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## BECOME A MEMBER

We have over 2,000 members across the world supporting our conservation works. Keeping our mission at the core, the membership platform is another great way to inspire and get people on board to support our cause.

**Support us by becoming a member!**

*Greetings from*

**RSPN**

**Greetings to our donors, partners, members, and valued readers in Bhutan and around the globe!**

Welcome to Volume 17, Issues 1 & 2 of Rangzhin, our newsletter dedicated to showcasing the heart of the conservation efforts led by the Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN). With each edition, we invite you to embark on a journey with us as we explore how we are steadfastly preserving the rich biodiversity of our Kingdom. This volume signifies a milestone in our journey, demonstrating the expanding reach of our initiatives and the fruitful engagement with various stakeholders.

In this edition, we delve into the symbiotic relationship between RSPN and local communities, highlighting our ongoing efforts to empower and uplift them. Additionally, we provide updates on projects supported by our generous donors and partners, offering insights into the transformative power of collective action in enhancing community well-being and conservation outcomes.

As we venture further, we remain steadfast in our commitment to maintaining and nurturing collaborations that drive positive change. Together, we strive to uphold the vision of RSPN, creating a society where environmental sustainability thrives.

We take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to every individual who has contributed to our journey, especially our donors, partners, and collaborators. Your unwavering support has been instrumental in our success and has fueled our growth from strength to strength.

We extend our warmest wishes to you all and hope you enjoy reading this edition of Rangzhin!

With heartfelt appreciation,

**The RSPN Family**

## In the News

### RSPN honored at Silver Jubilee Celebration of Bhutan Youth Development Fund

For over three decades, RSPN has remained deeply committed to engaging and empowering Bhutanese youth through Environmental Education, Leadership development, and Community-based Conservation initiatives. By working closely with schools, communities, and national partners, RSPN has helped nurture a strong sense of environmental stewardship among younger generations. Flagship programs such as school-based Nature Clubs, youth internships, Local Conservation Support Group members, and capacity buildings on Climate-Smart livelihood have played a significant role in shaping responsible, informed, and proactive youth committed to safeguarding Bhutan's rich natural heritage.

In recognition of these longstanding efforts, the Chairperson, Board of Directors, and staff of RSPN Bhutan were deeply honored to receive a Recognition Award from the Bhutan Youth Development Fund (YDF) during its Silver Jubilee celebration. We are profoundly humbled and grateful to Her Majesty Gyalyum Tseyring Pem Wangchuck, President of YDF, for her visionary leadership in championing youth engagement and environmental responsibility.

RSPN warmly congratulates YDF on 25 years of remarkable service in building resilient, skilled, and compassionate youth across Bhutan. We look forward to continued collaboration in the years ahead.



President of YDF Her Majesty Gyalyum Tseyring Pem Wangchuck and Executive Director of RSPN

### Strengthening Conservation Ties; French Embassy Delegation Visits RSPN

On 13<sup>th</sup> March 2024, a high-level French delegation visited RSPN to explore opportunities for joint action on Environmental Conservation and Climate resilience in Bhutan.

Mr. Victor Manche (*Political Counsellor, French Embassy, New Delhi*), Mr. Didier Talpain (*Consul General in Kolkata*), and Dr. Françoise Pommaret (*Honorary Consul in Bhutan*) met with RSPN's Management team.

The meeting discussed on following areas:

- Protecting endangered species like the Red Panda.
- Expanding ecotourism to boost local livelihoods.
- Promoting agroecological farming practices.

During the meeting, RSPN shared the success stories on the conservation of the White-bellied Heron and Black-necked Crane and outlined its vision to strengthen conservation efforts further. The French delegates expressed strong interest in linking RSPN with potential European partners and pledged to support the conservation activities in the future.







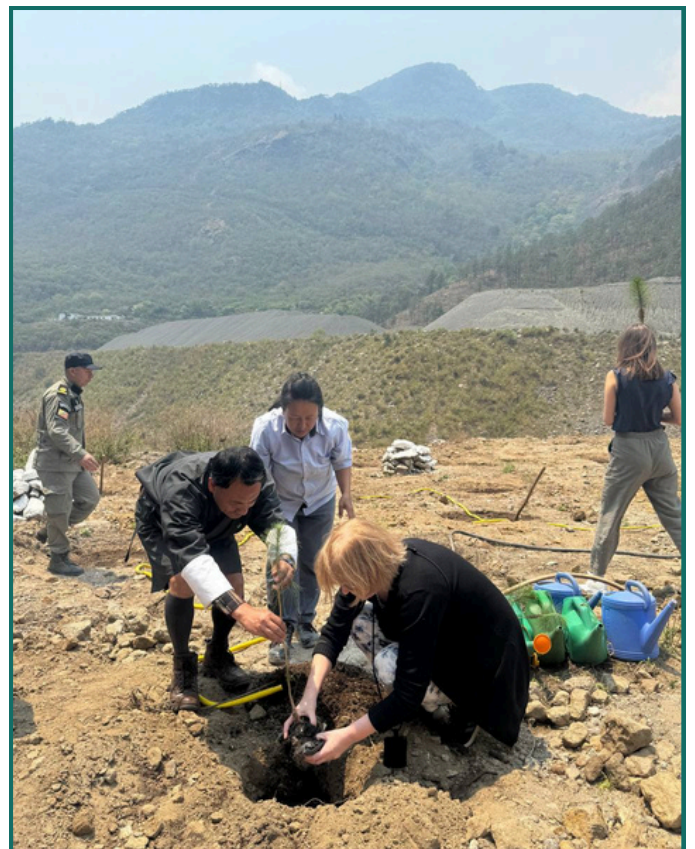
## German Officials Visit RSPN Project Sites in the White-bellied Heron Landscape



A five-member delegation led by Christiane Paulus (PhD, Director General for Nature Conservation and Sustainable Use of Natural Resources), visited the project sites of the ongoing BMUV-IKI project titled *"Developing Ecosystem-based Solutions for Managing Biodiversity Landscapes in Bhutan,"* implemented by RSPN.

The delegation visited key project sites, including eco-restoration works carried out in the degraded habitats of White-bellied Heron within the PHPA-I hydropower project area. The official also visited the water supply project in Matalungchhu Chiwog, Wangdue Phodrang District. At the eco-restoration site, the team planted tree saplings, symbolizing the launch of collaborative efforts in restoring eight hectares of WBH habitat. Restoration funding is shared, with 30% supported by RSPN through the BMUV-IKI project and 70% by hydropower.

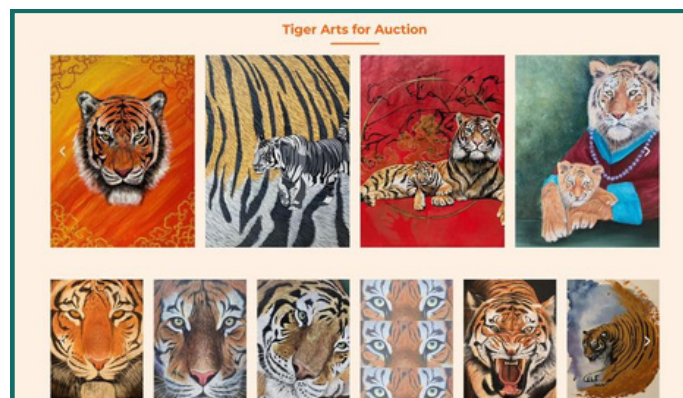
The visit concluded with the inauguration of a completed Rural Water Supply Scheme (RWSS), implemented in partnership with Thedtsho Gewog Administration. This initiative addresses the water needs of three villages, benefiting 25 households, a community Lhakhang, and an Extended Classroom School with 25 students



### Sustainable Finance for Tiger Landscapes Conference held.

The Sustainable Finance for Tiger Landscapes (SFTL) conference was held from April 22–23, 2024, in Paro, Bhutan. It was a landmark event in global tiger conservation effort hosted by the Royal Government of Bhutan under the patronage of Her Majesty Queen Jetsun Pema Wangchuck. The conference aimed to mobilize US\$1 billion over the next decade to preserve tiger habitats and ensure their long-term survival. The securing of this fund can equally benefit in conserving the associated species that are sharing the tiger landscape like White-bellied Heron and Black-necked Crane.

As a side event of the conference, the Tiger Art Exhibition and Auction was held jointly by the relevant stakeholders. The exhibition brought together conservationists, artists, and communities. The event helped raised awareness on the importance to conserving tiger and other associated species within the tiger landscape. Beyond this, the event also celebrated the rich diversity of Bhutanese art and culture, supported local artisans and reinforced collective efforts to safeguard Bhutan's diverse wildlife.



### Training on packaging to boosts Agriculture Produces

A five-day packaging workshop was held for youth and women groups from the districts of Punakha, Trongsa, and Zhemgang. The training aimed to enhance the skills in hygiene, design, labeling, branding, and marketing of local products that will ultimately boosts the marketing of agriculture produce.

The training was coordinated by RSPN with technical support from the Department of Industry's Cottage and Small Industry (CSI). The tailored made training encompasses both theoretical and practical sessions. With this training, the empowered participants are hopeful to tap into national and international markets, that will foster their livelihood. The training was supported through the BMUV-IKI project.







