Staying Connected to Bhutan

Spring 2013
Dear Friends of Bhutan,

Spring greetings from the Bhutan Foundation! As we were preparing this Spring 2013 newsletter, we got word that Bhutan’s historic Wangduechhoeling Palace was named the World Monuments Fund’s “Watch Site of the Week” (of March 25). Many of you specifically have supported the preservation and restoration of this Bhutanese heritage site through the Bhutan Foundation, and I know you join us in taking special pride in this news. In fact, in thinking about the updates in this newsletter, I can’t help but be reminded of the wonderful partnerships that bring all of these results to life. The progress reported here is possible because of your support, which we direct to our dedicated partners, who carry out the work that turns your donations into education, health care, preserved culture and history, and opportunity.

Wangduechhoeling Palace is one example, but there are many others. Our partnership with you is making a difference in the following ways:

- Providing scholarships to students like Sonam Penjor at the Royal Thimphu College through Bhutan’s Tarayana Foundation
- Encouraging entrepreneurship and strengthening the community by supporting youth in establishing a river-rafting company in Panbang
- Protecting the Phobjikha valley, Bhutan’s largest natural wetland and winter home to the rare black-necked cranes, through the Royal Society for the Protection of Nature
- Improving previously inadequate living conditions for Buddhist nuns and nunneries across Bhutan through the Bhutan Nuns’ Foundation

And the list of positive impacts because of our partnership goes on, as you will read.

The Bhutan Foundation exists to connect your support to the partner organizations who carry out the work. As you read the updates in these pages, we hope that you will be reminded that your support and the work of our partners matter. Thank you for your essential role in this partnership.

Sincerely,

Dr. Bruce W. Bunting
President
Too often, wildlife conservation is a prescription doled out by conservationists sitting in their offices far away from where conservation actually happens. Local residents are often excluded from conservation decision-making. But in October 2012, a team from the Nature Recreation and Ecotourism Division and Jigme Dorji National Park (JDNP) of the Department of Forest and Park Services visited the Jomolhari region to enlist the support and engagement of local residents in a community-led Jomolhari Snow Leopard Program.

The Jomolhari region of JDNP is a hotbed of snow leopard activity as confirmed through several snow leopard sightings, camera trap pictures, and DNA analyses. During consultations with local residents, it was evident that livestock disease, such as Coenurosis or gid disease, killed more yaks than did snow leopards and other predators. Dogs and other canids are definitive hosts for the tapeworm that causes this disease. Thus, vaccinating dogs for tapeworm infection and controlling dog populations are seen as effective strategies of handling this problem.

It also was apparent that the popular Jomolhari trek hardly brings any benefits to local communities. The Jomolhari Snow Leopard Conservation Program will explore innovative modification of tourism in the area through establishing cabin camps and homestays to enable local residents to benefit from tourism. This will be done in consultation with the Tourism Council of Bhutan. Additional activities include development of high-value products for sale. The Bhutan Foundation and the Snow Leopard Conservancy are supporting this initiative in collaboration with several partners in Bhutan.

Watch some amazing footage of snow leopards in Bhutan: www.bhutanfound.org/snowleopard
A Local Business Is Born: River Guides of Panbang

Panbang is a community in Zhemgang located right next to Royal Manas National Park (RMNP). As in other rural communities, the youth from this area aspire to migrate to urban centers in search of employment. If they are gainfully employed near their homes, they tend to live within their communities. This helps overcrowding in urban areas while making rural villages more productive. With a national park right next to Panbang and two rivers running by it, nature guiding and rafting services seem most appropriate as income-generation activities for the community. The Bhutan Foundation has initiated the formation of the River Guides of Panbang, a business venture that will be run by a group of young people from Panbang. Rafts have already been procured and given to the group. The initiative will continue in collaboration with the Tourism Council of Bhutan, Tarayana Foundation, RMNP, and the Rural Development Training Institute. The Bhutan Foundation will seek support from rafting companies in the United States for training in rescue and safety and in business and marketing.

UWICE Expands Relations with International Partners

In March 2013, representatives from the Ugyen Wangchuck Institute for Conservation and Environment (UWICE), the Bhutan Foundation’s partner in environmental conservation, visited Boston, New York, and Washington, DC. During their visit, they expanded professional relations with the School for Field Studies (SFS), the Smithsonian Institution, and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS).

