

## Roofing project cuts forest use in Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary

Surveys done in the park have revealed that Merak and Sakteng villages had been unsustainably harvesting large quantities of timber from the nearby forest. Therefore, to combat the issue WWF Bhutan along with park initiated an alternative roofing project to preserve forest resources by supplying CGI sheets to offset the shingles demand. Besides saving forest, the project is also aimed to build awareness of the importance of conservation and secure the confidence of SWS communities to partner and participate in the park's future conservation activities.



Community meeting

On 28th May, the park handed over 16,000 CGI sheets to seven village representatives from Merak and Sakteng village. Park staff briefed the village representatives on the purpose of the project and how they, as the closet neighbours to the forests, could serve as an important link in upholding the conservation goals of the park.

To bring about ownership and responsibility among residents, the purchase of the CGI sheets was very much a joint endeavour, whereby the communities themselves contributed 30% of the value. Three hundred seventy-four households have since benefited from this roofing project in SWS.

## Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary

Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary (SWS) is a 650 km<sup>2</sup> national park in the far eastern region of Bhutan, bordering the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. The sanctuary is adorned with a diverse ecosystem ranging from warm broadleaf forests to alpine meadows. From the two largest villages in the sanctuary, Merak and Sakteng, hails Bhutan's most prominent highlanders, the semi-nomadic people called *Brokpas*.

With an assemblage of rich ecosystem diversity and a distinctive culture to offer, Merak and Sakteng were opened to tourism in September 2010. Unfortunately, the influx of tourism in the area gave rise to issues like improper waste management and other unsustainable tourism practices.

To address these issues, WWF and SWS initiated an extensive environmental awareness campaign across the three villages of Merak, Sakteng and Joenkhar in October 2010. The overall objective of the project is to educate the local communities on the importance of retaining their pristine environment and rich cultural traditions, while at the same time nurturing tourism opportunities.



Community awareness meeting

Various eco-tourism plans, strategies and solutions were discussed and agreed upon through several local community meetings to address ongoing tourism challenges and issues. Subsequently, at the school level, two student nature clubs were initiated in Merak and Sakteng. Together with park staff, the schools conducted regular cleaning campaigns around their communities.

Establishment of a third nature club at Joenkhar Community Primary School is under way. The communities have also constructed and maintained seven garbage pits in their villages to support better waste management.



Developing eco-tourism potentiality

WWF Bhutan, with funding support from WWF UK, has long assisted SWS staff in updating their knowledge and information base of the sanctuary. Several rounds of species inventorying (vegetation, mammals and birds) have been conducted in the sanctuary, together with regular information updates. Four eco-tourism leaders from SWS were sent to India for a study tour and training at the Wildlife Institute of India in Dehradun.

## Royal Manas National Park opens its doors to eco-tourism

Royal Manas National Park (RMNP) is the oldest protected area in Bhutan and shares a porous border with India's Manas National Park and Tiger Reserve. With an area of 1059 km<sup>2</sup>, the ecosystem in RMNP ranges from tropical to subtropical. For a long time, the park remained isolated due to security issues. It was only in the early 2000s that the park began to recover and focus on conservation. As a result, very little is known about the park to the outside world.

With the aim to enhance and build sustainable tourism opportunities in the park, the first ever eco-tourism project was initiated in October 2010 with financial and technical assistance from WWF UK. Since this project was the first of its kind, basic infrastructure was required.

The first five eco-camps are currently being constructed in Gomphu range office, Pantang Geog (block) center, Panbang, Norbugang and Shilingtoe villages. Each campsite was chosen carefully, while some campsites overlook the picturesque view of the Mangdechhu, others capture the scenic beauty of the surrounding villages and the lush forests below.



Alongside the construction of the campsites, several local school dropouts have been identified as guides and trained to follow professional guiding guidelines. Cooks have also been trained according to professional cooking and serving standards.

This eco-tourism initiative will not only help communities earn additional income from various services but will also seek to gain their cooperation towards environmental conservation activities planned for RMNP in the future.

## Solar powered electric fencing in Lhamozingkha

Lhamozingkha *dunkhag* (sub-district) is located within the buffer area west of Phibsoo Wildlife Sanctuary (PWS) in southern Bhutan. Agriculture is the main source of income for villagers in the *dunkhag*. However, this source of income is threatened, often raided and destroyed by wildlife from the forests, the most rampant one being Elephants. With no permanent solution to combat the encroachment, communities began to harbour

resentment toward the wildlife and a strong desire to retaliate.

The residents of Singey village, located in the buffer to the east of PWS, were also experiencing similar human-wildlife conflicts back in 2009. The problem was successfully resolved in 2010 when WWF, PWS and the District forest administration, Sarpang, intervened and constructed a 4.5 km electric solar fence around Singey village to prevent wildlife invaders.

The feedback received from this pilot site was so positive that the team was encouraged to replicate the same technology and expertise in Lhamozingkha *dunkhag*. A longer stretch of fencing covering four villages, namely Sibsooni, Majhigaon, Dharagaon, and Lhamozingkha, was constructed. The 15 km solar electric fence currently benefits 300 households.

