



himalayan *highlights*

channeling news
from high altitude
Himalayan wetlands

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Reader,

The year 2010 has experienced a drone of activity, new initiatives, an exciting campaign, interesting partners and successful conservation stories. There have also been natural disasters and the re-construction of life after. Taking everything in its stride, WWF's conservation work through its 'Saving Wetlands Sky-High!' (SWSH) Initiative, has continued undeterred in Pakistan, India, China, Nepal and Bhutan.

We have seen Green Hiker hiking to greater heights, while Bhutan inches closer to the Ramsar map, and the study of Tourism Impacts in Spiti provides some interesting learning. While good things have occurred like the notification of the National Wetland Rules 2010 in India after a long wait, there have been unfortunate moments too, like the deadly earthquake in Yushu and the flash floods in Ladakh, leading to the loss of life and livelihood and massive destruction. In times like these, the WWF family has drawn together to pull life back on track in these regions, providing immediate relief, rehabilitation and financial support. How these events have impacted the high altitude wetland sites and biodiversity is still to be ascertained and will probably influence future conservation interventions.

As SWSH steps into a new year, this issue of 'Himalayan Highlights' provides an insight into the year gone by. A year of conservation and camaraderie.

The Editorial Team

Below: Emergency medication flown in for flood-affected victims in Ladakh © Pankaj Chandan/WWF-India

INSIDE

Feature Story

The 'Green Hiker' attitude slowly picks up at Manimahesh

Making a Difference

Solid Waste Management at Tsomoriri

Green Hiker reaches Dodital

Bhutan inching towards the Ramsar Map

Involving communities in conservation

Strengthening through Science

Studying Tourism Impacts in Spiti

Mapping the way for Samiti Lake

Spreading the message

Green Hiker hiking to great heights

Journey of Green Hiker to West Sikkim

Making new friends!

Conservation in Crisis!

The Cranes survive the Yushu Earthquake

Trouble at high altitude

Know your Wetland

Utter Lake, Pakistan

Media

Securing through policy

Rules for the Wetlands

Convention on Biological Diversity, CoP 10



THE 'GREEN HIKER' ATTITUDE SLOWLY PICKS UP AT MANIMAHESH

The annual Hindu pilgrimage to the high altitude Manimahesh Lake, in the Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh (HP) saw a change this year.

Mythologically, believed to be the abode of Lord Shiva, this sacred lake is visited by religious tourists every year from April to September. These tourists embark on a 14 km *yatra* (pilgrimage) from Harsar village to the lake nestled at an altitude of 4,088 masl, to eventually bathe in its holy waters.

Every year, Manimahesh receives an average of 300,000 visitors. In 2009, the number went up to 700,000 during the peak season. Pilgrims would come, trek to the lake, bathe and make their way down after their tryst with god. What they would leave behind was plastic litter, left over food, wrappers, fruits, offerings, sheep and goat carcasses, clothes, and tons of human excreta.

This could be attributed to the absence of a planned waste disposal system and toilets, as well as, the lack of awareness. Numerous tea stalls and tents along the path and near the lake also made the situation worse. In 2010, an estimate of 50 *langars* (open kitchens) and 400 *dhabas* (small food stalls lined along the path) and

private tents were erected from Harsar to the lake. Other disturbing factors were thousands of vehicles at Harsar, diesel generators, blaring loudspeakers and the illegal extraction of medicinal plants.

Covering an area of 378.87 sq. km, at an altitude of 2,250-6,044 m asl, also lies the Kugti Wildlife Sanctuary in the same region. The sanctuary is the last home of the Himalayan Tahr in Himachal Pradesh and is also a repository of rare medicinal plants like the *Gentiana kuroo* and *Jurinea macrocephala*. These herbs are believed to be locally threatened due to over-extraction. A few other species found here are the Himalayan Black Bear, Brown Bear, Ibex, White-eyed Buzzard Eagle and Grey-headed Bunting. An alternative route to Manimahesh cuts through the wildlife sanctuary and the telling human footprint is visible here too.

It was in 2008 that WWF-India drew the attention of the local administration, to these environmental threats for the first time. Environmental impacts were documented and presented to the Secretary, State Tourism Department and Additional Secretary, Forest Department, which helped secure their support in launching a management initiative.

What they would leave behind was plastic litter, left over food, wrappers, fruits, offerings, sheep and goat carcasses, clothes, and tons of human excreta

Below left: Carelessly disposed off garbage in 2009 © Dr. Sanjeev Sharma/WWF-India; Below right: Designated garbage disposal pits were installed at the yatra in 2010 © Ragini Letitia Singh/WWF-India



An initiative to raise awareness amongst pilgrims, tea stall owners, priests and taxi operators was kicked off through bilingual (English and Hindi) posters, pamphlets and four-day environmental awareness camps, from Bharmour (13 km before Harsar) to the lake, during the *yatra*. The focus was to highlight the ecological importance of this lake and its catchment area, while encouraging pilgrims to respect nature in her pristine form.

This received great cooperation from *langar* organisers. Moreover, with the help of the local youth, posters depicting the Dos and Don'ts for tourists were put up from Bharmour to Manimahesh, covering a distance of 28 km. Meetings with local communities, the local administration and the Mountaineering Institute were also held to secure support. An appeal went out to maintain hygiene and dispose all non biodegradable waste in pits dug by the HP Public Works Department. WWF also installed banners at prominent spots throughout the trekking route, as well as, in the vicinity of the lake, asking pilgrims not to leave their clothes behind or to throw rubbish into the lake. This was regularly monitored by WWF-India volunteers.

In 2010, the situation was an improvement from the previous year. Combined conscious efforts by WWF-India, Sulabh International (who erected and maintained 100 temporary toilets and kept the lake area clean), the Mountain Cleaners (www.mountaincleaners.org) and local bodies proved fruitful. At every *langar*, there were designated garbage dumping pits, with signs and posters, encouraging people to use them. The installation of toilets made a big difference, solving if not all but most of the human waste problem.

