



for a living planet

Activity Report

KHANGCHENDZONGA LANDSCAPE PROGRAMME

WWF- India, Khangchendzonga Landscape Programme
C/O Sikkim Programme Office
Deorali, (Near Forest Secretariat)
Gangtok - 737 102, Sikkim
www.wwfindia.org



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Published by

WWF - India

Khangchendzonga Landscape Programme

Suggested citation

WWF - India. 2009. Activity Report. Khangchendzonga Landscape Programme, Gangtok, Sikkim

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Printed by

Systematic Designers & Printers Pvt. Ltd.

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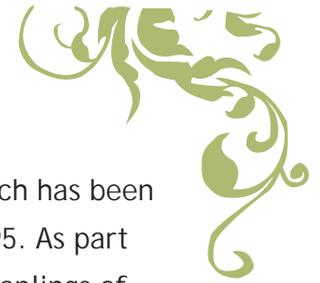
*F*oreword

I am extremely pleased to write this foreword for the first consolidated report of the WWF-India's Khangchendzonga Landscape Programme (KLP). This programme, initiated with a small amount of funding but a great deal of commitment in 1993, has grown from modest beginnings to a diverse set of initiatives being undertaken in collaboration with a wide range of partners. The KLP today encompasses initiatives ranging from traditional programmes on wetland and species conservation to emerging issues such as climate change and sustainable tourism. In the KLP, as in other programmes the WWF-India is engaged in throughout the country, we work through a range of strategies and approaches including community empowerment, education and awareness, research and monitoring, policy and advocacy, communications and documentation. WWF-India is committed to working with the state governments of Sikkim and West Bengal, NGO partners, research institutions and civil society at large to ensure the long term conservation of this critical landscape through a proactive and forward-looking programme which will benefit the people and the biodiversity of the region. The activities described in the report are a step towards this direction and we look forward to scaling this up to achieve significant impacts in the future.



Dr. Sejal Worah
Programmes Director
WWF-India

Executive Summary



WWF-India's Khangchendzonga Landscape Programme, initiated in 2005 from the Sikkim Programme Office has six thematic work areas. These are (i) species conservation, (ii) freshwater and wetlands, (iii) wildlife trade control, (iv) policy level initiatives, (v) eco-restoration and employment generation and (vi) awareness, capacity building and environment education. A major part of the species work is being done in partnership with the Forest, Environment and Wildlife Management Department (FEWMD) of Government of Sikkim wherein we have been studying the present status and distribution of red pandas in the state; in another work, we partnered with Wildlife Institute of India, FEWMD and Indian Army and surveyed the snow leopard habitats in northern part of the state and came up with some baseline data on the herbivores' distribution and abundance in the study area; capacity building of stakeholders for species management is also another tool which we have been using in Sikkim and northern West Bengal.

As part of our wetlands work, together with FEWMD, we identified 11 wetlands in Sikkim which require conservation actions. Out of these, Tsomgo lake or Tangyek Tsho was prioritized for urgent actions. Along with The Mountain Institute, Sikkim chapter, WWF-India helped FEWMD to develop the Sikkim Lake Conservation Guidelines and following this, a new CBO, named Tsomgo Pokhari Sanrakshan Samiti has been notified by the Government who will be responsible chiefly for conservation of the Tsomgo Lake and its environs.



Eco-restoration has been a key activity of WWF-India which has been carried out by WWF-India in the Darjeeling hills since 1995. As part of this initiative, WWF-India assists the farmers to grow saplings of indigenous plants and then those are planted in tea-gardens and degraded areas. This work not only helps in afforestation, but also helps in employment generation for the farmers. As part of livelihood improvement, we have been helping communities with apiculture, vermi-composting, off-seasonal vegetable cultivation, etc. Wildlife trade control is being done mainly through capacity building of stakeholders on technical and legal matters. The first step to control wildlife trade is to strengthen enforcement and recognizing this fact, WWF has been working with the state forest departments and different enforcement agencies.

WWF-India is working with the communities to address man-animal conflict both on ground and at a policy level also. The organization is presently also engaged in a dialogue with the stakeholders for conservation of sacred groves and protection of environment-friendly cultures and traditions of the local people.

As part of awareness and environment education, WWF-India has been working with the teachers from different parts of Sikkim in order to make the students aware about the biodiversity values of Sikkim. WWF-India appreciates the numerous partnerships, national and international without which implementing different projects of Khangchendzonga Landscape would have been impossible.

Dr. Dipankar Ghose
Head Eastern Himalaya & TAL
WWF-India

An Overview

Formed in 1962 (in India since 1969), WWF has grown into one of the world's largest and most respected conservation organisation with nature conservation as its prime concern. In Sikkim, present since the last 13 years, the organisation established initially in the form of a field office and then changed into a state office and finally went through a transformation with the setting up of a programme office and underwent a shift to focus along with the Darjeeling field office, on the Khangchendzonga Landscape as a whole.

