

bile. The park ranger stated that, at first, no one accepted responsibility for the offence, and he started questioning the entire Thridungbi community and threatened to drag them into the court. However, Mr. Thinley confessed to setting the trap and also divulged the names of the other two.

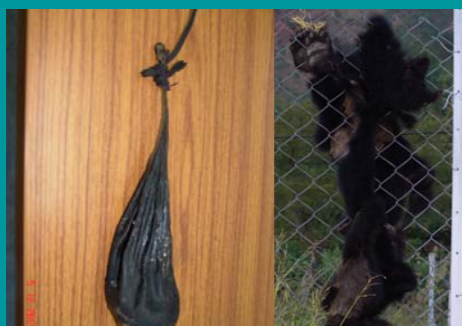
This resulted in mudslinging among the offenders. Mimi Tshewang was reported as saying to the Range office that he is too old to carry out such a scheme and that it was the other two who set the trap. However, he also confessed to killing numerous deers and wild boars in previous years, but not bears, tigers and leopards. In contrast, Mr. Thinley said that he is too young to know all about this, and that it was Mimi Tshewang and Samtenla who lured him to participate in the illegal act.

Also, Rinzin claimed he is innocent and that he wasn't involved in the poaching, and that it was a sheer coincidence that he saw the dead bear and brought home the skin and bile. Meanwhile, the Park Range office is forwarding the case to the court very soon.

According to Park Range Office, bile can be sold for Nu. 5,000 a piece in the market; however, if sold illegally, the price can go over a Nu. 5,000 a *tola* (11.9 grams) and a piece can weigh from two to three *tolas*. Poachers have been reported to strike deals with the buyers as soon as traps have been set. This shows how strong and effective the traps are- a sure death for the trapped animals. Thus, it is a challenge to make these poachers custodians of wild animals. There is also a belief that the bile is of the best quality during winter; thus, poaching mainly takes place during the winter. Biles are being used as medicines by communities even if they are not for sale. As good as the price of bile, the Department of Forest also levies heavy fines. A fine for a bear skin alone can go over Nu.3, 000; bile over Nu.5,000; for killing above Nu.10,000; and, the prison terms can go up to five years, depending upon the seriousness of the offense.

Mimi Tshewang was reported as having bought a power teller (Kubota) at a subsidized rate from the BDFC; but, he didn't have the money to pay the installments and it forced him to resort to the illegal activity. The park conducts ICDP programs to generate income for the communities within the park. If poverty is one of the leading causes that is making people kill animals, then maybe the program should be intensified in combination with awareness campaigns. Also, an important question that needs to be asked is how can the government bring poachers into the mainstream of conservation and make them custodians of the forest?

Bears have been reported frequenting villages and destroying crops, sometimes killing calves and colts; people even get mauled by them at times. Thus, is it retaliation, or just greed, that causes people to poach? Such incidences also lead to a strained relationship between the park staff and the communities. The former, as custodians of the forest, have to enforce laws and levy appropriate fines and penalties; however, this is not appreciated by the latter and leads to



The bile and the remains of the bear

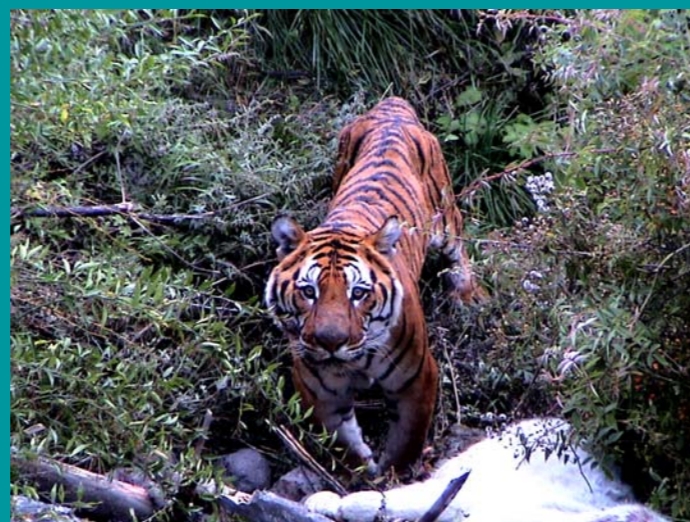
resentment and enmity between the two which can hamper conservation works within parks. Thus, having a central agency to enforce laws in the field can help staff working in the field. How practical and effective it is, is anyone's guess. Meanwhile, what fate awaits Mimi Tshewang and the two others? The jury is still out.