In Boston, discussions on expanding the existing SFS program to a full-semester program were held. SFS currently runs a summer program in Bhutan in partnership with UWICE. The program focuses its teaching and research agenda on several priority areas, including community forestry, human–wildlife conflict, and watershed assessment, and introduces American college students to the Bhutanese culture, society, and environment. The Bhutan Foundation, in collaboration with SFS, hosted a reception in Boston for the scientists from UWICE.

In New York, WCS and UWICE agreed to conduct a Smart Patrol for Conservation training in Bhutan later this year. Currently, WCS is supporting UWICE on its takin study.

In Washington, DC, the UWICE delegation met with senior officials of the Smithsonian Institution to discuss collaborative programs, including long-term forest monitoring, training in conservation biology, and natural history curation. The group also visited the National Zoo and met with officials involved in assisting the UWICE takin study with veterinary and animal health services. Dr. Bruce W. Bunting, the Bhutan Foundation’s President, and Ms. Jessie A. Brinkley hosted a reception for UWICE and our partners to celebrate this mission to conserve Bhutan’s rich environment.
Students of Wangduechhoeling Lower Secondary School participated in an essay competition to tell stories of the history of Wangduechhoeling Palace. The Bhutan Foundation, in collaboration with the Ministry of Home and Culture, conducted Watch Day at the Wangduechhoeling Palace on October 13, 2012, in celebration of the one-year anniversary of His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck and Her Majesty Gyaltsuen Jetsun Pema Wangchuck. This initiative was jointly supported by the World Monuments Fund to help engage youth in a program to promote and bring attention to the preservation and restoration needs of the Wangduechhoeling Palace, the birthplace of Bhutan’s monarchy.

The students gathered historical stories of the palace from the local community and members of their own families who served in the palace during the times of the first, second, and third kings of Bhutan. The students were able to engage the community and spread awareness about the historical significance of the palace and simultaneously contribute to recording oral history of the palace. On Watch Day, students who were selected read their stories to the rest of the school at assembly and were presented with prizes and a special tour of the palace. Students also offered butter lamps and prayers in the Utse.

The Wangduechhoeling Palace is currently listed under the 2012 World Monuments Fund’s 2012 Watch and was Watch Site of the Week from March 25 - March 29, 2013. Read more about our project on at www.bhutanfound.org/palace or read our journal about the palace on www.wmfn.org/project/wangduechhoeling-palace.
Bhutan Youth Development Fund Helps Youth Succeed

Pema Tshering, 29, from Mongar was born with cerebral palsy and congenital deformities in his spinal column. He is unable to use his arms and therefore uses his feet to carry out his daily routines. During one of her visits to Mongar, Her Majesty the Queen Mother Ashi Tshering Pem Wangchuck, Co-Chair of the Bhutan Foundation and President of the Bhutan Youth Development Fund, met Pema Tshering and offered to train him at the Institute for Zorig Chusum (the 13 traditional Bhutanese arts and crafts) in Thimphu. Pema Tshering began his training at the Institute in 2005 and learned the traditional art of wood carving with his feet. With support from the Bhutan Foundation and the Bhutan Youth Development Fund, Pema Tshering has now set up a small workshop at Simply Bhutan, a traditional museum at Nazhoen Pelri complex in Thimphu. He is now able to support himself through the sales of his woodwork.

Scholarship Program Makes Higher Education a Reality

Sonam Penjor from Baychu village in Gasa is in his final year at the Royal Thimphu College (RTC), where he is pursuing a bachelor’s degree in English and environmental science. He’s able to continue his higher education because of the Tarayana Foundation’s Scholarship Program, which provides financial support to students from disadvantaged backgrounds and to students from rural areas in Bhutan. “I was lucky,” said Sonam, “I got this scholarship, and now I can complete my education. After completion, I can proudly say that I have a degree. This would not have been possible without the support of the Scholarship Program.” The Bhutan Foundation is proud to support the Scholarship Program.

The Bhutan Foundation currently has sixteen local partners in Bhutan implementing the projects on the ground. Learn more about our partners: www.bhutanfound.org/partners
Bhutanese youth have an abundance of creative and compassionate energy, and the Bhutan Center for Media and Democracy (BCMD), one of the Bhutan Foundation's active partners, wants to harness that so the youth can realize their potentials as active and responsible citizens in Bhutan's democracy. Through their past events and workshops, BCMD has connected with many young people who have made films, taken photographs, and produced school newspapers in order to inspire dialogue and change on the challenges confronting Bhutanese society. However, after conducting a series of needs assessments and focus groups, BCMD realized that the majority of youth in Thimphu lack access to basic technology, and, without these tools, young people cannot follow up and sustain their creative interests.