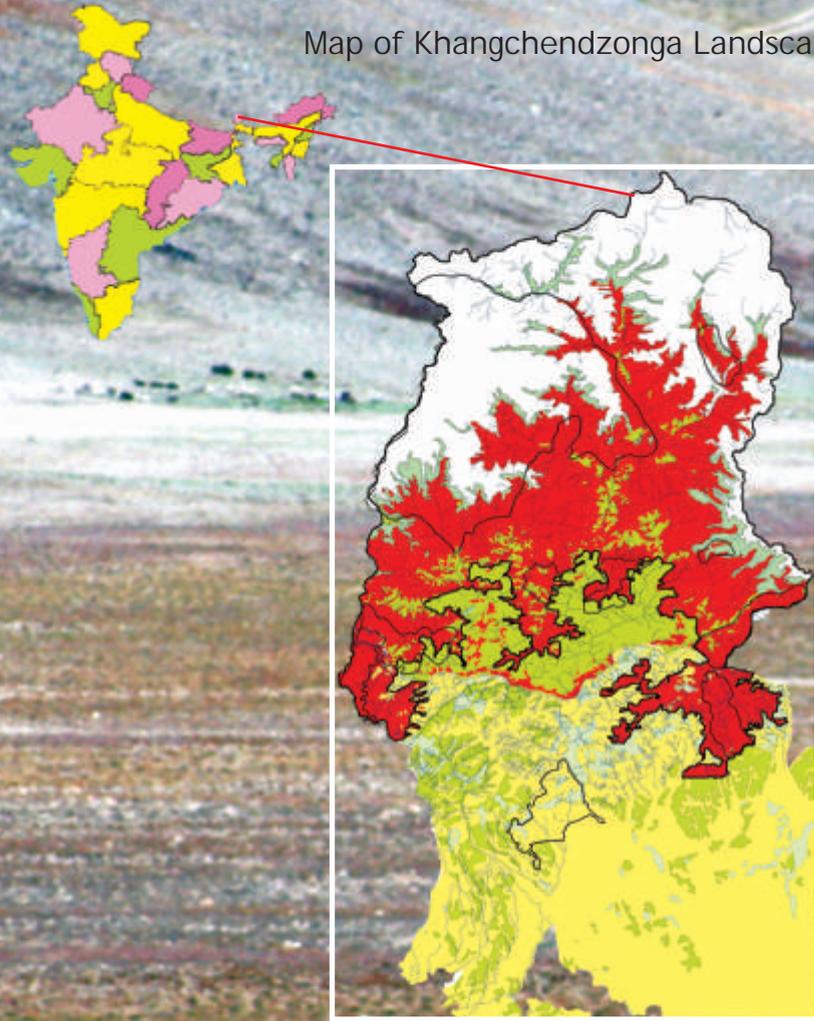
The Khangchendzonga Landscape spreading over an area of 11,500 sq.km has been declared a priority landscape by WWF and ICIMOD (2001). With a total of eleven Protected Areas shared by Sikkim and West Bengal, this landscape is home to many important species like the red panda, snow leopard, clouded leopard, rhododendrons etc.

The programme has projects on the following themes-

- Species conservation
- Freshwater and wetlands
- Wildlife trade control
- Policy level initiatives
- Eco restoration and employment generation
- Awareness, capacity building and environment education

For implementation of these projects the programme collaborates with partners at different levels chief of which is the Forest Department, with whom most of the projects are jointly carried out. Collaborations are also underway with other Government agencies like Police Department, Indian Army, Science and Technology Department, Customs Department and NGOs like Khangchendzonga Conservation Committee (KCC), The Mountain Institute, SKES, Kabi Endeavors and other NGOs in the region and private agencies like the tea gardens.