### Annual Population Survey for White-bellied Heron conducted



In its continued effort to monitor and conserve the Critically Endangered White-bellied Heron (WBH), RSPN in collaboration with the Department of Forests and Park Services (DoFPS), successfully conducted the Annual Population Survey from March 1-5, 2024. This comprehensive survey is designed to provide essential insights into the current status of the White-bellied Heron, facilitating informed conservation strategies for this rare and iconic species. This year's survey covered key habitats and known breeding grounds across Bhutan.

A team composed of experienced conservationists, field researchers from RSPN and DoFPS, along with members of the Local Conservation Support Groups (LCSGs), conducted five consecutive days of fieldwork across major river basins and tributaries. Besides tracking the WBH population, the surveyors also documented other waterbirds and wildlife found along Bhutan's river ecosystems. Since 2003, RSPN has been conducting annual surveys to monitor WBH population trends, habitat distribution, and potential threats to the species. These surveys have become a vital component of Bhutan's ongoing commitment to protecting the White-bellied Heron and preserving its fragile habitats.

This activity was funded by the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety, and Consumer Protection (BMUV), Germany through the International Climate Initiative (IKI), with co-funding from the MAVA Foundation, Switzerland, and RSPN.





### RSPN signed MOU with Green Bhutan Corporation Limited (GBCL)

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between RSPN and GBCL. This joint partnership aimed to carry out plantation efforts and seedling production to restore degraded habitats of wildlife.

Under this MOU, RSPN will support the creation of 4.5 Ha of plantation at Burichhu in Tsirang. The plantation will help in improving the habitats of White-bellied Heron and associated species, and benefitting in climate mitigation efforts.



### RSPN hosted key stakeholders to strengthen Ecotourism



RSPN received a team from ICIMOD and the Department of Tourism to consult on developing a roadmap for collaborative efforts in strengthening the ecotourism in Bhutan. The team discussed on various areas where each of the partners could contribute in developing ecotourism products and promoting them. RSPN assured its commitment to working together towards the conservation of Bhutan's rich biodiversity through sustainable livelihoods, in line with the shared goal of promoting responsible ecotourism.

### Thimphu City Football Club (TCFC) contributes to save the White-bellied Heron



Thimphu City Football Club (TCFC) made an innovative means to contribute to the White-bellied Heron Conservation Program by pledging donations for every goal they score. The club participates annually in the Bank of Bhutan Premier League season. The club pledged for every goal they score during the game, they contribute \$10 for the heron.

This noble initiative was led by club president, Mr. Hishey Tshering, who is known for his deep care for the environment and is also a football enthusiast. RSPN expressed sincere gratitude to Mr. Hishey Tshering and his son for handing over the amount accumulated through the goal they scored for this year's entire match season. The amount will go directly to White-bellied Heron conservation fund kitty.

### 12 Village Homestays Achieve Certification

Out of the 62 houses identified as potential village homestays, 12 of these homestays have recently earned certification from the Department of Tourism. These certified homestays are ready to extend warm hospitality, offering guests the opportunity to experience an enriching cultural journey. A homestay provided an ideal option for visitors seeking an authentic and immersive experience.

In Bhutan, Village Homestays provided a captivating glimpse into rural life, allowing guests to fully engage with the local customs and culture of this enchanting Himalayan nation. They also played a crucial role in contributing to socio-economic growth and preserving Bhutan's lush environment.

#### Why Community-based Tourism ?

Through CBT initiatives, RSPN is dedicated to fostering awareness and promoting positive attitudes, and sustainable actions in conserving Bhutan's rich environmental heritage. RSPN strives to empower local communities and build a sense of ownership in sustainably managing their environment through their engagement in planning, decision-making and project implementation.



62 

Houses are supported to become  
Village Homestays

12 

Houses are certified from Department of  
Tourism and became Village Homestays

### Peer Learning Trip organized for Homestay Operators

A seven-day 'Peer Learning Trip to Haa' was attended by 10 certified homestay owners and two members from Gumti Ecotourism under Dagana District. This immersive experience aimed to explore the dynamics of sustainable tourism, cultural preservation, and community engagement.

The trip brought together newly certified homestay owners from the project landscape to experience Community-based Tourism in Haa, which had been initiated by RSPN (2016-2018). The participants observed how local communities were empowered to manage and benefit from tourism activities. They also gained valuable insights into the principles of responsible tourism, the preservation of cultural heritage, environmental conservation promotion, and collaboration with relevant agencies within their landscape.





The trip was filled with enriching experiences, including:

- Village Homestays
- Haa Panorama Hike with a local guide
- Visit to Religious Sites guided by Homestay Chairman (Homestay Association of Haa)
- Interaction with Karsho Eco-Campsites Members
- Visits to Heritage Lodges and enjoying their hot stone baths
- Exploration of the National Research Centre for Riverine and Lake Fisheries
- A stop at the Haa Visitor Information Center
- Discovering the Jigme Khesar Strict Nature Reserve

This immersive peer learning journey not only fostered collaboration and knowledge exchange among the participants but also inspired a deeper understanding and appreciation for the transformative potential of community-based tourism initiatives. It also motivated the participants to consider setting up a local institution in their area.

### Project Inception Meeting for Green Climate Fund Readiness and Preparation Support Programme

The project inception meeting was held to provide contextual background on the approved Readiness and Preparatory Support Programme, BTN-RS-006 under the Green Climate Fund (GCF).

The meeting discussed the sequence of project implementation process, assuring collective responsibility among various agencies identified to implement it. The meeting was attended by relevant stakeholders for the project that include government officials and Civil Society Organizations.

RSPN as a Delivery Partner to GCF coordinates the overall implementation of the project. RSPN is grateful to NDA and DAE for the necessary support. This project will end in 2026. RSPN extends gratitude to GCF secretariat and UNOPS for their continued support.



### Readiness Grant Support

RSPN signed a USD one million grant support agreement under the Green Climate Fund (GCF) Readiness and Preparatory Support Programme (RPSP). The two-year Readiness project is titled 'Strengthening capacities and enhancing climate data services in Bhutan to scale up climate financing from multiple sources.'

The project aims to strengthen Bhutan's access to climate finance by improving the availability of and access to robust and credible climate information and data. This is planned to be achieved through stakeholder coordination and technical capacity building. The activities include identifying the climate knowledge gaps and the factors, such as policies and institutional capacity of organizations, in implementing climate-related projects.





### Empowering Local Communities for Sustainable Tourism

A Community-Based Tourism (CBT) training was held in the Haa district for eight days. It was attended by 56 local community members from Lhuentse, Mongar, Tashigang, Trashiyangtse, Zhemgang, Haa, Punakha, and Dagana. The training focused on a community-based tourism approach, aimed at creating a unique experience for tourists and emphasizing standard practices and sustainable mechanisms. The training, provided by the expertise of RSPN and other relevant agencies, helped participants, mostly female, acquire skills and knowledge in various components of tourism. The modules were specifically designed and conducted in the following areas:

- **Homestay Management:** Focused on providing authentic cultural experiences and enhancing hospitality skills.
- **Ecolodge Operations:** Emphasized eco-friendly practices, with participants gaining insights on managing lodges that respect and preserve the natural environment.
- **Cafeteria Management:** Covered everything from menu planning to customer service, helping participants enhance their skills in managing cafeterias efficiently while highlighting local cuisines.
- **Campsite Management:** Ensured memorable outdoor experiences by focusing on site maintenance, beautification, guest services, and maintaining safety protocols for campgrounds.





### Programs to balance socio-economic and environment

With the growing environmental concerns and economic challenges, there is an increasing recognition of the importance of sustainable practices that balance human needs with ecological preservation. One such practice is taking a business approach in plantation creation which offers a multitude of socio-economic and environmental benefits. Many communities residing along the White-bellied Heron landscape feel it is not too late to reap the benefit through the plantation program. The increase in the frequency of landslides, floods and crop failure in the community has driven many of the communities to go for the mass fruit and other tree species plantation. It has become a common sight now to see that every household has their garden with a wide varieties of fruit trees planted. More people now opt to grow a mix of crops and fruit trees together.

This integration, known as agroforestry or intercropping, represents a sustainable and holistic approach that the communities are gearing towards. This practice combines the benefits of tree-based and crop-based farming systems, creating a synergistic relationship that enhances productivity, environmental health, and socio-economic resilience.

Not very long ago, before the initiation of the conservation and livelihood projects by RSPN along the White-bellied Heron landscape, the communities had limited livelihood options. RSPN made a significant contribution in supplementing the government's effort to support these communities through various provisions: land management, high breed livestock provision, fishery farming, high-quality seed and seedling supply, fruit tree supply, high-value timber species supply, nursery raising, rural water scheme, development of ecotourism products such as homestay, nature trail and camps, and many more in terms of building their capacity. Today, there is significant progress observed in the way communities are engaged in diverse alternative livelihood options and it has also become a boom of roadside stalls selling the local products.

RSPN in recent years has focused on the communities to guide them in investing in long-term economic opportunities that also have ecological benefits.

Through the ecorestoration project, RSPN in collaboration with the with the Department of Forest and Park Services is supporting community forest groups and private individuals in enhancing their forestry management. High-value timber species, fruit trees and non-wood forest products are more encouraged for communities. In the last three years, more than 20 community forest groups and about 25 individuals under six districts of Bhutan were supported for forestry enrichment. This activity down the years will significantly benefit the community with increased access to natural resources, and income generation, and have ecological benefits such as sustaining biodiversity in the areas, land stabilization, Human-wildlife conflict management and regulating climate change. Similarly, the livelihood project under RSPN has a direct focus on the communities in exploring various alternative and sustainable livelihood options. Community-based ecotourism, climate-smart agriculture programs and sustainable resource management are current focus in the communities.