The Mountain Cleaners too approached the problem through a mechanism to collect and recycle garbage. They set up bins for different kinds of waste – plastic, biodegradable and glass, and distributed sacks to stall owners to collect trash. This trash then went for recycling into objects of utility.

According to Dr. Sanjeev Sharma from the WWF-India team in Shimla, and his volunteers, Anil Sharma and Bali Ram Sharma, there has been a considerable improvement in the garbage situation. They made five trips to the lake in 2010 during the season to spread awareness and gauge the results of their efforts. Of the same opinion are the tea stall owners and tent organisers who leave their main occupations every year to set up shop during the *yatra*.



Chamanlal, a stall owner just outside the entrance of the lake had a lot to share. *"The situation is much better this year. There are bags and dustbins all around which people are using. After all, every person is responsible for himself. All of us clear up our stalls before we leave after the yatra."* He tells of how people used to discard their clothes in the lake after bathing. But since banners by WWF were put up discouraging the act, it has been banned. Now the government officials and priests stop the people from leaving anything behind.

"But while on one hand bodies like Sulabh Shauchalya and langar organisers have become more conscious about where they dispose their waste, there has been very little change in the attitude of pilgrims" says Deshraj, who rents out tents to tired pilgrims.

Rajesh Talwar, a pilgrim from Punjab worries about the repercussions of the

Above: Messaging where it can't be missed © Ragini Letitia Singh/WWF-India



Above: Awareness material being handed out to pilgrims © Dr. Sanjeev Sharma/WWF-India; Right: Workers from Sulabh Shauchalya cleaning up © Ragini Letitia Singh/WWF-India



waste lying around. “The waterfalls carry the waste down with them, so the water is not pure anymore. What we need are more toilets, especially for the women and children.”

While some have adopted the ‘Green Hiker’ attitude, there are still some left to win over. Plastic rain coats discarded on the trekking paths and plastic bottles and wrappers rolling down the stony slopes, only to join a heap at the bottom are evidence of a battle half won. As Chamanlal said, “Those who have to litter will litter.”

A socks seller on the way to Manimahesh Lake revealed to our team, “You put up such clear signs but it’s a pity that some people don’t avail of the message. They throw whatever they want, and wherever. But we, who are present here every year, are your supporters. We will tell them to not litter.”

The shift towards a ‘greener’ way of travel is slow. But at least it has begun.

Ragini Letitia Singh & Dr. Sanjeev Sharma

Right: Manimahesh Lake in 2010 © Ragini Letitia Singh/WWF-India



SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT AT TSOMORIRI

LADAKH, J&K, India

One of the major threats to high altitude wetlands (HAWs) and the fragile habitats around them is solid waste which gets accumulated as a result of unplanned and unregulated tourist activities. Tsomoriri, being one of the most important and popular wetlands in Ladakh has seen an unprecedented rise in the amount of solid waste generated in its vicinity. This is directly linked to the increase in tourism in the area. This problem is more serious for HAWs as the peak tourist season coincides with the peak period of biological activity like the breeding season of the Black-necked Crane, Bar-headed Goose and many more species.

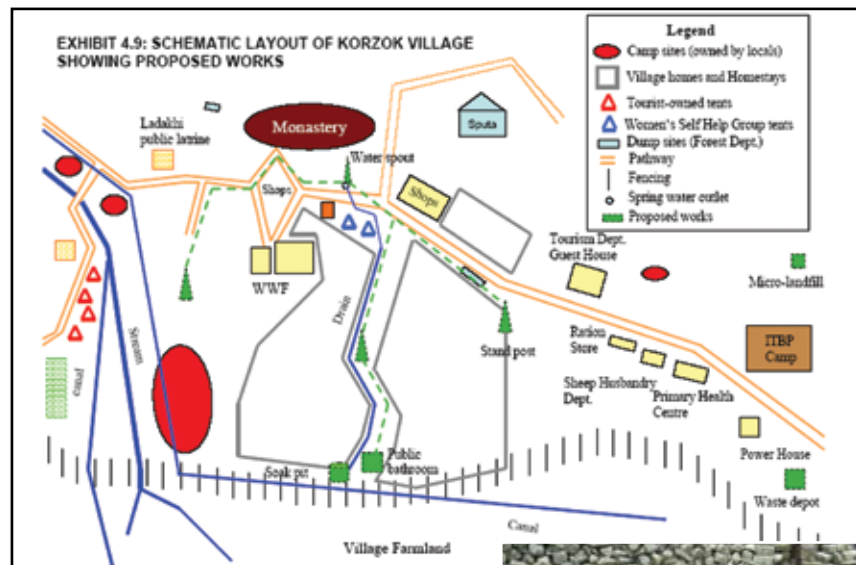
As part of the pilot initiative for waste management in the area, a study was conducted at Tsomoriri, aimed at providing a plan for sanitation and solid waste management.

The overall objective of the study was to identify appropriate technical interventions for sanitation and solid waste management at Tsomoriri. This would help set up a system for the sustainable operation and maintenance of these practices and thereby strengthen the ongoing efforts for conservation of habitats and species around Tsomoriri, especially the vulnerable bird species found here.

In this regard, a field visit was organised to assess the baseline conditions, expected loads, traditional practices, current initiatives and treatment measures, constraints and local capacity. During the visit to the village, a set of transect walks and meetings with the community groups and other stakeholders were organised. Current practices of waste collection, treatment and disposal adopted in the village were assessed, the traditional Ladakhi latrine system was studied and the local level institutions and initiatives were

appraised. In addition, a set of stakeholders at the regional level located in Leh were also consulted to explore the scope of partnership on the issues.