Map of Khangchendzonga Landscape

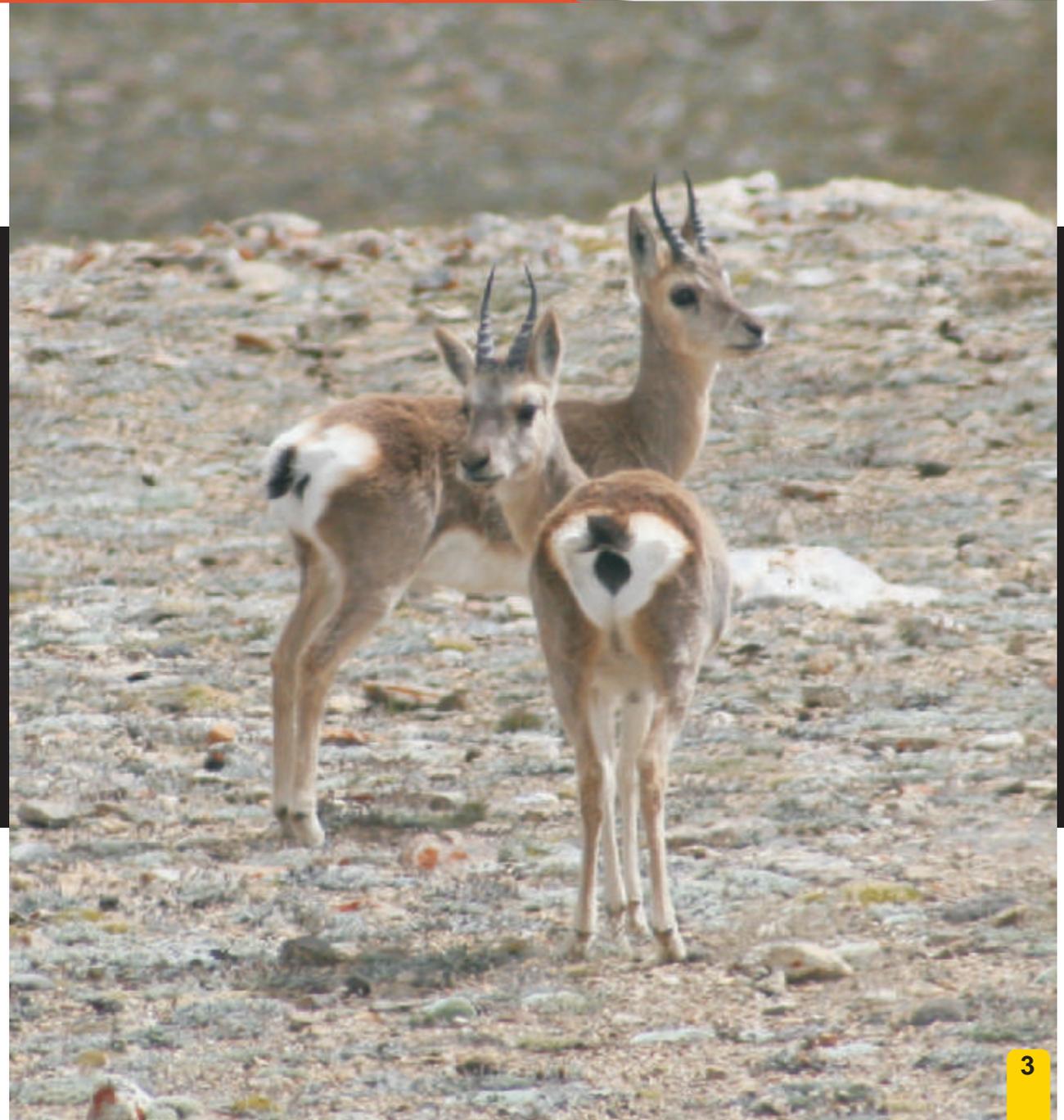


Prepared by : IGCMC Division, WWF-India, 2005



The Khangchendzonga Landscape holds numerous globally threatened species including the snow leopard, red panda, clouded leopard, blood pheasant and several species of rhododendrons, medicinal plants and orchids.

In Sikkim, under species conservation, the flagship project is 'Long term conservation of red panda', which is the state animal of Sikkim. With man - animal conflict situations on the rise in forest villages of Darjeeling, a study to understand the status of Asian black bear will soon also be underway.



Species Conservation

Lashar valley

is a complex of alpine meadows in the North of Sikkim, with the meandering Lashar River flowing through the rugged terrain, and is an area known for its abundance of prey animals of the snow leopard like the bharal or blue sheep - *Pseudois nayaur*.

To understand the possibilities of working for conservation of the snow leopard, the valley was surveyed intensively for signs of the snow leopard and evidences in the form of pug-marks (in different locations), and two scats were found.

With this encouraging evidence from the initial survey a second survey was also undertaken which, however did not yield any more data on the animal.