### Royal Bengal Tiger burning bright at 2600 meters

In a village called Tshapey (2670 m) in Ha, people had something to talk about other than the approaching winter snow. Almost everyone from the locality and the nearby villages were present to catch a glimpse of the tiger (Royal Bengal) that had been seen around the locality over the past few days. On the 31st of October, some of the villagers found a carcass of a cow in the pine forest nearby, which they then took back to the village. Some of the villagers had sighted the tiger in the forest but left it alone thinking that it would go away eventually. But after a few days, it killed a horse and afterwards, had been seen near a house. "We could not dare to come out of the house for the last two days," said Aum Damcho Dem. Asked whether there had been any previous records of tiger sightings in the area, she said that they had never seen one, though there were stories about sightings.

The 80 year old Dem thinks that their local diety has paid them a visit in the guise of a tiger. She said that although it had killed a few animals, it doesn't matter because this, she thinks, is a sign of future prosperity for the village.

The two meter long tiger was sedated and brought to Thimphu. On closer inspection, claws of all the four limbs were found missing. "This could be the main reason the animal has come for an easy kill in the village," said Sangay, tiger coordinator of the Nature Conservation Division. Since the animal is old it will be kept in an emergency rehab center where it will be fed and taken care of. "It would not be able to survive in the wild with all its drawbacks," added Sangay. Unfortunately, the tiger died a week later due to extreme dehydration and old age. The body of the tiger is being kept in the taxidermy unit in Thimphu for educational purposes.



# PANDA Quarterly

## News Briefs

### Branding Exercise:

WWF Bhutan finalized a collaboration with B-mobile. The WWF logo, pictures and messages will be featured on the mobile recharge vouchers. The vouchers are being printed and distribution will begin in January, 2006. For each collection of ten vouchers, people will visit the WWF office in order to collect gift vouchers and also to learn about WWF and its activities. This is an exercise for branding and is one sure way of getting the local people of Bhutan to understand and learn of WWF activities, not just in Bhutan but worldwide.

### HR Manual :

The consultancy for preparation of the Human Resource manual was fielded. A draft has been prepared for consultation and discussion with WWF US, HR Division during the upcoming HR fundamentals training in Delhi in early December. A core team from the office led the process for its preparation.

### WWF Communication strategy :

Lee Poston, Senior Communications Manager, WWF US, was in the office from 22 to 25 November to assist with the finalizing of the Communications Strategy. The draft was prepared based on the brainstorming of staff held in September during the conservation strategy review.

### Bhutan National Grazing Policy and Strategy Workshop :

Chadho Tenzin participated in the National Grazing Policies Workshop held in Bumthang from 7 to 11 November. This workshop was organized jointly by Department of Livestock, ICIMOD and the EU Wang Watershed Project. The purpose of the workshop was to draw from experiences elsewhere and to learn from each other. The four RNR research centres and TNP park staff also attended the workshop.

### Ground Breaking ceremony:

According to the Bhutanese Lunar calendar, 2006-7 are 'black years' during which people do not start any new ventures. Keeping this in mind, the ground breaking ceremony of WWF's office building was conducted on the 8<sup>th</sup> of December. The royal government of Bhutan has leased a plot of land to WWF on which to build our own office building. This privilege is not given to all the International offices. The plans and drawings for the building are yet to be carried out and, if everything works out well, the construction will be started upon completion of the plans.



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## Yet Another Black Bear and why?

Mimi Tshewang Rinzin is over 80 years old, but is he really old? Looks like he is and he isn't. He was recently apprehended in a poaching case along with his son and one of his nephews by the Park Range Office, Lingmethang. The case is due to go to the Mongar District Court soon.

Mimi Tshewang lives in Nantala village, under Thridungbi Gewog which falls as a buffer within the Thrumshingla National Park (TNP). His son, Samtenla lives with him. In early October 2005, the father and son had a plan to set a bear trap at Nanaphu, located about a two hours' steep walk from the road point near the Park Information Centre. However, the two didn't feel comfortable doing it themselves and wanted more help; thus, they sought the help of their nephew, Mr. Thinley Wangdi, a 21 year old who lives near the village.

The father and son also were reported owing the latter around Nu.6,000 for the labour he contributed for paddy transplantation. However, Mimi Tshewang didn't have the money, but just had the idea to make money by selling the bear skin and bile. In this way, he would not only get to repay what he owed, but also to keep some for himself.

The threesome went to set the trap, and Thinley reported that it took them almost four hours to set it. It meant having to fell down about 35 small standing trees nearby. According to Thinley, Mimi Tshewang was reported to have provided the group with the instructions. The trap was set on a somewhat leveled area upon a semi-ridge. A piece of meat was placed under the trap to attract carnivorous animals. According to the Park Ranger, the area was once settled by people and, afterwards, left fallow for about 50-60 years. The ruins of the houses could still be seen, although now it is covered with forest. The three decided to keep it secret and, therefore, did it clandestinely.

