campus II are also completed. The entry gate was constructed to campus II to secure the area.

In December 2024, all the herons from campus I were shifted to campus II due to a major renovation works carried out to maintain the fish ponds in campus I. The fish ponds were found leakage that has the potential risk of causing major landslides and erosion at the center.

The constant issue of water shortage at the center is also expected to resolve soon with new water source connectivity and a large water reservoir constructed at the center. The works for new water connectivity were completed and water will be available any time soon. The availability of water will help to reduce fish mortality, especially during summer that are caused by extreme heat and less water flow to the fish ponds.

With these facilities now established, the WBHCC has all the basic amenities in terms of infrastructure available; five units of staff quarter, an Education and Information unit, an office, a cafeteria, a veterinary office, a laboratory unit, seven large aviaries, a quarantine center with small aviary attached, lodging facility to accommodate five people, a vehicle, and eight large fish ponds.



Figure 3. Campus II Aviaries



## Education and Advocacy

The biodiversity loss is a matter of urgent global concern with many rapid human-induced extinction occurring worldwide. Ignorance and lack of education and awareness of biodiversity importance further contribute to the degradation of biodiversity. To raise awareness and promote conservation efforts of biodiversity mainly considering the WBH as a main species of concern, the staff of WBHCC coordinated to organise a series of an advocacy program in the year 2024. The program was attended by multiple stakeholders, including students, teachers, community people, sector heads of government, forestry officials, livestock, and local community leaders.

All the programs were held at participants to attend required facilities which include Information Unit in the center, the education programs was held. The was tailored based on the of participants. the program on presentation programs; in environment; livelihood; actions change; conserving environmental education. explained on the WBH ecology, the means to mitigate the threats to WBH. As a field-based session, participants are then provided with a guided tour introducing the captive breeding facilities of WBH and observation of herons.



WBHCC inviting the relevant alternatively. With the available at the WBHCC the Education and and live WBH birds the conduct of all and awareness successfully day program and designed different levels In general, usually covers of RSPN overview conserving the creating sustainable towards climate species; and promoting Later, the participants were the importance of conserving, and

The advocacy program met its objectives to educate and create awareness among the participants about the importance of conserving biodiversity with a focus on WBH. A total of 728 numbers of people attended the program. This includes 293 numbers of female and 435 number of males. The program created a significant step in promoting awareness and engaging various stakeholders in protecting the WBH. By involving students, community leaders, and experts from different sectors, the program laid the foundation for collaborative and long-term conservation efforts. The program further enhanced the conservation partnership of RSPN with other stakeholders, and the knowledge shared inspired the participants for continue action and commitment toward the holistic conservation of WBH.



## Insights from GPS tagging trial of the WBH.

The movement ecology of the WBH remains poorly understood, representing a significant knowledge gap in its conservation. To address this, the RSPN has initiated a collaborative study with Austrian institutions to track the spatial movements of wild herons using e-obs bird tags. A pilot study at WBHCC tested the feasibility of mounting a tag on a juvenile heron. The bird was fitted with a tag attached using a harness on the back, but within an hour of observation, its beak became entangled in the harness. Immediate intervention was made to prevent injury or death, and the tag was subsequently removed.



Upon closer examination, it was found that the heron's beak has sharp inward serrations on its inner lining, a unique anatomical feature that causes the bird to harness entanglement. Later, attempts were made to use a harness of different quality but revealed that the serrated beak could easily be entangled or slice the material of the current designs, making it unsuitable for safe tag deployment. These findings indicate that conventional back-mounted harnesses to tag are impractical for the WBH.



To overcome these challenges, there is a need to explore alternative tagging methods, such as feather-mounted tags or leg bands with miniaturized GPS units that may offer safer attachment options. There is a need to collaborate with material scientists to design species-specific, durable harnesses to further advance the feasibility of this research.





## Activity Patterns of Captive White-bellied Herons

This short report covers the activity pattern of the captive herons observed and recorded. Similarly, the feeding rate and their behaviour of each heron was analysed. The primary aim of observation and analysis was to assess the heron's health, social interactions and feeding behaviour to optimize the care.

To observe the behaviour of the herons at the conservation center, a standard observation time was set, 6:00 am – 6:25 am, 8:00 am – 8:25 am, 11:00 am – 11:25 am, 1:00pm – 1:25 pm, 3:00 am – 3:25 am and 5:00 pm – 5:25 pm. In terms of feeding rate, the amount of daily feeding records was analysed.

