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Developing Ecosystem-based Solutions for Managing Biodiversity Landscapes in Bhutan

A new ray of hope for the Critically Endangered White-bellied Heron (WBH), as the Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN) commenced a Euro 4.11 million project “**Developing Ecosystem-based Solutions for Managing Biodiversity Landscapes in Bhutan**”, with effect from July 1, 2021.

White-bellied Heron (*Ardea insignis* Hume, 1878) is one of the rarest birds in the world with an estimated population of fewer than 60 individuals and inhabit the freshwater riverine ecosystems of the Himalayas. Bhutan, as one of the hotspots for the White-bellied Heron, hosts almost half the population in the river basins of Punatsangchhu and Mangdechhu. Recognizing the urgency, RSPN initiated the conservation of WBH under the Royal Command from His Majesty Fourth Druk Gyalpo, in 2003. The conservation effort towards saving the WBH is being supported by the Royal Government of Bhutan, international partners, local communities, and philanthropic members. Despite rigorous efforts, the population of WBH has been declining.

The project aims to establish approaches and tools for protecting and managing habitats for the WBH in collaboration with the hydropower projects and communities. The project also focuses on supporting alternative economic and employment opportunities, to strengthen community support for WBH conservation activities, through a community incentive-based and participatory approach to project planning and implementation.

The project is being implemented by RSPN in collaboration with the Royal Government of Bhutan and communities of *Punakha*, *Wangdue Phodrang*, *Tsirang*, *Dagana*, *Trongsa* and *Zhemgang* districts along the *Punatsangchhu* and *Mangdechhu* are the direct beneficiaries. This five-year project is funded by the **Federal Ministry for Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU), Germany** through the **International Climate Initiative (IKI)** with co-funding from **MAVA Foundation, Switzerland** and **RSPN**.

International Climate Initiative, BMU, Germany

The International Climate Initiative (IKI) is one of the most important instruments of the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU) for international financing of climate protection and biodiversity. The IKI acts in the context of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). It finances climate protection and biodiversity conservation in developing and emerging countries as well as in transition countries. The IKI has committed over 750 climate and biodiversity projects in more than 60 countries with a total funding volume of over 4.5 billion Euros (2008-2020).

MAVA Foundation, Switzerland

The MAVA Foundation is a family foundation established by Luc Hoffmann in 1994, to 'promote the protection of nature and consolidate his lifelong personal support for conservation. The organization envisions Fostering a healthy, prosperous future for people and nature and the core mission is to conserve biodiversity for the benefit of people and nature by funding, mobilizing, and strengthening partners and the conservation community. The priority of Mava is to provide a sustainable future for people and nature, focusing on freshwater and coastal ecosystems, and cultural landscapes in the Mediterranean basin, West Africa, Switzerland and global Sustainable Economy.

Royal Society for Protection of Nature

The Royal Society for Protection of Nature is a citizen-based NGO devoted to the conservation of Bhutan's unique environment established in 1987 under the Royal command of His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye Wangchuck. The Queen of Bhutan, Her Majesty The Gyaltshen Jetsun Pema Wangchuck is the Royal Patron.

RSPN works in close collaboration with the Royal Government of Bhutan, other Civil Societies and international development partners to strengthen conservation efforts through community engagement to ultimately build community stewardship in conservation and enhance climate adaptation and resilience.

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