20 

**RSPN supported 20 community forest  
past last three years**

## Supporting Nature Clubs in Schools

A two-day consultation workshop was organized by RSPN to further strengthen and innovate the NatureClub activities in the schools. The workshop hosted at Phobjikha was attended by diverse participants; school principals and teachers, District Education Officers, Curriculum Developers, Environmental Officers, college students, and experts in Environmental Education. The consultation delved further into strengthening the RSPN's role in promoting Environmental Education (EE) in Bhutan. The two-day consultation has the following specific objectives:

- **Understand the Role of Nature Club in Environmental Education:** Gain a comprehensive understanding of how Nature Clubs contribute to environmental education, including their activities, impact on awareness, and engagement strategies.
- **Develop Innovative Strategies for Sustainability of Nature Club:** Generate and propose creative ideas and strategies to ensure the long-term sustainability of Nature Clubs and their environmental education initiatives. This includes exploring funding sources, community engagement, and resource management.
- **Actualise skills and knowledge for enhancing Nature Club:** Develop proficiency in resource mobilization from various stakeholders, including understanding the components of a strong proposal, tailoring it to different audiences, and highlighting the unique value of Nature Clubs.

Similar to every nation in the world, Bhutan is grappling with many environmental issues and is also subject to unknown and unquantified ecological impacts in the future. From the recent report on Peoples' Climate Vote, shared by UNDP-Bhutan, about 94% of the Bhutanese respondents expressed their concern about the impact of climate change on future generations. These environmental problems will have associated impacts across the sectors that reduce Bhutan's capacity and ability to achieve the desired development objectives. Further, the lack of knowledge of the environment and failure to consider nature-positive solutions will severely deteriorate our environment. The National Adaptation Plan for Bhutan, launched in the 2023 has identified 'Education and awareness' as critical components in raising awareness about climate change and adaptation among the public.

More concerning today is the observation of disconnection between children and the natural world. There is a pressing need to instil a sense of environmental stewardship and appreciation for nature among young people, and also to ideate to innovate to tackle some of the global issues through Nature-positive Solutions. The need for adequate, effective, and integrated Environmental Education for students and communities is a critical mechanism to bridge the gap. Therefore, a Nature Club in school is one of the mechanisms to promote Environmental Education to the youth and cultivate the young minds with positive thoughts and actions towards nature.

### Background about Nature Clubs:

RSPN has a long history of promoting Environmental Education in the country. In the '90s, the primary focus of RSPN was on Environmental Education and created a network of Nature Clubs in schools to promote Environmental Education. These clubs provided the main opportunity for children to learn about nature, and to identify and address issues in their communities. RSPN supported the clubs financially and built the capacity of club in-charges and teachers through professional development courses and environmental camps.

Further, RSPN also worked with teacher training colleges to develop an Environmental Studies curriculum module. By 2008, RSPN had affiliated more than 100 schools across the country with Nature Clubs. Through these clubs, several environmental activities were initiated. In 2015, RSPN in collaboration of the erstwhile Ministry of Education, also mainstreamed the Environmental Science subject into higher secondary school curriculum.





### Launch of New Project, Cooperation Development Research.

RSPN in collaboration with the Ugyen Wangchuk Institute for Forestry Research and Training (UWIFoRT), and the Natural History Museum and BOKU University in Austria is initiating a joint research project, 'Enhancing Biodiversity Protection and Building Capacity for Cooperative Research in Bhutan to Address Sustainable Development Goal 15 (EPiC)'.

The project aims to investigate the complex relationship between forest management, avian biodiversity, and ecosystem health in Bhutan, with a particular focus on the habitat of the critically endangered White-bellied Heron. The initiative aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 15, aiming to 'protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, combat desertification, and halt land degradation and biodiversity loss'. The project inception meeting followed up by a series of workshops was recently conducted from 22nd to 31st July 2024.

Capacity building constitutes a significant component of the project, aimed at enhancing the skills of Bhutanese researchers in ecological monitoring and conservation strategies. This workshop is an integral initiative of the EPiC Consortium aimed at addressing the critical need for enhanced land use and land cover (LULC) mapping in Bhutan, particularly focusing on the watersheds primarily for the White-bellied Herons, but also to other forest birds with relevance to EPiC. Despite the existence of a national LULC map, a refined version tailored to specific conservation goals is needed.

Through this workshop, it is targeted to employ GIS and remote sensing technologies with the long-term aim of creating a high-resolution map that accurately reflects the natural and utilized forest areas, identifying potential breeding and foraging habitats for the herons, and assessing river systems pertinent to White-bellied Heron ecology.

The workshop also aimed to secure open-source geodata and identify the necessary accompanying information (habitat requirements, occurrence of heron and other associated species). Similarly, the workshop focused on training the participants on research methods and tools, and exploring diverse scopes in enhancing the scientific knowledge on White-bellied Herons. As a part of the workshop, the participants made field visits to the White-bellied Heron Conservation Center.

The project is supported by the programme "Cooperation Development Research" (KoEF) from the OeAD Austrian Agency for Education and Internationalisation.



### Knowledge sharing workshop, visit to India

A visit to India was held to share knowledge gained from implementing the International Climate Initiative (IKI) project towards saving the White-bellied Heron bird species. As a part of the program, a knowledge-sharing workshop was jointly hosted by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN). Relevant conservation organizations from India and Bhutan attended the workshop, the Department of Forest and Park Services (DoFPS) and RSPN staff from Bhutan, and participants from India include staff from Nature Conservation Foundation,

Aaranyak, Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), WII, and researchers.

Towards enhancing the conservation effort of White-bellied Heron in Bhutan, RSPN through the support of the German government under the funding window of the IKI is currently implementing the project "Developing ecosystem-based solutions for managing biodiversity landscapes with the special objective to establish approaches and tools for protecting and managing White-bellied habitats." The project's goal is to develop ecosystem-based solutions for managing biodiversity landscapes, with a special focus on establishing approaches and tools for protecting and managing heron habitats.

The project introduced the Ecosystem and Socio-economic Resilience Analysis and Mapping (ESRAM) approach for biodiversity conservation and management in Bhutan. In addition, the project has significantly documented new knowledge and approaches to the management of natural resources, ecosystem services and climate-resilient livelihood options, resulting in the improvement of biodiversity management and enhancement of livelihoods of the communities living in heron landscapes. This project implementation by RSPN is in the middle of a five-year project period. The project knowledge and experiences gained thus far are found crucial to be shared with our neighbouring White-bellied Heron range countries to support similar planning and conservation efforts in regional landscapes. Therefore, a visit to India was coordinated.

The visit to India paved a significant pathway in sharing conservation knowledge and discussing the means to collaborate among conservation organizations in saving the White-bellied Heron as a regional approach. Besides sharing the knowledge gained thus far from the conservation of heron through the implementation of the current IKI project by RSPN,

an elaborate discussion was held on scaling up a similar conservation approach at the regional level through the same project modality. It was found that considering the critical nature of White-bellied Heron, there is huge scope for the distribution range countries of the species to collaborate in hosting landscape-level projects. The IKI project implementing by RSPN has already resulted in several output achievements, and there is great potential and feasibility for the same approach to be replicated or scaled up to other landscapes among the White-bellied Heron distribution countries.



#### Exchange visit to Ladakh, India for Black-necked Crane.

Supported by the India-Bhutan Foundation, the RSPN team embarked on an insightful exchange visit to Ladakh, India, in August 2024 to foster partnership between Ladakh and RSPN in the area of Black-necked Crane (BNC) conservation. Ladakh, home to India's only BNC summer breeding habitat with a population of around 100 cranes, plays a vital role in regional conservation efforts. Preliminary research indicates that there is a possibility of the cranes in Ladakh migrating to Bhutan, though no detailed research has been done to establish this fact. One of the key reasons of this visit was to fill this knowledge gap in addition to exploring the possibility of initiating collaborative conservation programs that include both the migration study and the knowledge-sharing programs.

Overall, the visit was insightful and useful and the RSPN would like to thank the India-Bhutan Foundation for their generous support in making this visit happen. The following are some of the key take-aways from the visit:

1. The RSPN is able to foster partnership with the various Government Organizations, including Chief Conservator of Ladakh and Non-Governmental Organizations in Ladakh. Such networks and partnership are useful to take this conservation program to the next level.
2. Identified key agencies in Ladakh for developing a regional BNC transboundary conservation action plan. On the request from the RSPN counterpart in Ladakh, RSPN had committed to support tagging of BNC in Ladakh in August-September 2025. This is useful to ascertain whether Ladakh cranes migrate to Bhutan.
3. As part of conservation exchange program, officials from Ladakh have indicated to visit Phobjikha, Bhutan.
4. BNC festival in Bhutan has become an exemplary event providing visibility and publicity for crane conservation as well as increasing local communities' income through international guest attending the festival.





The recent BNC festival held on 11th November, 2024 had around 800 international guest participants. RSPN and Government Agencies in Ladakh had agreed to explore possibility of replicating this BNC festival in Ladakh.