As a result of the study, a set of options to manage solid waste in the area have been



Above: Schematic layout of Korzok Village prepared by WWF-India team and solid waste management expert, Asit Nema right © Tsewang Rigzin/ WWF-India)



proposed, for example, the predominant solution of using improved traditional dry latrines, under the sanitation component. To check littering, the placing of traditional garbage bins at convenient locations has also been proposed, along with a waste depot for the sorting and stocking of waste and a handpress for flattening PET bottles. Effective ways to sensitise tourists with regard to minimising their ecological footprint and for the participation of stakeholders have been identified.

The detailed study report has been submitted to all key stakeholders and policy makers in Ladakh for necessary subsequent action for setting up a pilot waste management system for Korzok and Tsomoriri.

Pankaj Chandan & Nisa Khatoon, WWF-India

GREEN HIKER REACHES DODITAL

UTTARAKHAND, India

After having launched the Green Hiker campaign in the fifth Himalayan state of Uttarakhand in late September 2010, WWF-India took its first step towards high altitude wetland conservation in the state, by participating in a clean-up drive for Dodital Lake and its trekking route, during November 7-10, 2010.

Dodital is a freshwater lake situated at 3,057 m asl and surrounded by thick forests of oak, fir and *rhododendron*. It is inhabited by the Golden Trout, giving the lake its name. Dodital is a 22 km trek away from Sangamchatti, 20 km from district headquarters in Uttarkashi.

The clean-up drive was jointly organised and conducted by The Shikhar Eco

Foundation, the Uttarakhand Forest Department, WWF-India and the Agora village community. It was the first organised effort to clean up this high altitude lake of religious significance. During this expedition, 25 sacks of non-biodegradable waste were collected, which were then brought to Sangamchatti for segregation and recycling.

According to Dr. Sanjeev Sharma, WWF-India Shimla State Office who was an active participant, "The waste included glass bottles, mineral water bottles, tin cans and polythene and mostly *gutka* (chewable tobacco) packets. Of the 25 sacks, 15 were collected from around Dodital, five from the camping site at Majhi and the rest from Bebra and Agora villages."

Below: Clean-up drive around Dodital Lake © Dr. Sanjeev Sharma/WWF India; Bottom: Students of Junior High School, in Agora Village being told about the importance of conserving their wetlands © WWF India



Besides this, on November 10, 2010 an awareness programme was organised at Junior High School in Agora Village, where 50 students from Class VIII and teachers were spoken to about various environmental issues, including solid waste management in high altitude regions. This was followed by a rally and clean-up of Agora village by the students, at the end of which four sacks of waste were collected. Educational resource material was also handed out to the school, including Green Hiker posters.

This initiative has drawn attention to the importance of wetlands and the need to keep them pure. It has also helped raise awareness about WWF and its conservation work under the *Saving Wetlands Sky-High!* initiative and the Green Hiker campaign. Besides this, the role and responsibility of tourists, tour operators and other local stakeholders towards caring for the fragile Himalayan ecosystem has also become more lucid.

Dr. Sanjeev Sharma & Ragini Letitia Singh, WWF-India



BHUTAN INCHING TOWARDS THE RAMSAR MAP

THIMPU, Bhutan

On July 14, 2010, the Ugyen Wangchuck Institute for Conservation and Environment and the Watershed Management Division under the Department of Forests and Park Services, Bhutan held a National Consultation Workshop on High Altitude Wetlands (HAWs) in Thimphu, with support from WWF-Bhutan. The workshop which was attended by relevant government officials from Bhutan, WWF-Nepal, WWF-India and the Ramsar Convention, was mainly aimed at sharing information, experiences and challenges related to HAW



Above: Ms. Sonam Choden, Forestry Officer, Watershed Management Division, Government of Bhutan presenting an overview of the Watershed Management Division © WWF-Bhutan

management and to develop partnerships for research and development on HAWs with other stakeholders.

The workshop also brought the Ramsar Convention and the Government of Bhutan closer to ratify the convention on wetlands.

A field trip to Phobjikha (a HAW) was conducted for the international participants to see its status and meet with the field staff of the Royal Society of the Protection of Nature (which is a local NGO), to discuss Bhutan's accession to the Ramsar Convention and the feasibility

of Phobjikha becoming one of the potential Ramsar sites.

Moreover, a road map for wetland conservation in Bhutan was also developed, identifying relevant institutions both in Bhutan and outside to collaborate for the future conservation activities. The coordination with various stakeholders dealing with wetland conservation in Bhutan was enhanced for future collaborative programmes.

INVOLVING COMMUNITIES IN CONSERVATION

HIMACHAL PRADESH, India

Often to aid conservation work, the best people to win over are the local communities. WWF-India Field Office in Shimla, organised a four-day training programme for tour operators and other service providers from April 5-8, 2010 in Kullu and Manali, in collaboration with the Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP) and the HP Forest Department. The training focussed on how high altitude wetland conservation and community-based tourism can go hand-in-hand, and the important role of tour operators in assisting conservation initiatives for these wetlands.

Thirty-two people involved in a spectrum of tourism activities, ranging

from organising tours in the high altitude Himalayas to tourist guides, porters, cooks and trekkers participated in the first two days of the programme.

There were discussions and presentations on the high altitude flora and fauna of Himachal Pradesh, community-based tourism in GHNP, birdwatching, the role of tour operators in high altitude area conservation, wildlife management in high altitude areas and community participation.

In addition, there were group discussions and field visits to help participants identify fauna and flora in the high altitude region. The training was conducted by expert resource persons from WWF and the Forest Department, Himachal Pradesh.

In turn, the participants have become partners with WWF and its conservation goals in the region.

Dr. Sanjeev Sharma, WWF-India

Below: Guiding tour operators to identify marks left by wildlife © WWF-India



STUDYING TOURISM IMPACTS IN SPITI

SPITI, HIMACHAL PRADESH, India
A tourism carrying capacity study has been undertaken by WWF-India to assess the physical-ecological and socio-cultural aspects of Spiti to develop a long term sustainability plan for the region. Two field researchers studying each aspect had a lot to share about Spiti after their six-month long research in this high-altitude cold desert.