Bird behaviour patterns are shaped by their need to survive and reproduce, encompassing foraging, nesting, communication, and migration. However, the behaviour of birds in captivity often differs significantly from their natural counterparts due to environmental constraints, reduced stimuli, and human interactions. Captive bird behaviour can be broadly categorized into feeding, social interaction, reproductive/breeding, Environmental Interactions, and stress-related behaviour.

In captivity, birds like herons lose the need to hunt, as food is typically provided. This leads to reduced natural foraging behaviours and physical activity. Even the social interactions among herons in captivity depend on their housing or the aviaries they are raised. WBH birds remain solitary in the wild, and crowding them can lead to aggression or stress. For the breeding behaviour, the captive birds will have altered nesting behaviours due to limited space or unsuitable environmental conditions. There are also risks of the confinement of birds, lack of space, and frequent disturbance leading to stress-induced behaviours, such as feather plucking, inactive, weak health and repetitive movements. Understanding and addressing these behavioural changes is crucial for improving captive heron welfare and promoting behaviours aligned with their natural instincts.

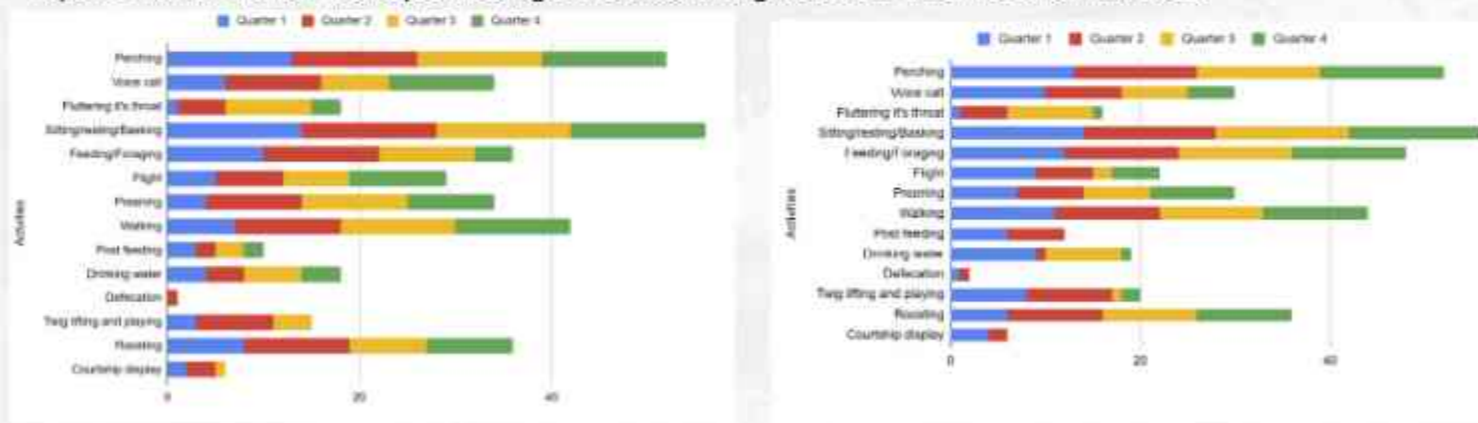


Figure 4. Activity representation of Red-tagged Heron and Blue-tagged Heron.

The behavioural analysis of each heron was made of the observation record maintained over the year. Figure 4 represents the behavioural observation over the year of two herons raised in captivity (red-tagged heron and blue-tagged heron). The maximum activity observed of these heron was 'Standing/resting/sitting/basking and perching' irrespective of weather/seasonal changes. There is a noticeable activity of vocalizations during quarters 1, 2 and 3 and also displaying increased

frequency of lifting the twig and playing.

Figure 5 represents the behavioural activity observed of the yellow-tagged heron. Similar to other captive herons, perching and sitting/resting/basking are the highest frequency observed of this heron. Foraging activity was very minimal throughout the quarter of the year.

The observation of heron activity mostly spending time by standing/resting/sitting/basking/perching indicates low foraging activity the birds are engaging as the birds are provided with food. This also indicate of energy saving the the birds engage. Since there are fish ponds within the aviary, the birds were also seen actively getting into the fish pond and displaying some foraging behaviour. The activity was mostly observed towards the later part of the day. However, no observation was made of any captive birds feeding the fish from fish ponds. Walking and flight activities are also notable in the three herons, with increased mobility in Quarter 4 likely driven by environmental needs or migratory behaviours.