RSPN extends heartfelt gratitude to India-Bhutan Foundation, Thimphu Secretariat for their generous support and to the Himalayan Foundation for Conservation Leadership (HFCL), our counterpart in India, for facilitating this meaningful exchange visit. Together, we are fostering regional cooperation for the conservation of this iconic species.



#### EarthRanger, Ai2 to deploy for conservation of White-bellied Heron

To enhance the conservation effort of the White-bellied Heron bird by streamlining the data collection and real-time visualization of monitoring efforts, the training workshop on EarthRanger was attended by the staff of RSPN Bhutan. The regional workshop in the Asian region was held in Cambodia.

EarthRanger is a data visualization and analysis software that gives conservationists the real-time information they require to keep wildlife, habitats, and communities safe. Easy to use and free for conservation missions, the platform collects, integrates, and displays all historical and available data and combines it with reports from the field to provide one unified view of conservation focus. Accessible through a web browser, EarthRanger is user-friendly and supports cross-organizational collaboration with APIs for integrations.

EarthRanger was launched in 2015 helping protected area managers make informed, conservation-related operational decisions. It is also used by ecologists and biologists to study wildlife and habitats, and to advocate for their protection.

The EarthRanger was developed by Vulcan LLC in partnership with many conservation and technology partners. It is a software solution that combines real-time data from ranger patrols, remote imaging, and various sensors. As of September 2021, EarthRanger is a product of Ai2. EarthRanger is a product of Ai2, with a mission of building breakthrough AI to solve the world's biggest problems.



### Knowledge sharing, visit to Myanmar

As a part of a visit to neighbouring range countries of White-bellied Heron landscape, the staff from the Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN) and the Department of Forest and Park Services recently visited Myanmar country. The program was coordinated mainly to share the knowledge on integrated approaches used by RSPN in saving White-bellied Heron birds. During the program, the participants visited important cultural and biodiversity sites in Myanmar and hosted a knowledge-sharing workshop with conservation organizations in Myanmar. The day-long knowledge-sharing workshop was jointly hosted by the country office of Fauna and Flora International in Myanmar and RSPN. The participants from Myanmar attending the workshop included the WWF-Myanmar, Nature Conservation Society, Myanmar Biodiversity Fund, Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Society (BANCA), and researchers.

It was a significant milestone for RSPN to conduct this visit to Myanmar with limited information and conservation efforts undertaken for White-bellied Heron in the country. During the knowledge-sharing workshop, both the participants from the Bhutan and Myanmar sides presented the conservation works and way forward plans. RSPN shared the knowledge on various approaches used by Bhutan, particularly through the implementation of projects like International Climate Initiatives (IKI) to enhance the conservation of White-bellied Heron. From the Myanmar side, the conservation organizations presented their respective areas of work and the status of the White-bellied Heron population in the country. As per the annotated checklist maintained by the researcher since 1999, it is estimated that there are about 29 White-bellied Heron distribution records in Myanmar.



However, the recent record for the last five years saw about five White-bellied Heron in the country. Though, there are no systematic surveys conducted on White-bellied Heron in Myanmar and India, the estimated population based on the sighting records indicates a very low number of population occurring in the region.

From the knowledge-sharing workshops held in respective countries of India and Myanmar, there is a presence of 10-13 individuals of the White-bellied Heron in India and about five individuals in Myanmar. In Bhutan, the recent population survey saw 25 individuals of White-bellied Heron (Year 2024). This makes the global population of this species only about 43 individuals.

Similar to India, RSPN also proposed the discussion on building regional effort to conserve the White-bellied Heron through diverse mechanisms relying on the expertise and experience of conservation efforts undertaken by RSPN. A discussion was held on scaling up a similar conservation approach at the regional level. It was found that considering the critical nature of the White-bellied Heron, there is huge scope for the range countries of the species to collaborate in saving the species. The White-bellied Heron was declared extinct from Nepal and similarly, many of the historical distribution sites have no recent record of the species occurring. The key discussions include the need to update the White-bellied Heron Strategy document, develop a country-specific Conservation Action Plan and implement landscape regional projects among White-bellied Heron range countries.

RSPN leverages the conservation experiences of the White-bellied Heron for more than two decades to lead many of the areas discussed at the regional level. As an immediate measure, RSPN is planning to host training of researchers and staff of relevant conservation organizations from Myanmar and India in Bhutan for survey and monitoring of the White-bellied Heron and initiate resource mobilizations required to support regional programs.

### Glimpse from Black-necked Crane roosts maintenance

Annually, RSPN coordinates to maintain the roost of the Black-necked Crane. The RSPN team was joined by volunteers from Gangtey Lodge, Aman Gangtey and forestry officials.



### BirdLife Asia Regional Partnership Meeting

The 21<sup>st</sup> BirdLife Asia Regional Partnership Meeting was held in Indonesia. The three day partnership meeting was attended by 14 BirdLife partners in Asia, and some of the key stakeholders having association to BirdLife in Asia.

The partnership meeting organized by BirdLife International Asia and co-hosted by Burung Indonesia outlines following objectives;

- Monitor and evaluate progress on delivery of the key conservation priorities identified by the Asia Conservation Strategy to advance the BirdLife Strategy (2023-2032).
- Continue to unite around joint initiatives to deliver on the key conservation priorities identified by the BirdLife Asia Partnership.
- To strengthen the Asia Partnership is in a better position to deliver on our shared conservation priorities, develop plans to strengthen Partners and the Partnership.

RSPN became the 122<sup>nd</sup> BirdLife Partner organization in 2016. As the largest conservation NGO in Bhutan, it dedicates itself to pioneering biodiversity safeguards, the environment, sustainable development, and climate change.

During the partnership meeting, RSPN presented some of the significant milestones it has achieved in recent years for conserving biodiversity, creating sustainable development, mitigating climate change impacts and other areas that supplements the effort of the government.





### Supporting community with Electric Fencing

As the harvest season approach, Ap Dorji Rinchen, a resident of Toedwang gewog in Punakha, can finally rest without sacrificing his sleep to guard his six acres of wetland from wild boars and other animals. Earlier, the community had built 11 temporary sheds around the fields for guarding the crops from wildlife ,with each household taking turns.

Now with the introduction and support of electric fencing by the RSPN, the situation has improved significantly. This intervention, which covers six villages has benefited 42 households and protects around 90 acres of farmland. The 17-kilometre stretch of fencing with a total budget of Nu 2.5 million was inaugurated on September 30<sup>th</sup>,2024.

Prior to the project's implementation, the local residents were felling trees from the nearby banks of the Phochhu River to use as fencing poles. The resident shared that this led to the habitat disturbance of wildlife, including the habitat of critically endangered White-bellied Heron. It was therefore, a long desire for the communities to install electric fencing that will lead to sustainable solutions to protect both the environment and the community's livelihoods.

Currently, the High-Density Poly-ethylene (HDPE) pipes are used for the electric fencing pole. The HDPE poles not only reduce the impact on local forests but also enhance the durability and effectiveness of the fencing system.

This activity is a part of IKI Project "Developing Ecosystem-based Solutions for Managing Biodiversity landscapes in Bhutan" funded by the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV), Germany through International Climate Initiative (IKI) with co-funding from MAVA Foundation, Switzerland and the Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN).



### Unlocking Creativity: Souvenir Development for the Berti Community in Zhemgang

The 8-day Souvenir Development Training for the Berti Community in Zhemgang District was held from October 22<sup>nd</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024. During this program, six participants acquired essential skills covering all aspects from tool sharpening to final polishing.

Mr. Ngawang Namgyel, training participant shared: "I am grateful for the recent training opportunity that has opened new doors for me. Now, I can explore and create various souvenirs in my free time while also earning some income. I look forward to participating in similar opportunities in the future." This training is part of our Community-Based Tourism project under the ongoing BMUV-IKI Project designed to enhance livelihoods through empowerment and provide alternative income opportunities.

This activity is a part of IKI Project "Developing Ecosystem-based Solutions for Managing Biodiversity landscapes in Bhutan" funded by the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV), Germany through International Climate Initiative (IKI) with co-funding from MAVA Foundation, Switzerland and the Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN)



### Field Update: Rural Water Supply Scheme (RWSS) in Punakha District

A recent field visit by a joint team from RSPN and the Punakha District Administration, led by Hon'ble DASHO DZONGDA, took place at the RWSS sites in Shengana and Dzomi Gewogs, Punakha District. This important initiative aims to extend approximately 18 kilometers of water supply, benefiting over 150 households across the two gewogs.

The RWSS is a crucial part of the BMUV-IKI project, providing essential support to local communities within the project area to enhance their stewardship of water body habitats and the Critically Endangered White-bellied Heron.

This activity is a part of IKI Project "Developing Ecosystem-based Solutions for Managing Biodiversity landscapes in Bhutan" funded by the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV), Germany through International Climate Initiative (IKI) with co-funding from MAVA Foundation, Switzerland and the Royal Society for Protection of Nature.



### RSPN attended COP16 UN Biodiversity Conference 2024

Two staff of RSPN participated in the **16th Conference of Parties (COP16)** that was held in Colombian city of Cali from 21st October to 1st November, 2024. The conference was preceded by a ceremonial opening, featuring a cultural presentation and statements by the President of the three bodies, as well as the Governor and Mayor of Cali on October 20th, 2024.

The conference included the Sixteenth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP16), the Eleventh Meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties (MOP) to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CP-MOP-11), and the Fifth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization (NP-MOP-5).