The elusive animal poses at the zoo

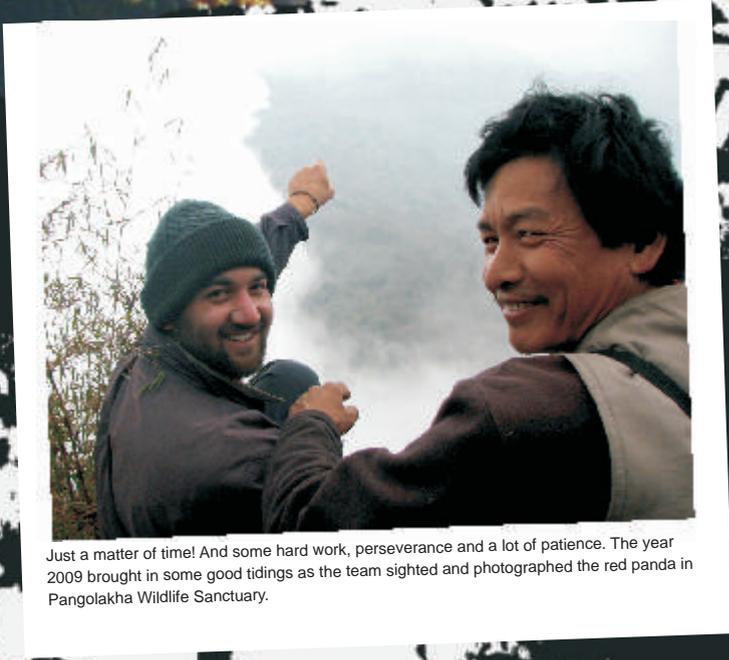


The Red Panda Project is implemented with the Forest, Environment and Wildlife Management Department, Government of Sikkim as the main partner. Joint surveys have been organised with the department to record the presence- absence status of the animal in protected areas of the state.

- On the red panda trail...
- The survey team sets up camp in a clearing within Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary. This sanctuary in East Sikkim spreads over an area of 128 km² and is one of the three Protected Areas surveyed for red panda evidences.
- While secondary evidences in the form of scats were found in plentiful, pug marks could be discovered only during the winter months.
- During the first year of survey the team missed sighting of the animal by only a few minutes on 2 -3 occasions.



Caught on camera



Just a matter of time! And some hard work, perseverance and a lot of patience. The year 2009 brought in some good tidings as the team sighted and photographed the red panda in Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary.



Species Conservation



Building capacities of the people at field level involving both the community along with Forest Department staff has been an important component in the red panda project. Training and workshops have been organised on basic field surveys and population estimation, though much of the learning for them has come from hands - on experience during the red panda survey.



Conserving Tsomgo



Freshwater & Wetlands



Being situated in close proximity to Gangtok, Tsomgo Lake attracts a large number of tourists each year and is counted as one of the major tourist destinations of Sikkim. While this generates employment opportunities for the locals, it is also seen as a threat to conservation of biodiversity.

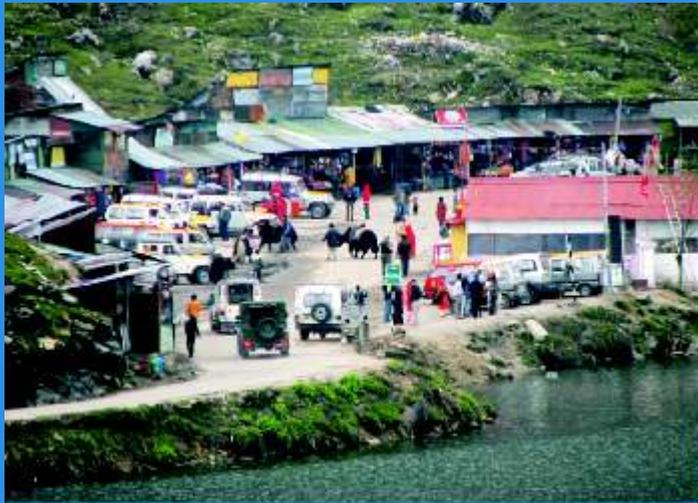
WWF- India jointly with The Mountain Institute, helped the Sikkim Forest Department to formulate the 'Sikkim Lake Conservation Guidelines' in 2006. This allows the government to partner with CBOs for conservation of wetlands in a participatory manner.

With the involvement of the Forest, Environment and Wildlife Management Department a community based organisation (Pokhri Sanrakshan Samiti) has been formed with the residents of the lake area to look into the conservation of the lake.



For the locals, Tsomgo is considered as very sacred, a belief maintained since ages. Every year during the time of Guru Purnima, local healers and shamans gather at the lake side to offer pujas to the guardians of the lake for its well being.

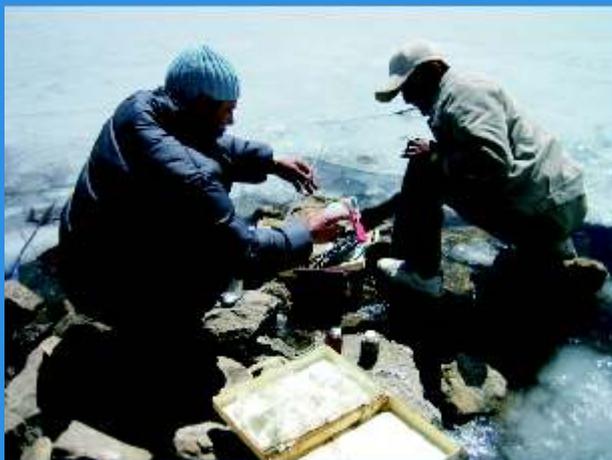




Previously with the shops situated above and very close to the lake, all the waste and sewage were flowing down into Tsomgo. With proper intervention from the Government the shops were shifted to a shopping complex constructed below the lake which has led to a cleaner Tsomgo.