Some important differences emerge in specific activities. The blue-tagged heron exhibits higher frequency in voice calls, especially in Quarters 3 and 4, hinting at more vocal communication, potentially linked to territorial defence or social interactions. Twig lifting and playing are more frequent in the blue-tagged heron, suggesting greater engagement in exploratory or social behaviours, while courtship displays, though rare for the three herons, are slightly more frequent in the blue-tagged heron during Quarter 2. Preening activities of red-tagged heron peaked in Quarter 3 (11).

Overall, the herons share critical behaviours for survival, such as feeding and roosting, while diverging in thermoregulation, vocalization, and social activities. These distinctions highlight their unique ecological roles and adaptive strategies, emphasizing the importance of understanding species-specific behaviours for conservation and habitat management efforts.

These behaviours displayed by captive herons might be due to restricted environments and consistent human-provided care. There is a need for enhancing management strategies to align their activities with natural instincts. Enrichment practices, particularly in feeding, are critical. Providing opportunities for heron to feed from fish ponds will give instinct of natural foraging behavior, mitigating inactivity. This can be also enhanced by dynamic enclosures of aviaries featuring varied terrain, water features, and vegetation mimic of natural habitats, encouraging exploration and foraging. Breeding behaviour can be encouraged by providing naturalistic materials and simulating seasonal cues to trigger reproductive instincts. Thermoregulation can be supported by shaded areas, basking spots, and water access.

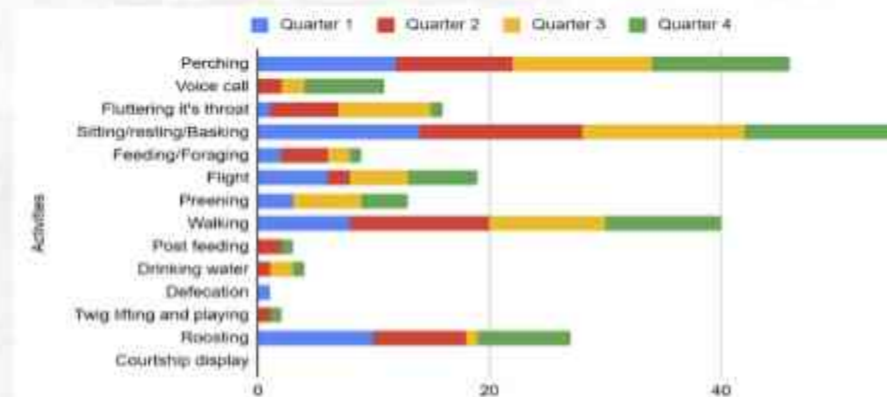


Figure 5. Activity representation of Yellow-tagged Heron.





## Feeding Patterns of Captive White-bellied Herons

Feeding patterns and behaviour are critical indicators of the health and well-being of birds in captivity. Regular feeding schedules are essential as they reduce stress and mimic natural routines, fostering stability in a controlled environment. Similarly, portion control of the food is equally vital as overfeeding may lead to obesity, while underfeeding can result in malnutrition. The captive WBH birds are feeding 10 per cent of their body weight.

The analysis of feeding was done for three adult captive herons, red-tagged, blue-tagged and yellow-tagged herons. The average feed consumption of three herons fluctuates significantly across the

Table 1 provides the average monthly feeding data (in grams) of three captive herons

Months	Red-tagged Heron	Blue-tagged Heron	Yellow-tagged Heron
January	334	330	349
February	339	334	344
March	354	359	360
April	351	360	311
May	348	348	345
June	276	280	276
July	313	322	312
August	302	318	290
September	215	270	276
October	311	312	317
November	330	346	332
December	302	353	353

toward the bird keeper and tends to stay in the corner during feeding times and only approaches the food once the keeper leaves the aviary.

months indicating seasonal changes that might impact feeding habits or environmental conditions. The highest average feed consumption for the three adult herons is during March (360g for Blue and Yellow and 354 g for Red), while the lowest is in September ( 215 g for Red). Their feeding patterns closely parallel each other, reflecting consistent requirements or shared environmental influences.

The red-tagged heron shows relatively stable consumption but drops significantly in September. It has the lowest average monthly consumption overall. Both blue-tagged herons and yellow-tagged herons demonstrate higher feeding rates compared to red-tagged herons. Their peak consumption aligns with the breeding period of the heron (March).

Both red-tagged and blue-tagged herons exhibit equal dominance during feeding and approach close to the feeder with begging calls. No consistent dominance by either individual has been observed. The yellow-tagged heron shows fear

Feeding pattern influences feeding behaviour. Though there are no significant behavioural patterns observed in captive herons resulting from the same feeding routines, we have realised there is a need to incorporate enrichment methods, such as hiding food and simulating natural foraging activities. This will reduce their inactivity and replicate natural feeding dynamics. Access to clean, fresh water is imperative, not only for hydration but also for bathing, which supports feather health. Behaviorally, healthy birds exhibit active interest in food, consistent consumption patterns, and engagement with feeding enrichment. Deviations, such as reduced appetite, selective feeding, or aggressive behaviour, may indicate stress, illness, or environmental inadequacies.