Three power houses were set up in community households. For areas where the fencing was not possible, a 30 meters watch tower was constructed overlooking the fields. Management of the fencing is being looked after by an eight member Gewog Conservation Committee elected by the community.



Watch tower



Solar electric fencing

To compensate the communities for any wildlife damage in future, a crop insurance scheme was also initiated for the community with seed money from WWF. In lieu to the fencing technology, the park together with nature clubs in schools have been regularly conducting events and programs to raise awareness on Human-wildlife conflict.

## Connecting Communities with Thodak Bridge

Conserving Wangchuck Centennial Park, the largest park in Bhutan is an utmost priority; from its tall snow peaked towers, the country's four major rivers namely Punatshangchu, Mangdechu, Chamkarchu and Kurichu originate. These perennial rivers flow in different routes across the park making travel to reach some of the far flung areas in the park extremely difficult.

Solely with the aim to improve communication and transportation across such rivers, WWF along with WCP initiated the construction of a 26 meter cantilever bridge on one such river, the Tangchhu (which is one of the main tributaries of Chamkharchhu) in the southern region of the park in Tang *Gewog* (block).

Prior to the construction of the bridge, a makeshift bridge usually made with a few strategically placed tree logs served as the only connection link across the Tangchhu. Such bridges are not only unsafe and risky for users but time and again they would be washed away by heavy tide.

After the completion of the Thodak bridge construction, community members and nomads can now easily commute across the river. This bridge also offers better opportunities for more WCP related research as the park staff will now be able to carry out improved monitoring and patrolling functions.



# National consultation finalizes the first Management plan of Phibsoo Wildlife Sanctuary

Measuring 269 Km<sup>2</sup>, Phibsoo wildlife sanctuary is the smallest among the ten protected areas in Bhutan. It is also the only protected area in Bhutan that still harbours pure stand of Sal forests with Spotted deer and Common pea fowl.

Following a consultative planning workshop on 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> February, 2011, Sarpang, a final consultation of the management plan for Phibsoo Wildlife Sanctuary was held on 13<sup>th</sup> May, 2011 in Thimphu chaired by the Director, Dept of Forests and Park Services. The valuable feedbacks received from the diverse group of representatives will be addressed and incorporated into the final Management plan. The plan will be shortly submitted to the Hon'ble Minister, Ministry of Agriculture & Forests for endorsement. This is the first ever management plan for the PWS prepared by the Department of Forests and Park Services and WWF.

## Updates: Royal Manas National Park

- The construction of Range office in Manas is completed.



- The additional 3.5 km Hathilaura trail in Manas range is also completed
- Renovation of guest house and staff quarter in Manas Range has been completed.
- Communication system has been improved after installation of advance technology in Tingphuraja (Manas range Kanamakura (Umling range) and Dharachu (between Tsirang and Sarpang dzongkhags)



New waterhole in Manas Range



Elephant shed

## Wangchuck Centennial Park

The construction of the western range office of Wangchuck Centennial Park in Sephu gewog (block), Wangduephodrang is almost 60% complete. The construction is expected to be complete by August, 2011.



## **In other news:**

### **First captive breeding of White Bellied Heron.**

The White-bellied heron is a critically endangered species as per the IUCN's category (2007). With the current global population estimated to be less than 200, Bhutan has 26 numbers; it is of great conservation significance to Bhutan to embark on saving the bird.

Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN-a national NGO working on the conservation of the species) in collaboration with Department of Livestock and Department of Forests and Park Services under Ministry of Agriculture and Forests have undertaken a captive-rearing of the bird to address the high mortality rates at its infant period due to predation and other calamities such as forest fires.

On 7<sup>th</sup> May 2011 at around 5:50 AM, a 54.9 grams chick was hatched successfully in its hatchery house in Phochu in Punakha.

This is the first captive initiative to conserve white-bellied heron in the world.

### **Water Act of Bhutan, 2010 endorsed**

After both the houses of Parliament deliberated at length on the draft Act, the Water Bill 2010 was finally endorsed on 31<sup>st</sup> May, 2011. The Act states that all water resources in the country shall be protected, conserved and/or managed in an economically efficient, socially equitable and environmentally sustainable manner.

## **Social Forestry day, 2011**

The Department of Forests and Park Services, under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, celebrated Coronation Day of the fourth King of Bhutan together with Social Forestry Day by planting trees above Changangkha Lhakhang, Thimphu on 2 June, 2011. About 15 hectares of forests above the Changangkha Lhakhang were burnt down by forest fires in March, 2011. To revive the forest, the department along with help from volunteers replanted tree saplings in three hectares of the affected area.

The day has been dedicated to the International Year of Forests.

---

For more information log on  
to [www.wwfbhutan.org](http://www.wwfbhutan.org)  
Or contact  
[ypema@wwfbhutan.org.bt](mailto:ypema@wwfbhutan.org.bt)