Their trap worked and a Himalayan Black Bear was reported trapped inside and killed. However, Mimi Tshewang and the group didn't get to reap the reward of their efforts. One of their neighbours, Mr. Rinzin Wangchuk, was reported to have gone to collect creepers and canes for fencing from the forest and he, coincidentally, saw the dead bear. He brought home the bear skin and bile and never shared it with anyone else.

Mean time, the park staff were on a regular patrol and saw a bear skin being dried near Karma's house (it wasn't a whole skin, some parts were missing). The incident was reported to the range office and an inquiry was conducted immediately. The range office also confiscated the skin and



The trap



Winged Winter Guests Arrive in Bhutan

Our usual winter guests, the Black-necked Cranes from the highlands of Tibet, arrived at their winter roosting grounds of Phobjika and Bomdeling on the 24th of October and the 6th of November respectively. Considered a harbinger of good luck, the birds have been regular visitors for as long as people can remember. Lots of local songs and folklores surround these birds. The number of birds visiting has been fairly stable and this year, to date, 320 birds have been recorded, with still more to come. But the cranes are facing the challenge of increased developmental activities in these roosting areas. In addition, the monsoon flooding of the Bomdeling area has decreased the usual number and size of the roosting areas.

Alternative Technology

The bulk electric cooker installed in the Royal Body Guard in 2005 is under operation. According to Major Tshewang Tandin, engineer, the cooker is saving three truck loads (appr. 24 m<sup>3</sup> of wood) of firewood per month. Further, the cooker is also saving 58% of the institution's revenue that was previously spent on the purchase of firewood. The Royal Bodyguard is already installing two more sets of such cookers in their head office, Thimphu, at their own cost.



Mingmala at the site during his visit recent to Bhutan

In Search of the Snow Leopard

Dec 1 (National day for Bhutan) 2005: this day saw a new horizon for the Snow Leopard of Bhutan in the UK.

Following a trip to Jumolhari base camp (known to be the home of the elusive Snow Leopard), Telegraph Magazine UK's reporter Peter Foster accompanied by Ami Vitale, photojournalist, Robert McNeil from WWF UK and Tashi Tshering (WWF Bhutan), covered a story on the conservation issues of the Snow Leopard in Bhutan.

Organized by WWF, the trip was an attempt to make people of the UK and other countries aware of this beautiful animal and the bleak future it faces. The 9 day trek took the team



Near Sophu lake where we found the footprint of the leopard on the snow

to one of the remotest places in Bhutan and the world at large. The threat of almost catching altitude sickness by one of the team members on the third day wasn't a big enough deterrent to stop the trek. Though the trip wasn't fruitful in the sense of getting to see the animal upfront, it left enough evidence to indicate its presence. We encountered two very fresh killings of Blue Sheep (one on the morning of the 8th day near our camp, at 4040 m above sea level) by the leopard. Foot prints on the snow and scats were found. Upon interviewing people of the locality, we gathered that they had seen the leopard on many occasions. The leopards appeared to have been there primarily during the yak calving season in order to prey on the young calves. The natural prey of the snow leopard is the Blue Sheep which are there in abundance. The local people expressed their views on the conservation of the animal. They were mainly displeased because of their cattle being lost to the leopard. But they were happy to know about the compensation scheme started by the government. Though the scheme seemed complicated to them, they were assured that if they reported their losses, they would be compensated accordingly. And, the King's decree a few years back has helped a lot in preventing retaliatory killings.

Jigme Dorji National Park ranger, Tenzin Phuntsho, holds one of the two freshly killed blue sheep



Elephant Conservation

Human-elephant conflict and resultant mortalities is the greatest threat facing the Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*) population which is already endangered due to poaching for ivory and the loss, fragmentation and alteration of habitat. Approximately 20 percent of the global human population resides near or in the present range of the Asian elephant (Anon 2000). The extensive alteration of elephant habitat by human population is pushing the species into small pockets of the land connected only by human settlements, and these pockets are inadequate to meet the food, water and security needs of elephant. As elephants have very distinct movement patterns by which they seasonally utilize optimum habitats, it is most likely that they come into contact with settlements (Sukumar, 1986).

In Bhutan, there is a dearth of information on virtually any aspect of elephants in the country. This is because no surveys have been ever conducted on elephants. While there are basic ideas of the possible areas where the species may be sighted or the various habitats it could inhabit, little is known about its distribution, abundance or its dispersal patterns. Each year the government receives a number of complaints from villagers concerning property and crop damage caused by elephants but is unable to provide any form of assistance to the farmers due to lack of proper means of verification and lack of funds. The existing information is inadequate for planners and conservationists to

use in planing innovative approaches to reducing the human-elephant conflict.