The key outcome of COP16 include countries managing to find consensus on a new benefit-sharing mechanism for genetic resources – known as the "Cali fund" and nations agreeing to a new permanent body for Indigenous peoples, which will allow them to advise and offer their view at biodiversity COPs directly for the first time.

This platform enabled RSPN participants to showcase their conservation efforts, and also uniting and networking with the RSPN's multilateral partners and philanthropists. It was also good learning opportunities on various global conservation strategies and new conservation transformations happening.

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### Collaborative Knowledge Transfer Among WWF Bhutan, Tarayana Foundation and RSPN

For the benefit of communities and biodiversity, WWF Bhutan, Tarayana Foundation, and RSPN are implementing various impactful project activities across the country. Some of the activities implementing by the three organizations share commonality on addressing same or similar issues in the community, the climate actions, biodiversity conservation, and community livelihood. However, the project sites are located in different regions across the country. In some projects, three organizations also share a similar donor profile, like International Climate Initiative project funded by German government

As a knowledge sharing mechanism among three organizations, a joint field visit is currently underway. During this joint field trip, the team will visit different project sites, and learn and share the new knowledge generation from the project activities. If there are areas for collaboration and improvement in some of the project activities, three organizations will also see possibility of partnership in the future. The team yesterday visited the RSPN project site, the supply of water scheme to Matalungchhu community under Wangdue Phodrang district.



### Turning passion into opportunity

Mr. Ngawang Namgyel, a participant from the recent Souvenir Development Training organized by RSPN Bhutan, had the incredible opportunity to showcase his and his friends' hand carved wooden bird figurines at the Fourth Bhutan Bird Festival, held in Tingtibi, Zhemgang, on November 12-13, 2024.

During the festival, Ngawang gained valuable exposure, showcased his talent, and turned his creativity into income. Ngawang shared, "This was an eye-opening opportunity for me. I never imagined I would one day have the chance to showcase my talent and earn an income from it. Now, I have even discussed with my team about producing more products to sell at the next year's bird festival event."

It's inspiring to see how training opportunities like these, supported by RSPN Bhutan, can empower local artisans like Ngawang to grow and thrive. We can't wait to see where his passion and craftsmanship take him next.

"I am thankful and overwhelmed by the support given to my group and community. Such support inspires me and my team to keep moving forward,"

Mr. Ngawang Namgyel,



### RSPN Meets with GCF secretariat officials

RSPN had a privilege to host a meeting with the officials from Green Climate Fund (GCF) secretariat. The team led by the Executive Director, Ms. Mafalda Duarte of GCF is currently on official visit to Bhutan.

During the meeting, RSPN shared its conservation strategies in saving globally threatened species through community-focused initiatives and building climate resilient societies. RSPN became DeliveryPartner to GCF in 2023 for implementing the Readiness Project in Bhutan and currently implements the Readiness Project-BTN-RS-006. The update was also made on the progress of project. The meeting also highlighted some of the areas to strengthen partnership between GCF and RSPN. RSPN aspires to become second accredited entities to GCF from Bhutan and the current Readiness Project have outlined scopes in preparation of RSPN for accreditation process.

RSPN, under the Royal Patronage of Her Majesty the Queen of Bhutan and in partnership with government, international partners, foundations and communities is dedicated to preserving Bhutan's environment. This meeting marks a significant step in strengthening our partnership with the GCF as we work together towards a greener and sustainable future for Bhutan



### Grant Agreement signing

RSP and Bhutan Trust Fund for Environmental Conservation (BTFEC) signed a Grant Agreement today to support RSPN's accreditation as country's second National Implementing Entity (NIE) to Adaptation Fund.

For RSPN's accreditation process, Adaptation Fund (AF) has approved a Readiness Package Grant of US\$ 150,000. This grant support will help RSPN in developing and updating policies and guidelines, conducting stakeholders consultations, and addressing comments related to accreditation process received from the AF.

RSPN is grateful to BTFEC for this handholding support. Together, RSPN wishes to bring major climate adaptation actions in the country for the Climate Change.

RSPN is grateful to BTFEC for this handholding support. Together, RSPN wishes to bring major climate adaptation actions in the country for the ClimateChange.





### A new partnership tied

With the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) earlier today, RSPN Bhutan and College of Natural Resources, Royal University of Bhutan have formally established their partnership, marking a significant step forward in environmental research and education.

This MoU aims to foster cooperation between the two organizations in key areas such as scientific research, capacity building, and educational development. Through this partnership, both organizations will be able to leverage their respective strengths, leading to mutual benefits and the establishment of a comprehensive framework for future collaborations.



The MoU outlines several exciting initiatives, including:

- Joint research initiatives
- Collaborative research projects
- Support for graduate and research degree students
- Organization of seminars, conferences, and workshops
- Capacity-building efforts
- Collaborative publications
- 

With this partnership, RSPN and CNR are ready to take bold steps in shaping the future of conservation and sustainable development.



### Empowering local communities: Building capacity for sustainable water use

A two-day Water Management Training was conducted for the Matalungchu community in Thedtsho Gewog, Wangduephodrang Dzongkhag which was designed to enhance local capacity in managing and protecting vital water resources.

In addition to community training, a Water Safety Plan (WSP) Facilitators' Training was organized, equipping participants with essential knowledge to promote sustainable water use. Practical activities such as water discharge measurement and water source protection were also carried out, ensuring hands-on learning and application.

To support long-term sustainability, Water Management Guidelines were developed in both English and Dzongkha ensuring accessibility for all. These guidelines will soon be formally endorsed by the local government, marking a significant milestone in water governance.

This collaborative effort was facilitated by the Dzongkhag Engineering Team, Thedtsho Gewog Administration, and RSPN. This activity is a part of IKI Project "Developing Ecosystem-based Solutions for Managing Biodiversity landscapes in Bhutan" funded by the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV), Germany through International Climate Initiative (IKI) with co-funding from MAVA Foundation, Switzerland and the Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN).



### Meeting between JICA and RSPN to discuss on Project ideation developed

The officials from JICA office Bhutan visited RSPN today to discuss and substantiate information on the project co-developed by RSPN and its partner in Japan, JEEF. RSPN has a long standing partnership of working with JICA. The past projects supported by JICA to RSPN ranges from working on enhancing Community-based Sustainable Tourism and Environmental education program to managing the wetland in the country. RSPN with strong institutional capacity, wealth of Human Resources and strong safeguards in place, leverage implementation of diverse projects and producing timely deliverables

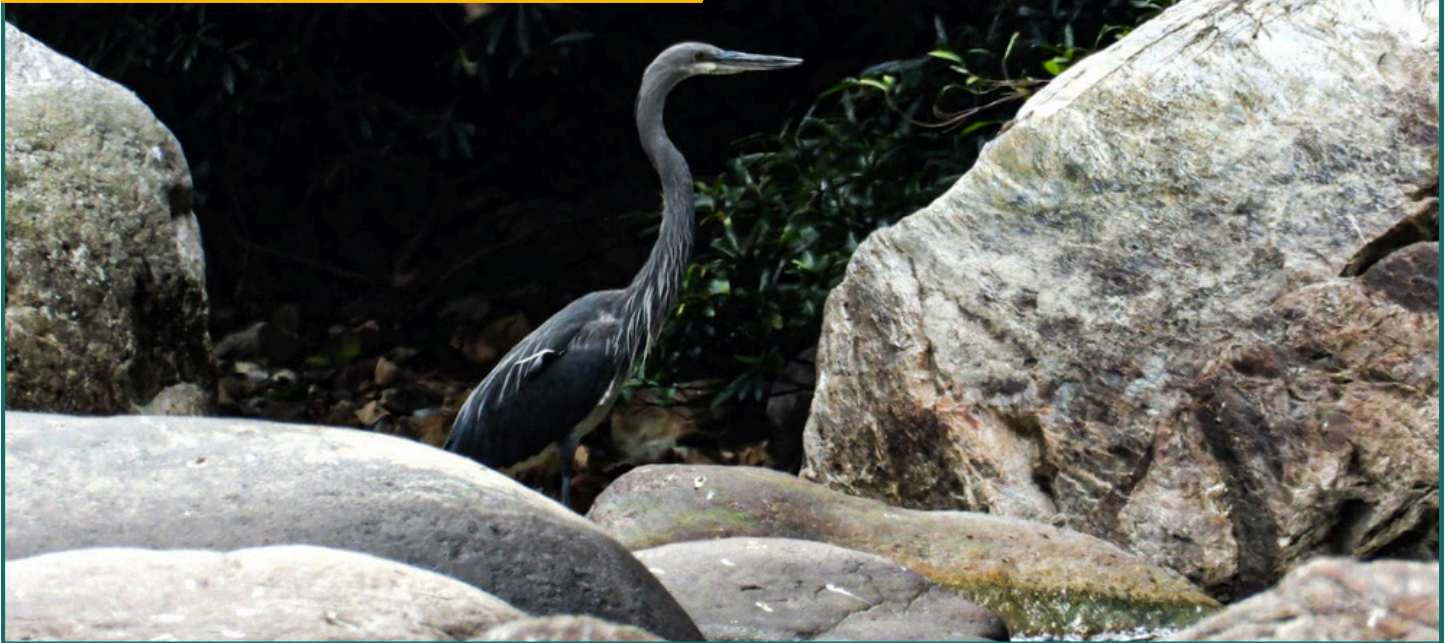




## Strengthening Species Conservation

### Annual Population Survey of White-bellied Heron, 2024

*Tshering Tobgay, Research Officer, RSPN*



For the year 2024, the annual survey of White-bellied Heron(WBH) was conducted from 1st to 5th March across the major river basins in Bhutan, Wangchhu, Punatshangchu, Mangdichhu, Kuri-gongri river, and Jomori. 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 raised at the White-bellied Heron Conservation Center. 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 Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN).