## Training Profile: Capacity Building of WBHCC staff

To enhance the professional capacity of the staff at WBHCC, an excountry training for all the staff was carried out. Three of the staff attended avian captive management training in Japan and Thailand, and two staff attended project management training in Philippines.

The training program organized helped in building their capacity in managing the WBHCC with main focus to enhance skills in handling, restraint techniques, breeding techniques and hand rearing of captive avian species. Beside acquiring these skills, the staff learned about managing conservation projects and how to run the center effectively.

The training consisted of both theoretical and practical sessions. For those staff trained in Japan, the theoretical sessions covered topics such as the reintroduction of oriental white stork, captive management of oriental white stork, egg incubation, egg candling, hand rearing of the chicks, pairing of birds, artificial insemination and ex-situ conservation of crested ibis birds. Practical sessions included hands on training in handling and restraint techniques, feeding practices, methods of artificial insemination, sample collection, making blood smears, counting blood cells and basic use of veterinary equipment. For the staff that attended training in Thailand, learned about basics of animal handling in captivity and techniques of ushering and handling visitors. The practical session mostly involved routine engagement in taking care of animals in zoo and interacting with visitors. Those staff who attended training on project management learned various mechanisms to manage the project through the project cycle; proposal development, resource mobilization, communication, and monitoring and evaluation.

These training programs provided valuable insights and foundational knowledge to enhance WBHCC management practices. The staff aims to improve the welfare of herons, contribute to conservation efforts, and establish the center as a model of excellence in avian management. However, given the extensive scope and complexity of the subjects covered, the training duration was insufficient to fully absorb and master the comprehensive material presented. Captive management and veterinary practices, especially concerning critically endangered species, require a deeper and more thorough understanding that will demand a longer training period.



## Fish stocking for Heron

The WBH bird is a piscivore animal feeding only on fish. There is no record of observation made in the wild of feeding any other species than fish. However, the heron raised in captivity was once observed killing grasshopper and feeding on it. There was another record of killing a White Wagtail bird that got into the aviary.

The captive birds are routinely fed with the fish. Each of the birds is feeding 10 % of their body weight daily which comes to an average of 300 grams of fish. With five birds now at the center, there is a need to capture a minimum of 1.5 kilograms of fish every day. The fish reared to feed the herons also need to have the right size and weight that is easier for herons to feed. The fish sizes of 100 - 200 g are usually captured and fed. Maintaining the right size and weight is challenging with inadequate fishery ponds, poor structure and a lack of technical expertise in rearing the fish. Therefore, in recent years, RSPN has been relying on fishery experts to redesign the fishery ponds and construct new ones. To supplement the fish supply for the herons, fish are bought from the fishery pond managed by the community people.

In the year 2024, the center bought 370.5 kilograms of fish from the nearby communities of Sergithang and Sungkosh under the Tsirang district and Salamji of Dagana district. To rear the fingerlings at the center, additional 42,000 fingerlings were purchased and brought from the Gelephu Fisheries.

With the planning of more birds to be raised at the WBHCC, there will be growing demands for fish. There is a need for rearing the fish within the center and also equally supporting the communities to manage the fish. This will help to meet the growing demand for fish required to support the captive herons.



## RESOURCE GAP

Considering the urgent actions required to save the WBH, there are numerous initiatives RSPN is taking both in the wild and at the WBHCC. However, we are challenged with some of the resources that are important for the success of WBH conservation program. We are genuinely looking for mobilizing the resources as indicated in the following with detailed description.

Sl.No.	Support area required to	Amount Required (USD)
1	Buying the private land near WBHCC The threat of avian influenza (AI) from a poultry farm just 25 meters from the captive White-bellied herons on the opposite side of a stream necessitates the farm's purchase for \$120,000 (US), and the removal of the poultry. Several outbreaks of AI have recently occurred in Bhutan. The purchased lands can also be beneficial for the expansion of the heron center, to create a huge aviary along the stream as a preconditioning facility before releases of captive-reared herons back into the wild	US\$120,000
2	Fish pond Maintenance White-bellied herons feed only on fish. Therefore, to support the captive breeding of the heron, many fish are needed. Currently, the WBHCC has six large fishponds outside the aviaries and smaller fish ponds within each of the seven aviaries. Unfortunately, several of the large fish ponds leak. They must be relined with concrete for a cost of \$30,000.	\$30000
3	Procuring of laboratory materials. For the treatment of sick and injured herons, an X-ray machine and a general anaesthesia device are needed.	\$7500
4	Enhancing Education and Information Center. Hundreds of visitors each month benefit from excellent exhibits in the Education and Information center. A small kitchen and dining room are located within the exhibition building. To accommodate the needs of visitors, there is requirement for expansion of the hall and the kitchen within the same building has risk associated with the exhibition hall. So as a separate kitchen and dining building a few meters from the main exhibition hall needs to be constructed.	\$45000