Therefore, BCMD has now set up a state-of-the-art digital media lab that will give young people access to powerful technology tools as well as a dynamic space designed to inspire learning, collaboration, and creativity. The idea for the lab is borne from evidence-based principles of connected learning, which is realized when a young person is able to pursue a personal interest or passion with the support of friends and caring adults and is in turn able to link this learning to academic achievement, career success, or civic engagement.

Living Conditions and Education of Nuns Improving, but Still in Need

The Bhutan Nuns’ Foundation (BNF) seeks to improve the quality of life and education of all Buddhist nuns in Bhutan and, so far, has actively supported seven nunneries throughout the country. BNF is currently providing some support for twelve young nuns, ages 15 to 30, at Chotpo Goenpa in Pema Gatshel, in the eastern region of Bhutan. BNF improved the quality of life for these nuns drastically by providing clean and sanitary bathrooms, basic teaching and learning materials, and a teacher who can help them learn important skills for life in the nunnery. However, these young nuns are desperately in need of living quarters at Chotpo Goenpa, for which BNF is seeking additional support. To learn more about what BNF is doing in Bhutan, please visit www.bhutannuns.org.
Bhutan’s First Conservation Nonprofit Organization Celebrates 25 Years

Last October, the Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN) celebrated 25 years of service in environmental conservation in Bhutan. Founded in 1987 by the leading environmentalist in Bhutan, Dasho Paljor J. Dorji, RSPN has grown and is recognized for its effectiveness. RSPN started with creating awareness projects for youth in environmental conservation and conducting an annual count of black-necked cranes, a very rare bird that makes its winter home in Bhutan. Today, RSPN focuses on endangered species, education and advocacy, conservation and sustainable livelihoods, and research.

For example, RSPN has expanded its education and awareness efforts to all the schools throughout Bhutan, including monastic institutions, through creating environmental studies curricula in partnership with the Ministry of Education. With support from the Bhutan Foundation, RSPN has also expanded their black-necked crane conservation efforts in the Phobjika valley, the largest wetland in Bhutan housing the largest number of black-necked cranes (368 in 2012) in Bhutan. RSPN hopes to enhance wetland management to maintain its coverage and quality through an in-depth study of its ecological and geological composition, assessing the impact of human activities on the wetland. In addition, RSPN wants to assess the relationship between climate change and the wetland over time. RSPN also expanded its conservation efforts to include the white-bellied heron, a critically endangered species.

The Bhutan Foundation supports RSPN’s work in environmental conservation and congratulates them on their accomplishments.

The white-bellied heron along the riverbanks of Punatsangchu River in Punakha. There are only 27 left in Bhutan and between 50-200 in the world. RSPN works to conserve this critically endangered species.
Harvard Humanitarian Initiative and Bhutanese Specialists Conduct EMS Training

In September 2012, all the General Duties Medical Officers (GDMOs) in Bhutan were trained in the National Emergency Medicine and Trauma Care Modules. This training helped improve clinical effectiveness of doctors in areas of critical emergency medicine and trauma care, thereby reducing referrals. The modules also provided uniform emergency management and trauma care protocols for every hospital in Bhutan. The weeklong training was conducted by a core team of Bhutanese specialists from the Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital in Thimphu along with two specialists from the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative in Boston. The training was supported through the Bhutan Foundation’s program to improve emergency medical services (EMS) in collaboration with the Ministry of Health.

In November 2012, instructors from Phelps Memorial Hospital trained Bhutanese medical professionals in advanced cardiac life support (ACLS) and pediatric advanced life support (PALS). One of the instructors, Dr. Norman Herman shared his experience: “I have taught thousands of healthcare professionals in advanced life support courses over the past 20 years. I can say hands down without reservations that I have never had a group with more interest and questions as I had with the doctors and nurses we trained in Thimphu in November 2012. They were like sponges. They ask questions and gave clinical anecdotes at most breaks. They brought up contrasts between the incidence of cardiovascular disease in Bhutan versus the USA and how this would affect the implementation of the knowledge they obtained on their patients. This spawned some of the most interesting and lively discussions I have ever had teaching ACLS and PALS. I thoroughly enjoyed my interactions and hope in some small way I have helped each and every one of these fine professionals in their future medical practice.”
Progress is being made to restore Trashigang Dzong, an important Bhutanese heritage site, which suffered considerable structural damage from the earthquake that struck the eastern districts of Bhutan in September 2009. The Department of Culture of the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs, through its Division for Conservation of Heritage Sites, compiled a detailed renovation plan to restore Trashigang Dzong. The Bhutan Foundation, with the Prince Claus Fund and the World Monuments Fund, is supporting the initial restoration work. However, concerns were raised regarding the structural stability of the Dzong, and a preliminary geological study indicated the possibility of instability of the surrounding steep slopes affecting the integrity of the Dzong.