As a follow up to the shifting of shops, a cleanliness drive organised by the PSS got the whole area rid of all of the garbage that had accumulated over the years.



Water quality monitoring of Tsomgo Lake is also a much needed task that is carried out regularly. Parameters for water samples collected for qualitative analysis fall within the prescribed desirable limits, though some show minute fluctuations, which is attributed to human interference and increase in garbage around the lake.



Freshwater & Wetlands



The PSS has been entrusted with the responsibility to collect an entry cum conservation fee from all tourists visiting Tsomgo by the Forest Department. The money collected will be used for the conservation of the lake and the benefit of the resident community on the basis of an annual lake conservation plan.

In the Annual Lake Conservation Plan developed by PSS with the participation of the whole community, garbage management occupies an important section.



Majurpokhari



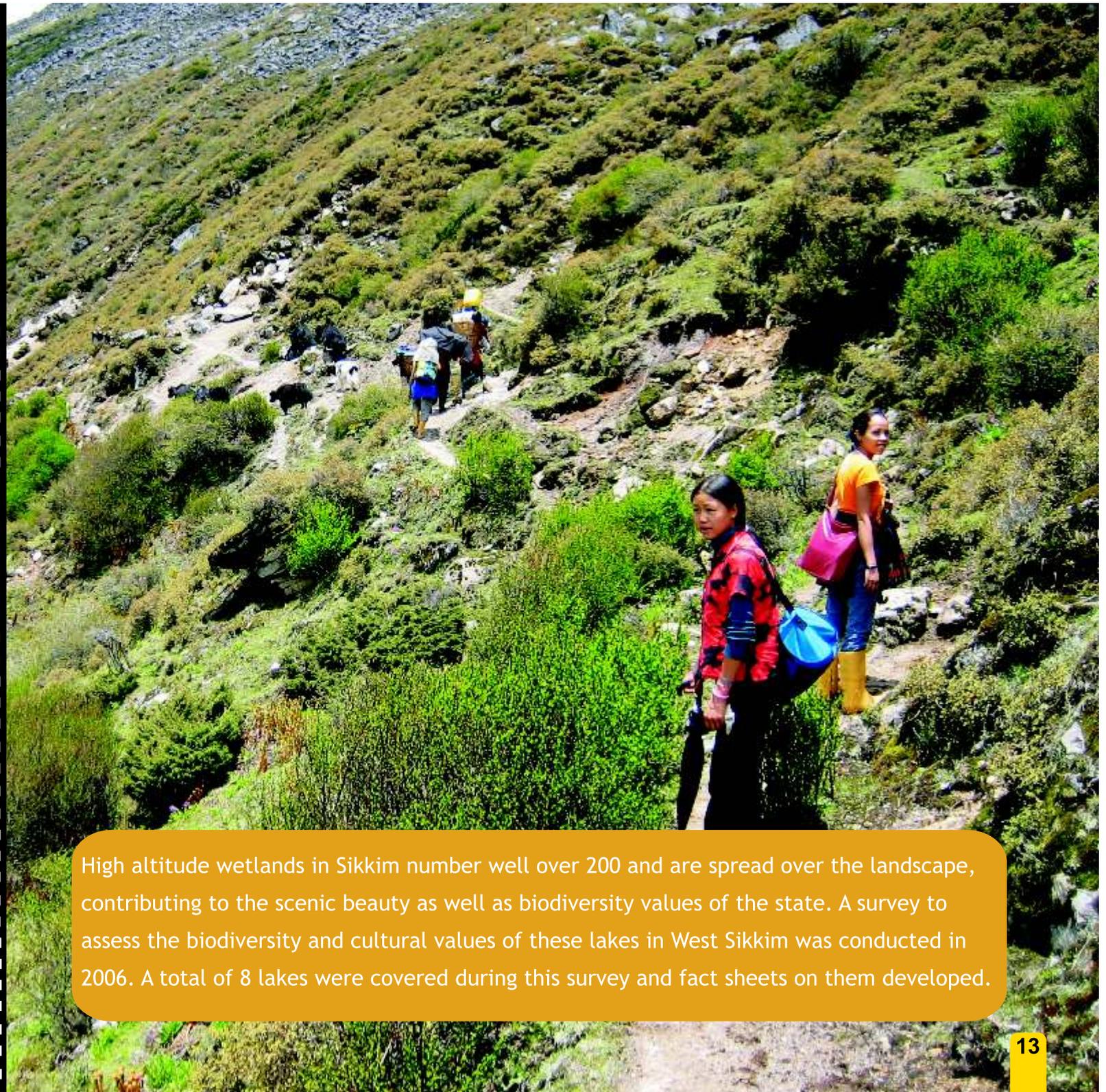
Laxmipokhari



Nirpokhari



Kalapokhari



High altitude wetlands in Sikkim number well over 200 and are spread over the landscape, contributing to the scenic beauty as well as biodiversity values of the state. A survey to assess the biodiversity and cultural values of these lakes in West Sikkim was conducted in 2006. A total of 8 lakes were covered during this survey and fact sheets on them developed.