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 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.

The WBH population survey was first initiated 2003 and it is an ongoing annual event coordinated by the RSPN with the support of DoFPS and LCSG members in conducting the survey. This concerted effort is significant for the WBH conservation. Today, WBH conservation is not only as a flagship program but also as a fundamental aspect of RSPN's core mandate aimed at securing the species' genetic diversity and facilitating population recovery in Bhutan and the region.



	WBH Habitat Zones	Places	Counts
In-situ	Zone - I	Phochhu, Mochhu, Dangchhu	1
	Zone - II	Adha, Nagzhina, Hararongchhu, Kisonachhu and Taksha area	5
	Zone - III	Burichhu, Sunkosh-Dagachhu, Relangthang, Wakletar, Balwani, Malbasey, Kalikhola and Middle Punatsangkha area	4
	Zone - IV	Lhamozingkha, Rangae and Gumti Lower Punatsangchhu area	2
	Zone - V	Phibsoo Wildlife Sanctuary	2
	Zone - VI	Berti and Upper Mangdechhu area	1
	Zone - VII	Goling and Tsaidang area	3
	Zone - IX	Chamkharchhu	1
	Zone - XV	Jigmechhu and Wangchhu area	3
Ex-situ	WBH Conservation Center (WBHCC)		3
Total			25