As such, the Nature Conservation Division, Department of Forest has submitted a proposal to the WWF Bhutan Program Office, which would provide for assistance in the collection of data on the status and distribution of the elephants as well as providing assistance in mitigating elephant-human conflicts in Bhutan. Meantime, the Nature Conservation Division has initiated plans to carry out a field survey in all the potential elephant areas with support from the WWF Bhutan Program Office. To implement this, a three-day training workshop was conducted at Samtse on field survey methodology with the help of Dr. Arun, Sub Regional Support Officer, CITIES/MIKE South Asia for all concerned field staff. Now, in order to start the actual field survey, it was important to provide hands-on training on field equipment, particularly on the GPS, for the field staff as the GPS is the main equipment that will be used throughout the survey. Therefore, a two-day training workshop was conducted at Gelephu from 27th to 28th of October, 2005 with the help of Mr. Sherub, ornithologist, Nature Conservation Division.

White-bellied Heron

The White-bellied Heron, *Ardea insignis*, one of the endangered bird species in the world, (*Threatened Birds of Asia 2001*) has been recorded in only a few countries: Nepal, India, Bangladesh, North Myanmar and Bhutan. In Bhutan, a two-year study (April 2003- April 2005) on the White-bellied Heron, financially supported by the Fellburn Foundation and initiated by RSPN, has revealed useful information regarding their habitat, distribution, etc. However, the information gathered during the study is limited due to localized study sites, thereby restricting the knowledge on the actual ecological significance of the White-bellied Heron in Bhutan. In order to further this knowledge, RSPN recognized the need for countrywide detailed research about the ecology of the species and its ecological importance. There has been little research done to assess White-bellied Heron abundance, and, essentially, none aimed at describing any relationship between abundance and either habitat quality or human disturbance level. The real potential of this species as a tool for environmental monitoring still remains largely unexplored.

The second phase of the project (2005-2007) was initiated in March 2005 with financial assistance from WWF Bhutan Program and the Fellburn Foundation, USA via the International Crane Foundation. The project will attempt to study the sustainability of the population and the distribution and habitat status of the White-bellied heron in Bhutan in relationship to present anthropogenic challenges. As a result, this information is expected to be the fundamental advocacy tool for raising awareness on the importance of ecosystem management among communities. In addition, the knowledge gained during the research is expected to strengthen the nation-wide conservation efforts.

Under the project field surveys in the western and central part of Bhutan were carried out. Activities included the Heron population and distribution survey, quality habitat status in sub-tropical and warm temperate forest and a socio economic survey. Field surveys were undertaken between March 2005- November 2005 in Samtse, Phuentsholing, Wangdue, Punakha, Dagana, Tsirang, Trongsa, Zhemgang and Gelephu.

The highlights of this year's survey comprised the spotting of two new chicks in Zawa (Wandue Dzongkhag), and the discovery of a new nesting site and discovery of yet more herons in Berti (Zhemgang Dzongkhag). The areas of Phochu, Mochu and Punatsangchu were also visited regularly in autumn to study the bird and human activities along the river.

Socio-economic surveys were conducted in Punakha, Wagdue-phodrang, Samtse, Chhukha (Phuntsholing) and Gelephu (Sarpang,). The villagers were also made aware of the endangered status of the White-bellied Heron and the importance of protecting the bird.

The White-bellied Heron annual count will be conducted in February 2006 before the nesting period.

Retreat 2005

The Royal Manas National Park, land of tropical animals and the bird of Bhutan, was a warm relief from the approaching winter for the staff who attended the 2005 WWF staff retreat.

The 5 day retreat was a learning trip for the staff who visited some of WWF's project sites. Visiting the Umling warden post, demonstrated the ways park rangers operate there. This is the post looking after the northwestern portion of the park. The rangers explained the problems faced by them including the poaching problems posed by the people from across the border.

The area is also known for the globally threatened Rufous-necked Hornbill. The search for the hornbill took us to Tamala, a small pass heading towards Trongsa. The birds are found in the cool evergreen broad-leaved forest of the area foraging for wild fruit. The staff sighted at least 6 hornbills in the area. Being early in the day, they seemed to like basking in the sun on the tree tops. Due to the lack of settlements in the area, the birds are not very shy and don't fly off easily. The other birds sighted were the Indian Roller and Black Stork.



Weapons confiscated from the poachers



Bird watching



Cooling our heels on the way back from Umling



Part of the park seen from the Umling warden post