Lake Gurudongmar, in North Sikkim glistens in the summer sun. Conservation of this high altitude wetland also forms a part of the Wetlands Project. Preliminary meeting with the Lachen Dzumsa, the local governing body of the area has been successfully conducted and water quality monitoring of the lake has also been carried out with help of the State Pollution Control Board.

In Darjeeling, WWF - India has established its presence through **Project Save the Environment and Regenerate Vital Employment (SERVE)** which works with three objectives, of which one is environmental restoration of Darjeeling hills by reforestation activities. Under this programme plantations are carried out in degraded areas of Block Forests and also in the Senchal water catchment area that forms the main source of water for Darjeeling town. Apart from these, shade tree plantations are also done within the tea gardens of Darjeeling. Seedlings raised in the project's own nursery are supplied to the plantation area through local committees or groups for planting.



Eco restoration



For plantation purposes, farmers are provided with seeds and also the required technical training for raising saplings. They raise these seedlings in their own nurseries which are then bought back by the project for plantation at various locations. The site of nursery is selected by the altitude and the species required for next plantation. This approach helps provide farmers with a regular source of income.

Employment Generation



Traditional practice of bee keeping yields very less amount of honey and also the boxes do not hold the bee population for long. Since beekeeping constitutes a resource of sustainable income generation to the farmers a shift to improve the technique of honey bee cultivation was a long felt need.

Project SERVE has been involved in imparting apiary training to the rural communities with main focus on field practices and transferring bee colonies from traditional bee hives to the modern honey boxes. These boxes are also distributed to each participant at a subsidized rate along with other APIARY equipment

Employment Generation



Project SERVE as part of its income generation activities, supports villagers for cultivation of off - seasonal vegetables, mainly in areas where people depend solely on the forest for their livelihood. The vegetables cultivated in hot houses grow earlier than the normal season time which fetches a higher price in the market.

Vermi composting is being also encouraged importantly to lead farmers away from the use of these chemical fertilizers for better crop production. Though in the future, it is envisaged that the farmers could gain direct benefits by selling the compost they produce, for the moment it is being utilized only in their own fields, which has also been beneficial to them in the form of improved soil conditions and production of better crops.

Wildlife Trade Control



Awareness generation and building capacities of enforcement agencies is the main objective of this project. Workshops have been organised involving all enforcement agencies (Department of Police, Indian Army, Indo Tibetan Border Police, Forest Department, Customs Department, etc.) in Sikkim and northern West Bengal. Cross border meetings between officials of India and Nepal have also been organised successfully with support from TRAFFIC- India.

Posters in 3 languages on relevant issues under the Wildlife Protection Act were also printed and widely distributed.

Wildlife Trade Control

Wildlife Protection Act

WWF for a living planet

Hunting includes the act of killing, poisoning, capturing, snaring, trapping, driving and baiting of any wild animal and even captive animal.

The mere attempt to hunt even if no actual hunting has taken place constitutes hunting.

Even injuring an animal constitutes hunting

In case of birds and reptiles, even damaging the eggs is hunting.

Causing disturbance to the nests and eggs of reptiles also constitutes hunting.

The law prohibits hunting of almost all species of wild animals.

No Authority can permit hunting other than the **Chief Wildlife Warden** and only in exceptional cases by a reasoned order in writing and after options for capture, tranquilizing and translocation have been exhausted.

Design by Priyadarshinee Shrestha, Sketches by Peter Lepcha

WILDLIFE PROTECTION ACT SERIES Published by WWF -India, Sikkim Programme Office

Wildlife Protection Act

WWF for a living planet

Hunting of a wild animal listed in Schedule I and Part II of the Act leads to imprisonment for a minimum of three years and can extend to seven years.

If the offence takes place within a National Park or Sanctuary the above penalties are applicable for hunting any wild animal regardless of whichever Schedule they fall under.

Along with imprisonment, a fine is mandatory. The law stipulates that a minimum of Rs 10,000 has to be paid. There is however no upper limit for fine, which can extend to any amount.

All vehicles, vessels etc used in the commission of the offence will also become a property of the government.

Burden of proof is on the accused.

Design by Priyadarshinee Shrestha, Sketches by Peter Lepcha

WILDLIFE PROTECTION ACT SERIES Published by WWF -India, Sikkim Programme Office



Cases of man animal conflict have been on the rise in the state of Sikkim in areas adjacent to the forests. While on one hand farmers' livelihoods are at stake on the other the conservation angle comes in to play.

A study was undertaken in South and West districts of Sikkim to understand the conflict status of these areas and to gauge the general feeling amongst locals regarding the issue, and also to recommend suitable mitigation measures.