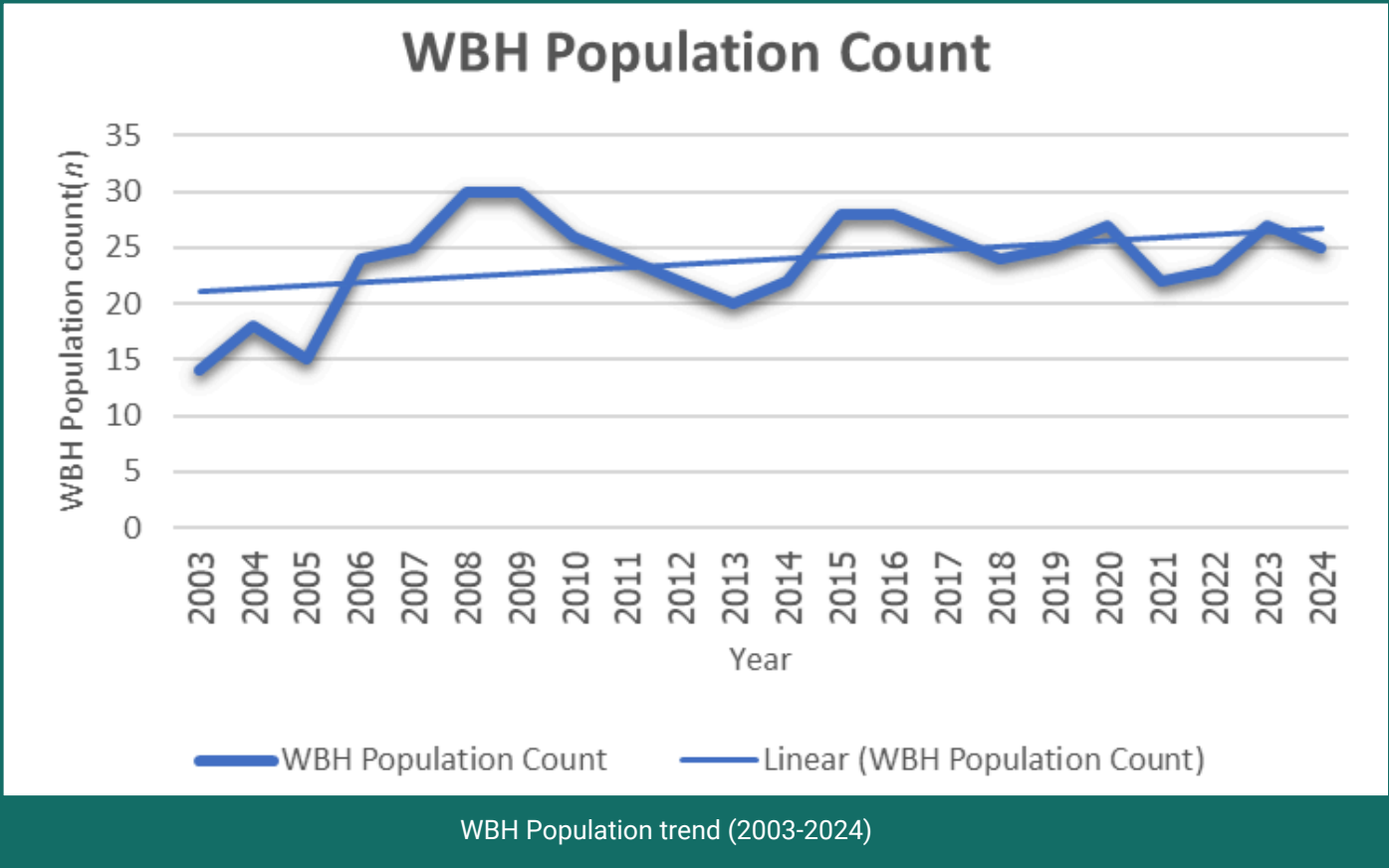






Photo credit: Tshewang Lhendup/RSPN

**25**   
WBH recorded

**04**   
Active Nests

**207**   
Bird Species  
Observed

**18**   
Mammal Species  
Observed

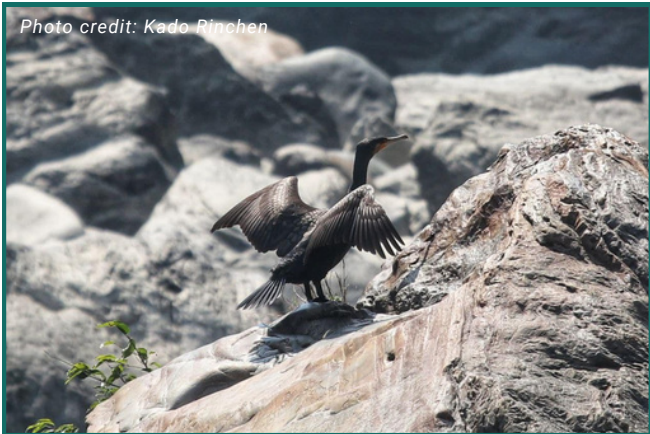


Photo credit: Kedo Rinchen



Photo credit: Tshewang Lhendup/RSPN





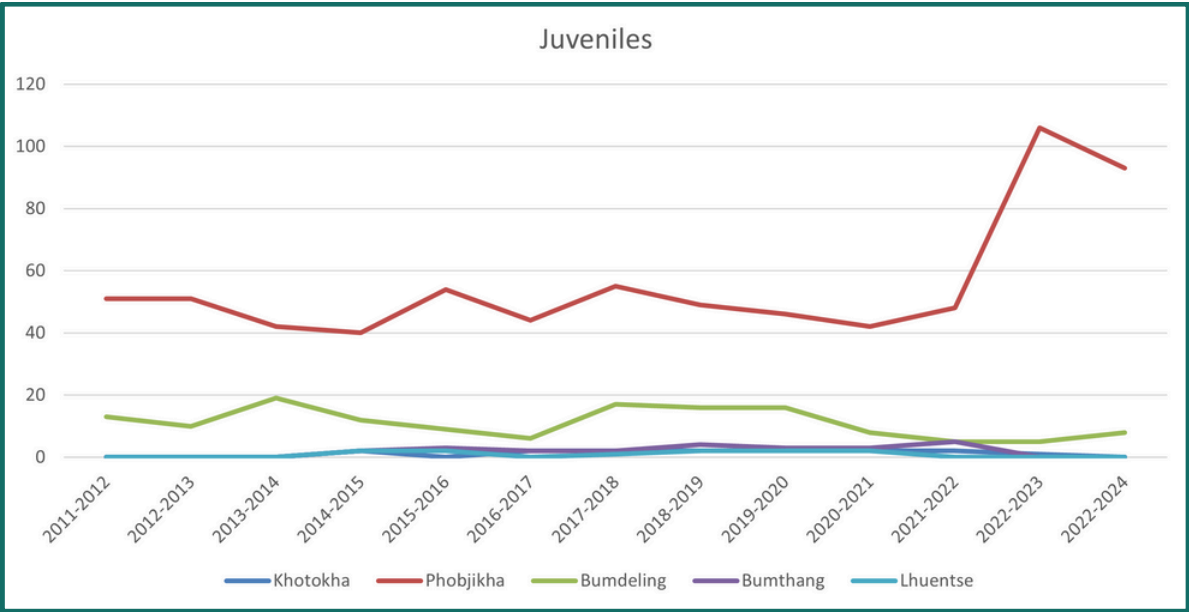
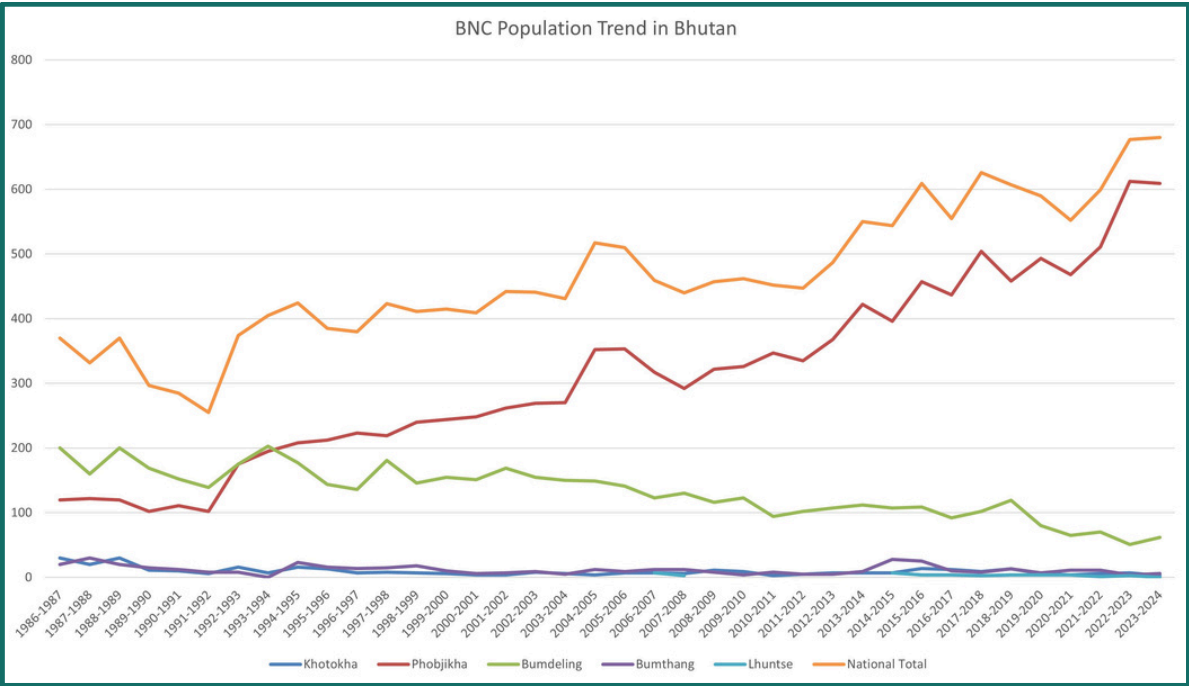
**Black-necked Crane Population count, 2024**

*Jigme Tshering, SCD Chief, RSPN*

We are even grateful to our partners in the field, Forest Division Offices and others, for their participation in the count as well as in maintaining the habitats for the Black-necked Cranes.

Such annual count has been conducted since 1986-1987 to monitor the wintering population trend in Bhutan.

Location	Count (Year 2024)
Gangtey-Phobjikha	609 (93 juveniles)
Bumdeling	62 (8 juveniles)
Khotokha	3
Bumthang	2
Total Count	676 (101 juveniles)





## Conservation of the White-bellied Heron: A Symbol of Resilience in Berti Community

Berti, a small village, is located in the valley of Mangdechhu under Zhemgang district. The village has a long history of connection with the White-bellied Heron.

In the early 2000s, the loud call of the WBH initially startled the residents of Berti. There were only a few people who then recognized this bird. However, as time passed, the community began to recognize the bird as not only an important symbol of their local ecosystem but also a potential catalyst for progress. Understanding the significance of this endangered species, the community of Berti aligned itself with conservation programs. Through RSPN's support, Berti received various forms of assistance, including agricultural initiatives, and capacity-building opportunities, fostering both environmental sustainability and community welfare. RSPN's initiatives in the area included distributing seedlings for vegetables, promoting high-value tree sapling plantation, and supporting piggery and fishery farming. The village also benefited from the development of an Ecolodge, designed to encourage ecotourism while preserving the region's natural beauty and biodiversity.

One of Berti's most influential conservation advocates is Ap Dorji, an esteemed community member whose involvement with RSPN dates back to the formation of the Local Conservation Support Group (LCSG). Over the years, he has been instrumental in nurturing the next generation of conservationists, ensuring that the commitment to the WBH is passed down. While Ap Dorji is no longer able to monitor the heron populations as actively due to his age, he finds satisfaction in seeing his daughter take the reins. She is now helping run the WBH Ecolodge and also attended capacity-building training to further enhance her skills in ecolodge management.

Despite the community's best efforts, challenges remain, notably the declining population of the WBH along the Bertichhu river, which runs through Berti village and eventually joins the Mangdechhu river. Once a thriving habitat for the heron, Bertichhu saw two active nests and as many as 10 individuals until 2015. Unfortunately, the heron population has drastically dwindled, and it has now become a rare sight to spot even one or two of these majestic birds. Locals have also observed a reduction in the river's volume, which has contributed to the habitat loss for the heron.

The WBH Ecolodge, operated by the local community, is a shining example of how tourism can contribute to both environmental conservation and economic development. The ecolodge serves as a platform for promoting environmental awareness and generating income for the community while simultaneously safeguarding the future of the WBH. Currently, eight community members, seven of whom are women, manage the ecolodge. Each member contributes 2% of their income to the community and 35% into savings, fostering a sense of collective responsibility.

The infrastructure for the ecolodge was supported by various agencies, including RSPN, making it a sustainable model for ecotourism in the region. Through this initiative, the community has not only become an advocate for the conservation of the WBH but also found a way to thrive economically while protecting their natural heritage.

Berti village is also known for its unique tradition of Bon offerings, specifically the Berti Karchoed. This practice, which evolved from the earlier Nakchoed (black offering), no longer requires animal sacrifices. Instead, the community has embraced a more sustainable practice. Although RSPN initially supported the village with piggery and fishery farming, the shift towards the white offering practice in 2015 led the community to abandon animal farming. In response, RSPN introduced alternative sustainable farming methods, including Agrobiodiversity farming and ecotourism initiatives.

For the people of Berti, the WBH is more than just a bird. It represents resilience, unity, and hope. As the community continues to navigate the challenges of conservation, they remain committed to preserving both the heron and their unique cultural heritage. Through their collective efforts, Berti village is proving that even small communities can play a significant role in environmental stewardship and sustainable development. In Berti, the White-bellied Heron is not merely a bird; it is a symbol of the community's enduring spirit and dedication to safeguarding Bhutan's rich biodiversity for future generations.



## Improving the life of communities

### Clean Water Brings New Hope to Matanglungchu Chiwog, Ending a Decade of Water Scarcity: A New Chapter for Matanglungchu

Nestled in the scenic landscapes of Thedtsho, Wangdue, the village of Matanglungchu has long been synonymous with water scarcity. For over a decade, residents struggled with limited access to clean drinking water. Sharing a single tap among multiple households often led to conflicts and disharmony within the community. However, the situation has now improved as Matanglungchu celebrates a new chapter of abundance, with a reliable water supply reaching every doorstep.

The transformation began with the implementation of the Rural Water Supply Scheme (RWSS), aimed at enhancing the lives of local residents living in the white-bellied heron landscape. The seven-and-a-half-kilometer-long RWSS will benefit 25 households and 203 residents, where each household is provided with its own water tap.

### Empowering Agriculture and Education

With the water crisis resolved, residents are eager to expand their agricultural activities. Thedtsho gup, Mr. Chador, hopes the improved water supply will create more opportunities for the community. With 150 acres of arable land, residents can now focus on cultivating crops for commercial purposes, helping them repay loans and improve their standard of living.

The Scheme also extends its benefits to the Matanglungchu Early Childhood Resource (ECR) center, which serves 25 students. Previously, the school relied on water transported by the principal. With the new water system in place, both students and teachers can now focus more on education.

Originally planned as a five-month project, the initiative progressed at an impressive pace due to the strong collaboration within the community.



“The project which began in January 2023, was successfully completed in just three months. “Thanks to the support and cooperation of the residents, we were able to reach this milestone ahead of schedule”

-Mrs Sarita Gurung,  
Gewog Administrative Officer, Wangdue District





### The Journey of Wangdue Dzong View Homestay: The Power of Dreams

Ms. Passang Om is a young, rising entrepreneur and advocate, her journey shaped by resilience and determination. Her life took a pivotal turn in 2016 when she decided to drop out of school to alleviate her parents' financial pressure while they supported her siblings in pursuing higher education. Passang said, "This decision closed so many doors in my face." Yet, unbeknownst to her, this closed door marked the beginning of her journey of self-discovery and entrepreneurship.

After leaving school, Passang sought a new path and enrolled in formal training in food and beverage. This led to an exciting job opportunity in India, but the COVID-19 pandemic shattered those dreams and brought her back home. However, undeterred, she explored various avenues, from tailoring to hospitality, until she finally found her true calling in agriculture and hospitality.

Upon returning to her ancestral house, nestled beside the magnificent Wangdue Phodrang Dzong, a fortress that has withstood the test of time, Passang envisioned a unique venture that would blend her expertise in hotel management with her family's farming legacy. She transformed her family house into what is now known as Wangdue Dzong View Homestay. As her dreams began to take shape, Passang learned about the Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN) and eagerly joined capacity-building training on homestay management. RSPN was supporting local communities residing in the critically endangered White-bellied Heron landscape.