Exploring Wildlife in Spiti

Spiti is the largest region in the Lahaul and Spiti district, with an area of 7,100 sq km, located at an average altitude of 3,500-4,000 masl. Spiti Valley is formed by the Spiti River in the southern and south eastern part of the district and teems with fascinating biodiversity.

While studying the physical-ecological aspects of Spiti, the field researcher visited sensitive biodiversity habitats and surrounding villages, trekking routes, camping sites and some parts of the protected areas. The critical wildlife habitats lie within the Pin Valley National Park, the Kibber Wildlife Sanctuary and part of the Chandertal Wildlife Sanctuary.

This region is characterised by alpine pastures and dry alpine scrub forest and is noteworthy for the diversity and medicinal value of its herbaceous growth. Some of the important medicinal plant

species found here are *Arnebia guttata*, *Rhodiola sp.*, *Gentianella sp.*, *Geranium sp.*, *Clematis sp.*, *Aquilegia fragrans*, *Pedicularis longiflora*, *Aconitum violaceum*, *Rubia sp.*, *Capparis spinosa*, *Ephedra intermedia*, *Hippophae sp.*

The mammals include the Pika (*Ochotona sp.*), Himalayan Weasel (*Mustela sibirica*), Wolf (*Canis lupus*), Snow Leopard (*uncia uncia*), Himalayan Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), Ibex (*Capra siberica*), Himalayan Blue Sheep (*Pseudois nayaur nayaur*) and more. The Himalayan Agama (*Laudakia himalayana*), Skink (*Asymblepharus sp.*) and Toad (*Bufo sp.*) are the reptiles here.

Some of the bird species in this area are the Lammergeier Vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*), White-backed Vulture (*Gyps*

bengalensis), Robin Accentor (*Prunella rubeculoides*), Yellow-headed Wagtail (*Motacilla citrine*), Yellow-billed Chough (*Pyrrhocorax graculus*), Raven (*Corvus corax*), Horned Lark (*Otocoris alpestris*), and Short-toed Eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*).

Spiti has seen a remarkable increase in the number of tourists. If this continues in an unplanned manner, it is feared that this may be damaging to this ecological treasure that the region nurtures.

Akshaya Mane, Field Researcher, WWF-India

Homestay: An offering of Culture and Lifestyle

To provide comfortable home stay facilities to tourists and supplement



Above: Home stays dotting the picturesque Langza Village © Vijayeta Singh/WWF India; Left: A Robin Accentor (*Prunella rubeculoides*) taking rest at Kibber Wildlife Sanctuary © Akshaya Mane/WWF-India

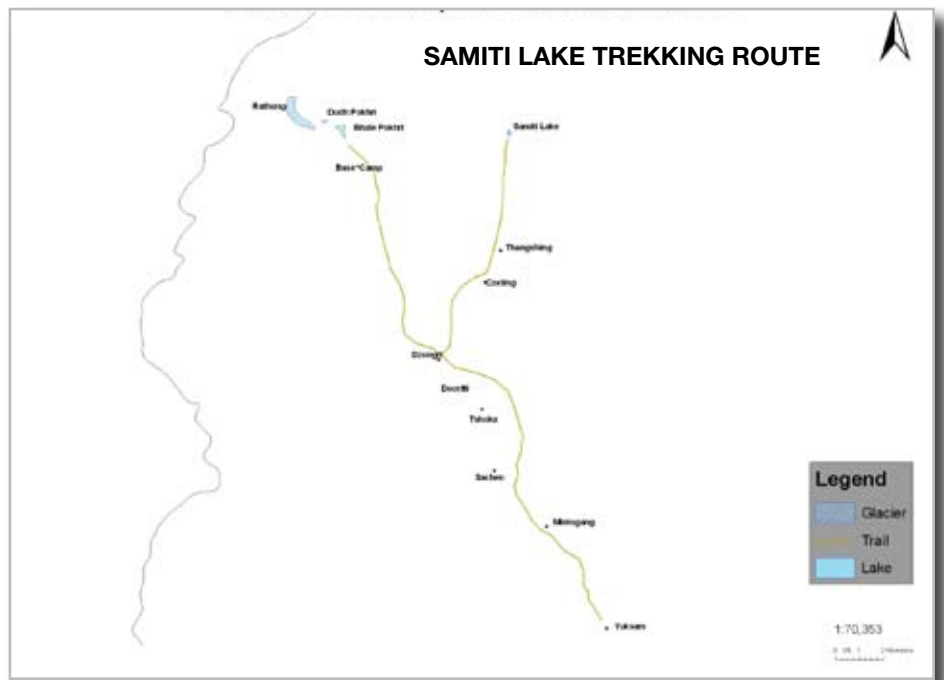
the accommodation in rural tourist destinations, the Government of Himachal Pradesh introduced the Home stay Scheme in 2008. The concept is relevant to remote places of tourist interest like the Spiti Valley, where tourist destinations are spread over seven lakh hectares of very tough terrain and the extreme climatic conditions of a cold desert.

Home stays can be found in Spiti, especially in the higher villages of Langza, Demul and Kibber to name a few. Here, tourists get to enjoy the hospitality of the locals, their traditional homes, the *bakku* (local furnace), the nutritious and delicious traditional meals (soup and dimsums), and the colourful hand-made carpets and *thankas* (traditional Buddhist paintings). The people of Spiti use the traditional dry toilets which are best suited owing to the restricted supply of water especially during winters. It is also a perennial source of organic manure for crops.

However, the recent boom in the tourism industry has led to the construction of hotels and guest houses with modern facilities like attached toilets and baths with 24-hour running water. Such water intensive practices are bound to disrupt the already scarce water supply and distribution systems in Spiti, inducing a chain of social and political issues.

Moreover, tourism has impacted the socio-economic structure of the region at various levels. The tourist seasons coincides with the cropping seasons causing a great strain on local manpower. There is increased interest and opportunity in the tourism industry which is not matched by sufficient understanding, skills and qualifications, causing the locals to be exploited by non-domicile operators. Most of the necessary goods and services are not being procured locally (many which are not produced locally have the potential for the same).