The report of the survey will soon be published.

Policy Initiatives

Devithans are small patches of forests protected by communities over centuries as a religious tradition and are found in all parts of the state. Most *Devithans* are associated with a source of water, which is the *Simsar*. In many of the cases these *Devithans* are as old as 150 years and beliefs that gave birth to them are lost in the tide of time. With an ever increasing population, *Devithans* all over face a lot of pressure and their areas are decreasing. A survey was conducted to ascertain the conservation status of these sites, the local laws that existed and the sentiments of the locals towards them. The findings would ultimately help understand how community conserved areas outside of the PAs were in existence over the years.



Kabi has great significance in the history of Sikkim as the place where the 'Blood Brotherhood Treaty' was signed during the 13th century between the Bhutia King, and the Lepcha Chief along with their retinue. The place where the treaty was signed was marked by large stones and all the powerful spirits were invoked as natural witnesses, amidst a grove of trees, and the patch of forest surrounding it was considered sacred whose sanctity is maintained till this day. The sacred grove at Kabi is a patch of forest within the village at an altitude of 1950m situated just beside the north Sikkim highway. The grove occupies about 3 km² of area and is surrounded by households and degraded forests. While the people of the village have sentiments attached to the sacred grove, it is mostly religious and cultural in nature, and not towards safeguarding the biodiversity values of the grove.



Kabi People

Kabi has a mixed society consisting of the Bhutia, Lepcha, Sherpa and Tamang communities. All communities intermingle freely amongst each other. Inter caste marriages are also prevalent. Most of the people depend on agriculture for their livelihood, cardamom being the main cash crop of the area. Ginger, maize, millet and paddy are other important crops cultivated by the locals.



Around Kabi Caves of Kabi

Namphyang cave is worshipped since ages as a dwelling place of the Lepcha Chief. Thekong Tek. It is located amidst the forests of Kabi above the national highway.

Rongoch cave is also situated at a short distance from the national highway. It is believed to have been used by Guru Padmasambhava himself for meditation and is treated with much reverence by the locals. The cave is believed to have special wish fulfilling powers mainly for married couples to be blessed with a child, and is visited by many. Puga rituals are held here by the local people annually.



Kabi Sacred Grove

The sacred grove, known as 'Kabi Lungchok', is a patch of forest within the village at an altitude of 1950 m and extends from the highway towards the river below covering an area of 3 km². Medicinal plants like the 'Thodney, Nimpaat and Soma' are found in abundance in the grove. There have been direct as well as indirect evidences of several animals like jungle cat, leopard cat, barking deer, rhesus macaque, jackal, yellow throated marten, Himalayan palm civet and Indian porcupine.



Standing among the grove of trees within the sacred grove, one can find the stones commemorating the signing of the Blood Brotherhood Treaty. A little ahead are the large stones which stood as witnesses to the treaty and it is at this spot that the annual puga are held. A four walk below the grove will lead to 'Byachung Thang', agricultural fields of the Lepcha Chief, Thekong Tek and Nseyang Nyel, which stand next to the cave.

Kabi Monastery

Belonging to the Nyingma Sect, the monastery at Kabi was established in the year 1973. Cultural festivals of Dugchay and Boom Kor are celebrated annually at the monastery, in which all the people from the village participate.



Birding in Kabi

Kabi makes an ideal spot for bird watchers. Many birds feeding in and around the village can be watched for a wonderful bird watching experience. The bird life around Kabi includes such colorful and spectacular members like black redstarts, scarlet minivets, daisy headed parakeets, millers, orange flanked bush robins, yellow bellied fantails, etc. Most of these birds can be easily sighted along the trails.

The project in collaboration with Kabi Endeavours, a local NGO is formed chiefly looking at the conservation of the sacred grove and to promote it as both an area for tourists as well as for educational purposes. Initial training for homestay operators and tourist guides had been conducted and an information brochure on Kabi has been developed and released.

Awareness and Environment Education

For exchange and sharing of experiences JFMC (Joint Forest Management Committees) members along with field level forest officials from Sikkim went on an exposure trip to Gorumara National Park in West Bengal, mainly to get an insight into the eco tourism projects being run by the Forest Department with the Eco Development Committees and the partnership that existed between the two.

Awareness generation programmes cater to a variety of target groups and also through various means. While for Forest Department staff it is mainly through training and orientation programme, for schools contests and events are held regularly for them to participate in a spirit of fun and learning.



For the staff of West Bengal Forest Department training on legal matters have been organised regularly and these are well appreciated by the participants.





Successfully running partnerships with different NGOs at the field level form an important requisite for better outreach to the community. Khangchendzonga Conservation Committee (KCC) based in Yuksam, West Sikkim is an NGO working for promotion of eco tourism and conservation in Sikkim and in collaboration with this NGO, a training for eco friendly trekking cooks was organised. The main objective of this training was to encourage and equip the local youth with knowledge and skills for seeking different avenues for self employment.