This marked the beginning of a transformative experience that further fueled her passion for conservation, particularly focusing on the protection of the White-bellied Heron.

Today, Wangdue Dzong View Homestay offers guests an authentic Bhutanese rural lifestyle, coupled with a farm-to-table dining experience sourced directly from their farm. The ancestral house is beautifully painted with traditional Bhutanese artwork, creating a culturally immersive atmosphere. Guests can enjoy wearing traditional attire, taking guided village tours, and participating in agricultural field visits.

Passang is deeply committed to preserving Bhutan's natural heritage and traditions for future generations, recognizing that these unique experiences attract guests to her doorstep. Inspired by conservation efforts, she engages in advocacy and community initiatives aimed at protecting Bhutan's rich biodiversity while enhancing the sustainability of homestay experiences in her own small ways.

Despite facing financial limitations in setting up the homestay, Passang turned her dream into reality with modest financial support from RSPN and her family members. Though setbacks in securing additional funding arose, her determination for continuous improvement remains unshaken. Furthermore, her active engagement in capacity-building training added significant value to her venture.

Passang's journey transcends personal success; it inspires others to pursue their dreams with passion and perseverance, as dreams can flourish even in the most challenging circumstances. She shares a simple yet powerful message: "Start small, seek help, and never stop learning." For her, being a homestay owner means embodying creativity, resilience, and adaptability.

This support is part of IKI Project "Developing Ecosystem-based Solutions for Managing Biodiversity landscapes in Bhutan" funded by the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV), Germany through International Climate Initiative (IKI) with co-funding from MAVA Foundation, Switzerland and the Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN).



TikTok Account: Wangdue Dzong View Homestay

“ Ever since I embarked on my homestay journey, I've been driven by a profound inspiration to protect the critically endangered majestic White-bellied Heron and conserve its habitat ”

Ms Passang Om  
Rising Entrepreneur and Advocate



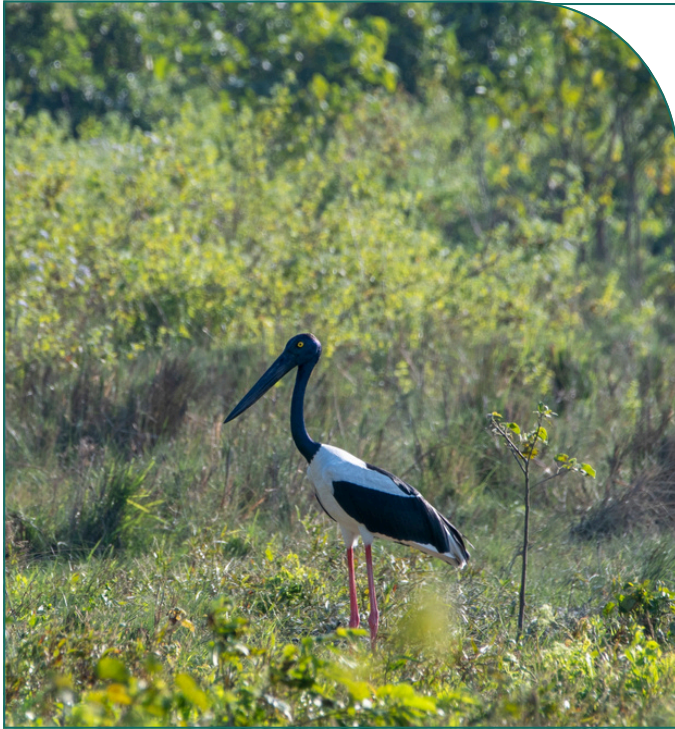
## White-bellied Heron Advocacy Program

Engaged 728 participants (435 female and 293 male including students) for White-bellied heron awareness and advocacy program.





## Species Watch with RSPN



**Name:** Black-necked Stork

**Scientific Name:** *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*

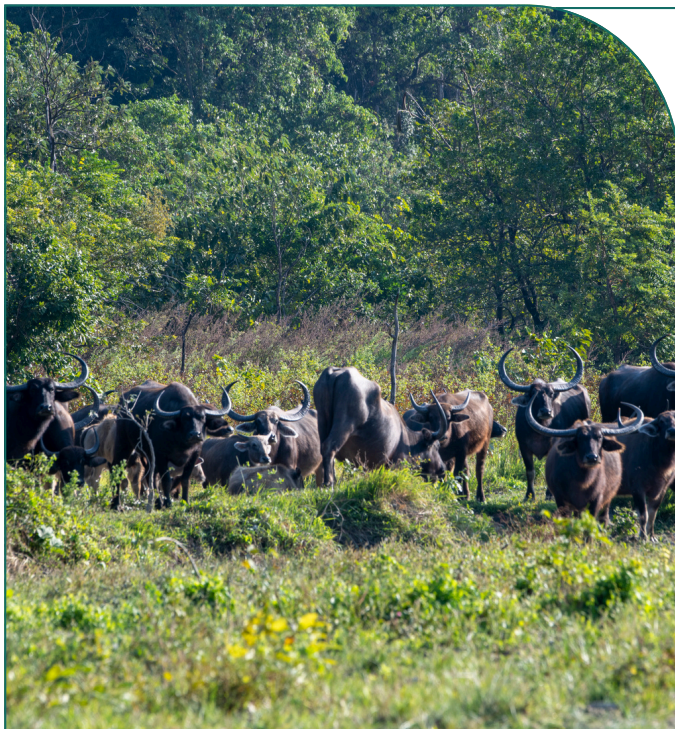
**Conservation Status:** Near Threatened

**Population Trend:** Decreasing

**Habitat Type:** freshwater wetlands, watercourses, and swamps, including those associated with major coastal rivers

**Place photo taken:** Royal Manas National Park

**Photo credit:** Tshering Tobgay/RSPN



**Name:** Water Buffalo

**Scientific Name:** *Bubalus bubalis*

**Conservation Status:** Endangered

**Population Trend:** Generally increasing

**Habitat Type:** Wet grasslands, marshes, swamps, and tropical and subtropical forests, often near rivers and other water sources.

**Place photo taken:** Royal Manas National Park

**Photo credit:** Tshering Tobgay/RSPN





**Name:** Assam macaque

**Scientific Name:** *Macaca assamensis*

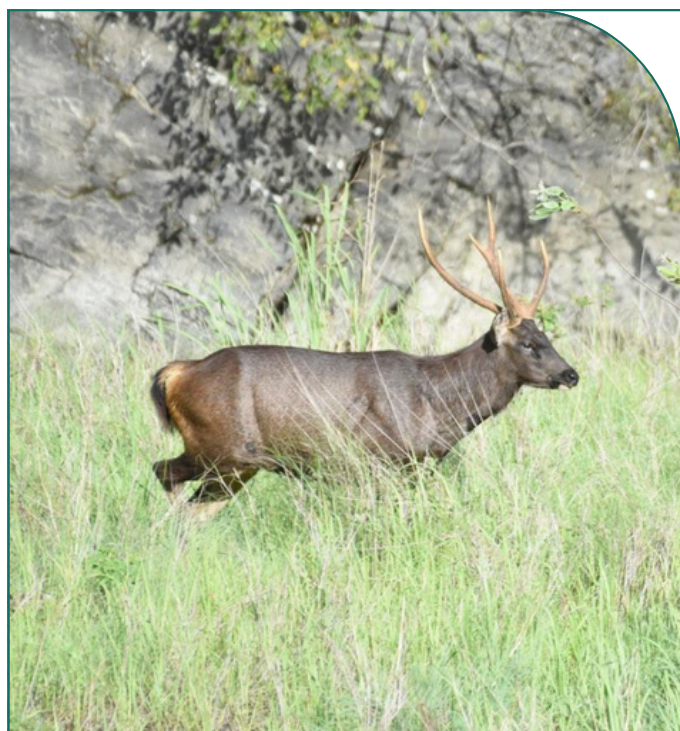
**Conservation Status:** Near Threatened

**Population Trend:** Decreasing

**Habitat Type:** Subtropical and temperate broadleaf forests, as well as evergreen and semi-evergreen forests, often in hilly and mountainous regions. They also utilize mixed deciduous and bamboo forests, particularly in western Thailand. Rocky outcrops and cliffs are often features of their preferred habitats, sometimes near water sources.

**Place photo taken:** Jigmechhu

**Photo credit:** Tshewang Lhendup/RSPN



**Name:** Sambar deer

**Scientific Name:** *Rusa unicolor*

**Conservation Status:** Vulnerable

**Population Trend:** Decreasing

**Habitat Type:** Found in variety of forest habitats, including tropical rainforests, deciduous forests, and mixed forests.

**Place photo taken:** Punatsangchhu Basin

**Photo credit:** Tshewang Lhendup/RSPN



## ABOUT US

RSPN was established in 1987 under the Royal Command of His Majesty The Fourth King of Bhutan as a citizen based Non-Government 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 Royal Patron. RSPN is managed by a seven-Board Directors, the Executive Director is the head of the organization.

## 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.

## WHAT WE DO?



## RSPN Conservation Mandala

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 Goal (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".

## CONTACT US

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Tele: +975 1733 2329 (Officer In-Charge)

### BLACK-NECKED CRANE EDUCATION CENTER

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