What is worse is that the Home stay Scheme by the Himachal Government is promoting these practices by making attached flush toilet facilities mandatory for all home stays to be able to apply for registration (it already being mandatory for hotels and guesthouses). Due to this, most of the home stays in these areas are running without any legal backing, depriving them of any benefits that come as part of the scheme. But what is most alarming, is the increasing strain on the



natural resources in the region which may soon run out, leaving nothing behind for its local communities and biodiversity.

Vijayeta Singh, Field Researcher, WWF-India

MAPPING THE WAY FOR SAMITI LAKE

SIKKIM, India

After demonstrating a model of community based management of a wetland in Tsomgo Lake, the possibilities of working for the conservation of other threatened HAWs are being explored, Samiti Lake located in West Sikkim being one of them. Samiti Lake is en route to Gochela pass from Yuksom at an altitude of 4267 m asl.

After Tsomgo and Gurudongmar, Samiti is a biodiversity hotspot. The fauna mostly reported here are the Blue Sheep (*Pseudois nayaur*), Snow Leopard (*Uncia uncia*), Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) and bird species like the Blood pheasant (*Ithaginis cruentus*), Monal Pheasant (*Lophopura impejanus*), Lammergeier (*Gypaetus barbatus*) and several species of rare waterfowls. The lake is located in the alpine scrub habitat dominated by *Rhododendron anthopogon* and the ground flora comprises *Potentilla peduncularis*, *Rheum nobile*, *Saussurea*, *Bergenia purpurea* and *Potentilla fruticosa*.

Samiti receives approximately 4,500 visitors a year, both national and international who visit the lake as pilgrims or tourists. Issues like eutrophication, increasing tourist pressure, non-biodegradable offerings, extraction of *Rhododendron* and Juniper for burning as incense, Yak ranching, habitat destruction, firewood collection and lack of awareness amongst the visitors are prime reasons for the immediate conservation of this lake.

To assess the level of intervention required for the lake, a preliminary meeting was held between WWF-India, Khangchendzonga Conservation Committee (KCC), the Eco Development Committee (EDC), travel agents and local community members. The main threats to this lake were discussed along with the possible future collaborations with local bodies.

Some future interventions planned are;

- Establishing a network with stakeholders
- Collection of data on biodiversity for at least every season
- Water quality analysis at least twice every year

Laktsheden Theengh, WWF-India

GREEN HIKER HIKING TO GREAT HEIGHTS

The campaign to reduce the negative environmental impacts of tourism on the high altitude Himalayas, particularly on wetlands has got off to a good start.

The Green Hiker Campaign was launched in June 2009 by WWF-India as a part of the SWSH initiative.

five states). This leads to huge problems of solid waste accumulation, pressure on water and other natural resources, littering and trail degradation due to hiking pressure. Moreover, what is worse is that the huge influx of tourists during the summer season coincides with the peak wildlife activity period, (breeding, feeding

'Incredible India' campaign, which lent Green Hiker a boost and massive public recognition. In addition, with Lonely Planet Magazine (India), a travelogue contest was held, encouraging Himalayan travellers to write on their journey to the Himalayas, with a special focus on how they travelled 'green' (www.ecotrail.in).



Above: The Green Hiker blog at <http://greenhikercampaign.blogspot.com/>;
Right: The Green Hiker Campaign being launched by the former Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, Mr. Sujit Banerjee, on the eve of World Environment Day 2010, at WWF-India Secretariat in New Delhi © Anil Cherukupalli/WWF India

From the time it was launched, the campaign has made considerable progress in terms of extent, outreach, impact and awareness-raising. Officially, it was launched in 2010, in New Delhi by Sujit Banerjee, Former Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, in the presence of officials from the Ministry of Tourism and Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India, veteran hikers and conservationists. Arjun Vajpai, the youngest Indian to conquer Mount Everest at the age of 16 was also present to lend his support for this campaign.

In India the campaign is active in the Himalayan states of Jammu and Kashmir, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

The number of tourists who visited the Indian Himalayas in the year 2004 is estimated to be 12, 870,928* (for the



and reproduction). Tourists also clean out the sparse mountain vegetation for campfires and through off-road driving. The situation is further aggravated in the absence of garbage disposal facilities, leading to the practice of dumping garbage into nearby streams, as well as, into marmot, mouse hare or vole burrows.

In 2010, the campaign has had a strong partner in the form of the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India and its

Green Hiker has emerged stronger and more effective through new communication material – posters, bookmarks, postcards, coasters, badges and T-shirts carrying the message of the campaign, and a short animation film Journey of a Green Hiker, developed to drive the message home to the target audiences. While this material has been widely distributed through extensive networks and can be found at cafes,

bookstores, marketplaces and tourist information centres in the Himalayan states, the film has been screened across 406 outlets in the region on an 'Out-of-Home' Media service called 'Live Media'.

A Green Hiker blog (<http://greenhikercampaign.blogspot.com/>) has also been initiated, inviting veteran hikers and conservationists to write about their

* Indian State Tourism Ministry websites

experiences in the Himalayas, throwing open to readers the option of expressing viewpoints and holding discussions. The Green Hiker database is also expanding rapidly as people are signing up to support the campaign through the WWF-India website (www.wwfindia.org/greenhiker). Green Hiker can also be read about in-flight and travel magazines, and local and national print media.

The campaign also plans to generate awareness through:

- Sustainable tourism workshops - designed especially for tour operators, hotel associations and taxi unions
- Training and capacity building of local home stays
- Publication of a bi-lingual pocket booklet on Dos and Don'ts for tourists while in the Himalayas
- Conservation-oriented educational activities for children and tourists

There has been a change in perception through this campaign as small adventure tourism organisations and tour operators are signing up and volunteering to carry and distribute campaign material in areas of high tourist concentration. In addition, requests are being received from willing individuals who want to volunteer to spread the message of responsible tourism at their level.