5	Predator-proof fence and gate installation along the boundary of the center. There are risks of animals like Leopards, Monkeys, dogs, and snakes encroaching into the center with porous fencing and gate. There is a severe risk of predation by these animals on the captive herons. Therefore, predator-proof fences and gate need to be installed.	\$10000
6	Inventory of habitat suitability for post-release of captive breed heron. We are targeting to release the first captive breed heron by the year 2028. For this, we need to explore the suitable habitats of all the river basins of Bhutan and prepare to monitor the post-released of herons accordingly through use of technologies such as tagging.	\$15000
7	Annual Population Survey and Monitoring of White-bellied Heron. Since 2003 RSPN initiated to annually conduct population surveys and monitor the nest and its habitat. The population survey and nest monitoring purpose annually cost RSPN \$17000. For now, until 2026 year, RSPN has a budget received through the grant of the International Climate Initiative to support the program, but after 2026 we do not have any provision for funding support. For at least the next five-year period (2027 - 2031) to cover the program, we are seeking the fund.	\$85000
<b>Total Amount</b>		<b>\$312500/</b>

## WBH Financial Report for 2024

Code	Activity head	Budget BTN	Expenses BTN	Balance
<b>1</b>	<b>Pay and Allowances</b>			
	Pay and Allowances	6,755,634.77	6,755,634.77	(0.00)
<b>2</b>	<b>Office supplies &amp; Maintenance</b>			
2.1	Office stationery, parts & accessories	150,000.00	137,550.00	12,450.00
2.2	Office cleaning, maintenance, supplies and repairs	496,160.50	306,785.00	189,375.50
2.3	Uniform, labcoats and accessories for staff	90,211.00	85,000.00	5,211.00
2.4	Guest Entertainment	150,000.00	88,343.00	61,657.00
<b>3</b>	<b>Utilities</b>			
3.1	Internet	216,506.40	216,506.40	-
3.2	Telephone	72,168.80	72,168.80	-
3.3	Electricity	144,337.60	144,337.60	-
<b>4</b>	<b>Vehicle maintenance</b>			
4.1	Fuel deposit	135,316.50	135,316.50	-
4.2	Maintenance and spare parts	349,924.45	154,000.00	195,924.45
<b>5</b>	<b>Travel</b>			
5.1	DSA for staff	670,000.00	654,000.00	16,000.00
5.2	Transportation	360,844.00	354,000.00	6,844.00
<b>6</b>	<b>Meeting and workshop</b>			
6.1	Training and capacity building of breeders, Vet and staff	902,110.00	902,110.00	-
<b>7</b>	<b>Breeding and Rearing cost</b>			
7.1	Medicines, Vits, suppliments, medical supplies, lab and equipment, hygiene and sanitation for WBH CC	676,582.50	676,582.50	-
7.2	WBH information Development, publications & Display and maintenance	180,422.00	145,000.00	35,422.00
<b>8</b>	<b>Fishpond management</b>			
8.1	Procurement of fish and fingerlings	280,000.00	230,000.00	50,000.00
8.2	Procurement of feed and fisheries supplies	360,000.00	320,000.00	40,000.00
8.3	Fishpond maintenance	638,291.25	635,358.00	2,933.25
	<b>Total</b>	<b>12,628,509.77</b>	<b>12,012,692.57</b>	<b>615,817.20</b>

Prepared by

  
(Phuntsho Wangmo)

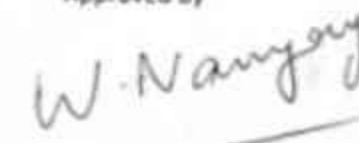
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Yeshing Phodrin  
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Chidar Man  
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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Royal Society for Protection of Nature would like to thank all donors, partners and advisors for supporting the White-bellied Heron conservation work.



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# BIRDS OF WBHCC



Speckled Piculet



Bar-winged Flycatcher



Crimson Sunbird



Velvet Nuthatch



Indian White-eye



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