To investigate this concern and to recommend possible mitigation measures to enhance the stability of Trashigang Dzong, a geological and geotechnical assessment was carried out in January 2013. The assessment included a hands-on capacity-building module to train staff of the Division for Conservation of Heritage Sites and the Department of Geology and Mines in geological and geotechnical investigations of slopes and their relation to structural stability of heritage sites. The findings and recommendations of the assessment will be used to finalize the master plan for the renovation efforts of Trashigang Dzong and will contribute to safeguarding an important historic landmark, which is still actively performing its dual function as a center of religious and administrative life.

The study also proposes a broader consideration of natural and anthropogenic hazards that could affect heritage sites. A proper identification of natural risks such as floods, earthquakes, mass movements, and forest fires are recommended to be incorporated in a master plan for safeguarding and maintaining historic buildings in the very dynamic environment of the Bhutanese Himalayas.

The Bhutan Foundation would like to congratulate Dr. Tashi Tenzin, Neurosurgeon and Head of the Department of Emergency Medical Services at the Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital, for receiving the Drakpoi Norbu Yoedsel Medal (Light Treasure of the Armed Forces) on February 21, 2013 from His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck for his meritorious and distinguished services to the Tsa-Wa-Sum (the King, the Country and the People). Dr. Tashi has played a critical role in establishing the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Program in Bhutan and continues to work with the Bhutan Foundation and the Ministry of Health to improve EMS throughout the country.
Bhutan Celebrates International Day of People with Disability

On December 3, 2012, the Bhutan Foundation, in collaboration with Ability Bhutan Society, Draktsho Vocational Training Center for Special Children and Youth, the Ministry of Education’s Special Education Division, and Disabled Persons’ Association of Bhutan organized a Special Olympics Meet to commemorate the International Day of People with Disability in Bhutan.

Her Majesty the Queen Gyaltsuen Jetsun Pema Wangchuck is the Royal Patron for Ability Bhutan Society and graced the event as the Guest of Honor.

Students of Draktsho, Changangkha Middle Secondary School, and Tendruk Higher Secondary School as well as their parents participated in the event. This was the first time that all stakeholders jointly celebrated and organized the International Day of People with Disability in Bhutan.

The Bhutan Foundation supports and collaborates with the Ministry of Education’s Special Education Division in helping the country pursue inclusive education, especially in creating awareness, gaining access to international resources, and building the capacity of teachers, special education coordinators, and the various stakeholders involved.

Bhutan’s Second National Elections To Take Place in 2013

Bhutan’s second national elections are to take place this spring and summer. On April 23, the citizens of Bhutan will vote for the seats in the National Council (the upper house), which consists of 20 members elected by the electorates of the 20 Dzongkhags and five members nominated by His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck. For the National Assembly (the lower house) elections, for the first time, a primary round will take place in which five different parties will run. This will be followed by the final elections, in which the two leading parties will run for the 47 seats in government.

The country anxiously awaits the upcoming elections as Bhutan continues to grow as a democracy. In an interview with Kuensel, Bhutan’s first newspaper, Dasho Kunzang Wangdi, the Chief Election Commissioner, said, “Everything in the 2013 parliamentary elections will be the same from the first, except that we will have the primary round, common forums, use of social media, higher rate of campaign financing, and more parties and candidates. All are a little better, smarter, and wiser, and the procedures and processes have been further improved.”
The Bhutan Foundation serves the people of Bhutan in living and sharing the principle of Gross National Happiness. We cherish the values of the Bhutanese intention: measuring “happiness” as the highest attribute of all decision-making. We contribute to strategies of conservation of the environment, equitable and sustainable development, good governance, and preservation of culture in Bhutan. The Bhutan Foundation serves as the only American not-for-profit organization that is wholly focused on the benefit of the country and people of Bhutan, bridging understanding between our two countries and beyond.

For more information on our programs and activities, please visit www.bhutanfound.org

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VAST (Voluntary Artists’ Studio of Thimphu)
WWF (World Wildlife Fund), Bhutan