The campaign is slowly turning regional, just like the initiative it was launched under. It is hoped to be launched in 2011 in Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan and China.

The Green Hiker may have travelled some distance but it still has a long way to go.

Ragini Letitia Singh, WWF-India

JOURNEY OF GREEN HIKER TO WEST SIKKIM

SIKKIM, India

As part of the Green Hiker campaign, WWF-India's Sikkim Team organised a three-day programme in Yuksam, West

Sikkim from November 1-3, 2010, in collaboration with the Khangchendzonga Conservation Committee and a few volunteer students from the Yuksam Secondary School.

Green Hiker posters and message banners were put on display at the Khangchendzonga National Park check post, where tourists entering and leaving the park could see them. Later, this material was also exhibited at the Yuksam market. A blank banner was also put up for tourists to write their feedback on. Tourists were receptive to the messaging and interacted with the team, asking questions like "whose responsibility is it to keep nature's beauty the way it is – the



Above: A Green Hiker volunteer interacting with tourists on issues relating to unsustainable tourism © WWF-India; Left: A tourist examining a Green Hiker poster in Sikkim © WWF-India



national tourist or foreign?" Tourists were also quizzed on facts about Sikkim and the winners walked away with Green Hiker caps, badges and bookmarks. There was no place left on the feedback banner by the end of the programme, which was full of comments, suggestions and support for the campaign. It was certain that the campaign had left its mark on everyone who had come to learn about it.

Tashi Choden Bhutia, WWF-India

MAKING NEW FRIENDS!



Above: Tour operators, hoteliers, taxi union leaders and guides discussing their local environmental issues in the workshop © Ragini Letitia Singh/WWF India

UTTARKASHI, UTTARAKHAND, India
To further the cause of wetland conservation in Uttarakhand after the clean-up drive at Dodital Lake, WWF organised an interactive workshop for local tour operators and other stakeholders in Uttarkashi.

The primary objective of this workshop was to introduce WWF's SWSH initiative to the participants and to highlight the Green Hiker campaign and its relevance to the region of Uttarkashi, which has several high altitude wetlands, threatened by development or religious tourism. Moreover, it was intended to bring together local stakeholders – tour

Below: Dr. Sanjeev Sharma explaining WWF's conservation work under the SWSH initiative © Pushpinder Jamwal/WWF India



operators, hoteliers, local communities, educational institutions, local NGOs and the Forest and Tourism government departments, to lay the foundation for collective conservation action in the future, for the fragile wetlands in the region.

The first session of the workshop included the screening of the Green Hiker animation film *Journey of a Green Hiker* and a concise presentation on WWF's work in the Himalayan region, including the SWSH initiative. The presentation concluded with WWF's future plans for Uttarakhand's high altitude wetlands, for integrating tourism with conservation.

In the second and most important session, there was a group discussion amongst the participants, where they talked about the environmental threats they perceive to these wetlands and its wildlife. According to most, Dodital and Nachiketatal are two of the most endangered lakes since they attract large numbers of religious tourists every year, leading to waste problems and a drastic fall in the trout population, a major source of food and livelihood. They felt that these lakes were too accessible to tourists, and that this accessibility affected wildlife and its habitats. The lack of proper dustbins and a sound waste management system, the extensive use of plastic and lack of awareness amongst the local people and tourists were major causes of environmental degradation in and around the lake and along its trekking routes.

When asked to suggest possible solutions, the participants stressed on the need for environmental awareness programmes for the local children and adults. In addition, regular cleanliness drives in and around the lakes, installing signage on Dos and Don'ts, pressing for pro-environment government policies and establishing an effective and holistic waste management system in Uttarkashi were also suggested.

Ragini Letitia Singh & Dr. Sanjeev Sharma,
WWF-India

THE CRANES SURVIVE THE YUSHU EARTHQUAKE

LONGBAOTAN NATIONAL RESERVE,
China

In the early hours of April 14, 2010, the Longbaotan National Nature Reserve located in Yushu, in the Qinghai province was rocked by a deadly earthquake with a magnitude of 7.1. Many lives were lost and much damage incurred as a result of this calamity.



The Longbaotan National Nature Reserve located in Yushu, in the Qinghai province, is an important summer breeding ground for the endangered Black-necked Crane, the Bar-headed Goose and the Ruddy Shelduck. Every early April, over 150 cranes and thousands of other migratory birds come to this wetland to build their nests in the reserve's lush wet meadows.

WWF chose this lake as a demonstration site for its SWSH project in 2006 and together with Mr. Shega, the director of the Longbaotan Reserve and his team, has been working to conserve the Black-necked Crane habitat. To him directly reports, Lobsang Thabkey, one of the reserve's three community rangers responsible for protecting and monitoring migratory birds. Thabkey lives 100 m from Longbao Lake and regularly provides his detailed observations on the cranes, right from their arrival in early April till the departure of the last one in November.

When the WWF team visited Yushu one week after the earthquake, the city had been leveled. Mr. Shega's house had been totally destroyed and four of his

relatives, including his mother killed. Soon after the earthquake, WWF CPO donated emergency relief supplies including barley and butter through the Yushu Prefecture Forestry Bureau to quake-affected residents of the Yushu County.

Sixty kilometers away, Thabkey's house beside Longbao Lake had also been



completely destroyed. He was found with his family living in a disaster relief tent donated by the government. However, Thabkey was calm and full of hope saying, "*We will rebuild the house and I will resume my work of monitoring the cranes soon*". Although many homes in Longbao Township were destroyed by the earthquake, there appeared to be little long-term impact on the wetland itself.

Six months later, the WWF team visited the Longbaotan Reserve once again in late October. Mr. Shega accompanied the team on the field trip around Longbaotan, where he told that crane numbers appeared to

have been affected by the quake. In the past few years, the total number of cranes spending the summer at Longbaotan had generally been over 150. But immediately after the quake, the number dropped to about 60, gradually increasing to 120 over the next two months. During the trip, the team counted over 110 cranes around the Longbao wetland, while Mr. Shega revealed that some of the cranes had already left on their southward migration while all of them would be gone by November 20.

On our return drive from Yushu to Xining, the capital of Qinghai Province, the team was fortunate to see more cranes in the process of migrating southward. Four cranes were sighted feeding in

Left: A Black-necked Crane family, where both the chicks survived the earthquake, a rare phenomenon © WWF-China; Below: WWF staff at earthquake site initiating relief work © WWF-China

a small wetland in the Yellow River Source Region. As they were excitedly photographing these birds, four other honking specimens passed overhead in flight. Hearing the call of their fellow cranes, the feeding cranes took flight too, gradually ascending and disappearing in the southern sky.

The Crane seemed to have put up a tough fight against the natural disaster that left Yushu all shook up. After all, they had a Mr. Shega, Thabkey and the entire WWF-China team to back them.

Kelsang Norbu, WWF-China

TROUBLE AT HIGH ALTITUDE

Deadly flash floods caught Ladakh, located in the north-eastern part of Jammu and Kashmir and its surrounding areas unawares in the early hours of August 6, 2010. These floods were caused by a cloudburst which can be defined as 'highly concentrated rainfall over a small area lasting for a few hours'.

Though the loss of life, property and infrastructure is still being assessed, these floods claimed approximately 500 lives, destroyed about 40 villages and completely damaged agricultural land in most of the villages (a big loss since agriculture is the main source of food and livelihood for the Ladakhis). However, Leh town and Choglamsar, a low-lying, small, dry mountain town, 14 km from Leh bore the brunt of the mudslides and were the worst affected by the floods.

WWF-India has been working in Ladakh for the past 15 years, focusing on conserving six priority Himalayan high altitude wetlands - Tsomoriri, Tsokar, Pangong Tso, Hanle, Chushul in Leh district and Rungdum in Kargil district.

The Ladakh administration tasked WWF-India with the rehabilitation of a hamlet south of Choglamsar, situated about 10 km from Leh, having a population of 85 families (350 individuals). This area was identified as one of the worst affected areas. Plans are afoot for equipping the people of Ladakh with better disaster management methods, which also includes providing guidelines on green development and construction. The existing buildings are made of local materials which are unable to bear the brunt of such calamities.

Presently, the long-term damage to this fragile ecosystem caused by the flash floods has not been ascertained. As things limp back to normalcy WWF's conservation work will have to be rebuilt. Rehabilitation of this critical landscape and capacity building towards understanding natural disasters and combating them will soon be undertaken.

Ladakh is a part of the Himalayan landscape that plays an important role in the hydrological regime of mighty rivers like the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Indus. These wetlands also act as a buffer between glacial melt waters and outflows to smaller rivers and streams. Ladakh is also home to some of the most endangered species such as the Snow Leopard and Black-necked Crane.

Once an environmental assessment is undertaken, it shall be known how much the ecology in the region has been affected by this natural calamity.

With excerpts from the report – 'WWF-India's Relief Work in Ladakh'



Above: Relief supplies being distributed at the severely affected Sumdo Village © Pankaj Chandan/WWF-India; Right: Flash floods, which took the people of Ladakh by surprise © Phuntsog Tashi/WWF-India



KNOW YOUR WETLAND

UTTER LAKE, Pakistan

The gorgeous Utter Lake, nestled in the Ishkoman Valley of the Ghizer District, is situated in the Hindukush region of the Northern areas of Pakistan. The lake covers an area of 107.06 ha and is at an altitude of 3840 m asl. It is fed by the Bolvadagov, Shaheen-pang and Sodhgah streams. Its outlet stream called Mathanter flows downward and merges with the Ishkoman River.

The wetland catchment area is home to a range of flora and fauna, some of which are rare and endangered. The flora includes *Pinus wallichiana*, *Betula utilis*, *Juniperus macropoda*, *J. communis*, *Salix tetrasperma*, *Rosa webbiana*, *Ribes alpestris*, *Artemisia gmelinii*, *A. maritima*, *Taraxacum officinale*, *Sophora mollis*, *Plantago major*, *Urtica dioica*, *Ephedra intermedia* and *Myricaria germanica*.

Among the fauna are the Siberian Ibex (*Capra sibirica*), Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes Montana*), Snow Leopard (*Panthera uncia*), Grey Wolf (*Canis lupus*), Lynx (*Felis lynx*) and the Kashmir Flying Squirrel (*Hylapetes fimbriatus*).

Birds found here are the White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*), Yellow Wagtail (*M. flava*), Brown Dipper (*Cinclus pallasi*), Streaked Laughingthrush (*Garrulax lineatus*), Great Tit (*Parus major*), Chukar (*Alectoris chukar*), Hill Pigeon (*Columba rupestris*), Eurasian Eagle Owl (*Bubo bubo*), Himalayan Snowcock (*Tetraogallus himalayensis*), Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) and Snow Partridge (*Lerwa lerwa*). Migratory birds like the Common Teal (*Anas crecca*), Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*), Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*); Utter Lake provides an important stopover for these birds.

Many fish species are also found in the Ishkoman River up to Gotalti Village. They include the Snow Trout (*Schizothorax plagiostomus*), Tibetan Stone Loach (*Triplophysa stoliczkae*), Brown Trout

(*Salmo trutta fario*) and Common Carp (*Cyprinus carpio*).

Utter Lake is a famous tourist destination where tourist attractions such as camping, trekking and bird watching are sought after. The local communities benefit financially as tourist guides, porters and transporters, and can earn substantial amounts of money during the tourist seasons. The lake provides a constant flow of water to communities residing downstream, which use this water for drinking, irrigation and power generation.

Most of the locals from the Ishkoman Village spend their summers in the vicinity of Utter Lake with their livestock which number up to 3,000 heads. They have constructed shepherd huts near the lake. Moreover, small agricultural fields have been developed by the locals just below the lake in order to draw sustenance from it.

The settlements and tourism bring their share of disadvantages, as they have led to the depletion of pastures owing to over-grazing. The summer months are witness to a huge influx of tourists creating a problem of solid waste which is aggravated by the lack of stringent conservation policies, rules and regulations.

WWF's conservation measures for Utter Lake include increasing community involvement for sustainable development, and the development and implementation of the Wetland Management Plan for Utter Lake by WWF-Pakistan in conjunction with the local government, line departments and the local community.

Film

QUITE AN ANIMATED CAMPAIGN!

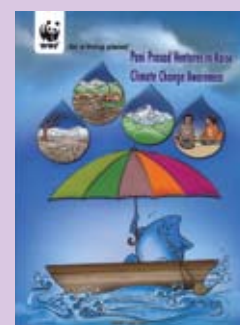
Green Hiker graduated to the audio-visual medium in order to spread awareness about responsible tourism in the Himalayas, through a short animation film. Titled *Journey of a Green Hiker*, this one minute, 18 second film captures instances of unsustainable tourist behaviour while travelling through the high altitude Himalayas, especially the pristine wetlands. At the same time, the film provides solutions and alternatives for tourists, encouraging them to become a green hiker!



The message - While travelling, there are always 'greener', cleaner options, and that one can enjoy natural beauty without spoiling it for others.

Book

PANI PRASAD OFF TO RAISE AWARENESS ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE!



The third book in the series, Pani Prasad Ventures to Raise Climate Change Awareness was published by WWF-Nepal in 2010.

Pani Prasad, the illustrated character in the book goes about spreading information and useful facts on climate change, its impacts and possible adaptation measures. The book has interesting illustrations making it more comprehensive for readers.

The book targets students, eco clubs and teachers. Pani Prasad has become very popular through the earlier books in the series - *Journey of Pani Prasad and Pani Prasad and Friends: Off to the High Altitude Wetlands*.

RULES FOR THE WETLANDS

NEW DELHI, India

The Government of India has finally notified the Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules 2010, which especially bring under their purview high altitude wetlands, along with the Ramsar Wetlands of International Importance.

...the following wetlands shall be regulated under these rules, namely:-

(iv) High altitude wetlands or high altitude wetland complexes at or above an elevation of two thousand five hundred metres with an area equal to or greater than five hectares

Some of the prohibited activities within the wetlands are reclamation, setting up of new industries and expansion of existing industries, dumping of solid waste and any other activity likely to have an adverse impact on the ecosystem of the wetland.

The Rules also include the constitution of the Central Wetlands Regulatory Authority. This body will chiefly appraise proposals for the identification of new wetlands and projects in consultation with the concerned local authorities, ensure the

enforcement of these rules, and issue necessary directions for the conservation, preservation and wise use of wetlands to the state governments.

In 2006, WWF-India held the first consultation on the need for a National Wetlands Policy, wherein major NGOs working on wetlands, enviro-legal experts and representatives of the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India participated. This was followed by focused discussions and meetings convened by WWF to deliberate upon the Draft Rules circulated by the Ministry for comments.

The formulation of these rules spells good news for wetland conservation in the country, providing the much needed policy support. WWF-India will now concentrate on how these rules can apply to its conservation work ongoing in the field.

CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY, CoP 10

NAGOYA, Japan

Close to 18,000 participants representing

the 193 Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and their partners, met at Nagoya, Japan to adopt historic decisions designed to meet the unprecedented challenges of the continued loss of biodiversity compounded by climate change.

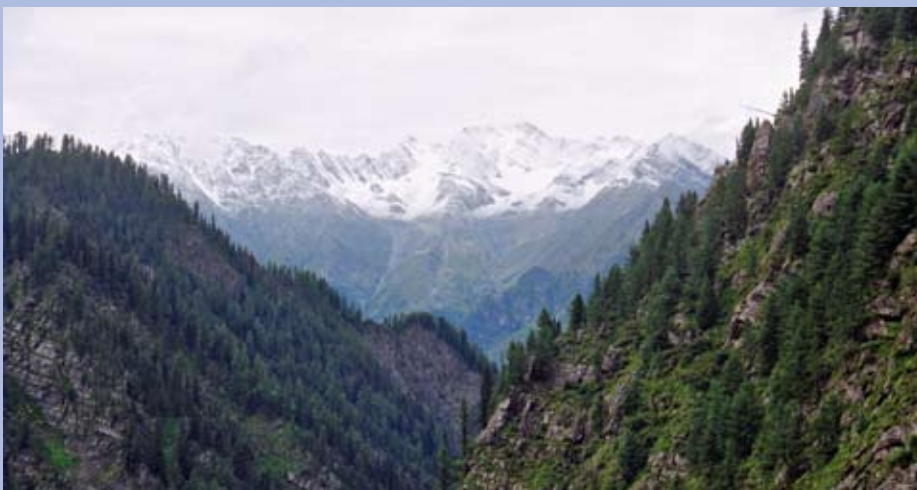
CBD COP 10 was a milestone in setting a new global policy framework for the CBD's three objectives during the next decade up to 2020. WWF called on Parties to secure the following major outcomes:

- 1. A new Strategic Plan with a mission to halt biodiversity loss by 2020 and an ambitious set of goals and targets for the next decade**
- 2. A Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS)**
- 3. An ambitious Resource Mobilisation Strategy**
- 4. Strengthened thematic programmes of work e.g. protected areas, marine and coastal biological diversity.**
- 5. A Joint Programme of Work on Biodiversity and Climate Change**

Opened for signature at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and entering into force in December 1993, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is an international treaty for the conservation of biodiversity, the sustainable use of the components of biodiversity and the equitable sharing of the benefits derived from the use of genetic resources.

Archana Chatterjee, Head, Regional Programme for Himalayan High Altitude Wetland Conservation, participated in CoP 10 as part of WWF Delegation.

Left: View from Manimahesh Lake trekking route © Ragini Letitia Singh/WWF-India



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