Greater Rangit Ecotourism Committee (GREC) is an organization formed with the partnership of Indreni Pariwar, Sumbuk and Munal Club, Kitam for the promotion of ecotourism in these villages. With Kitam Bird Sanctuary situated close to these villages there is a good possibility for village tourism to be initiated successfully in these places.

Basic training for Homestay Operators and Naturalist Guides for the youth of Sumbuk and Kitam were organised collaboratively by TMI, KCC and WWF India. As a follow up of this training a more thorough orientation for Bird Guides was also organized in Kitam Bird Sanctuary for an interested and small group of youths.





Students' fascination for red panda has been apparent during the school level awareness generation programmes on the animal. The presentation about the animal never fails to receive a rapt audience followed by a mock quiz in which students are given red panda post cards as prizes.



Project SERVE with a strong Environmental Education component, organises varied events throughout the year for schools to participate. Wildlife Week, Earth Day, Environment Day are important times when the schools gear up for healthy competition amongst themselves. Nature trails, quiz shows, debates, painting contests, zoo visits, town rallies are some of the programmes that are organised for the students to enjoy, share and learn.





Environment Education in schools has gained prominence over the years and when taught effectively can encourage children to be more responsible and sensitive towards nature. With proper environment education being imparted it would not stop only with generating awareness amongst the children, but facilitate that important next step to inspire them into taking action.

A workshop for teachers was organised which saw participation from 10 schools of Gangtok to develop a way forward for EE.

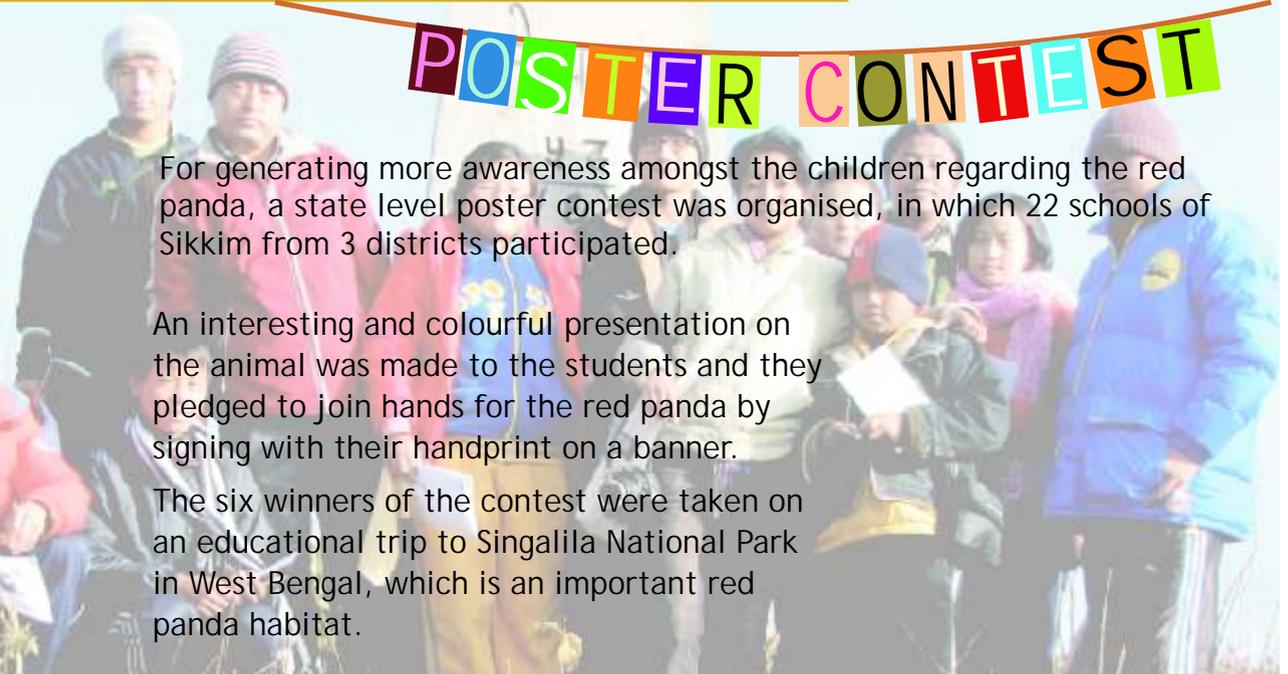
POSTER CONTEST



For generating more awareness amongst the children regarding the red panda, a state level poster contest was organised, in which 22 schools of Sikkim from 3 districts participated.

An interesting and colourful presentation on the animal was made to the students and they pledged to join hands for the red panda by signing with their handprint on a banner.

The six winners of the contest were taken on an educational trip to Singalila National Park in West Bengal, which is an important red panda habitat.



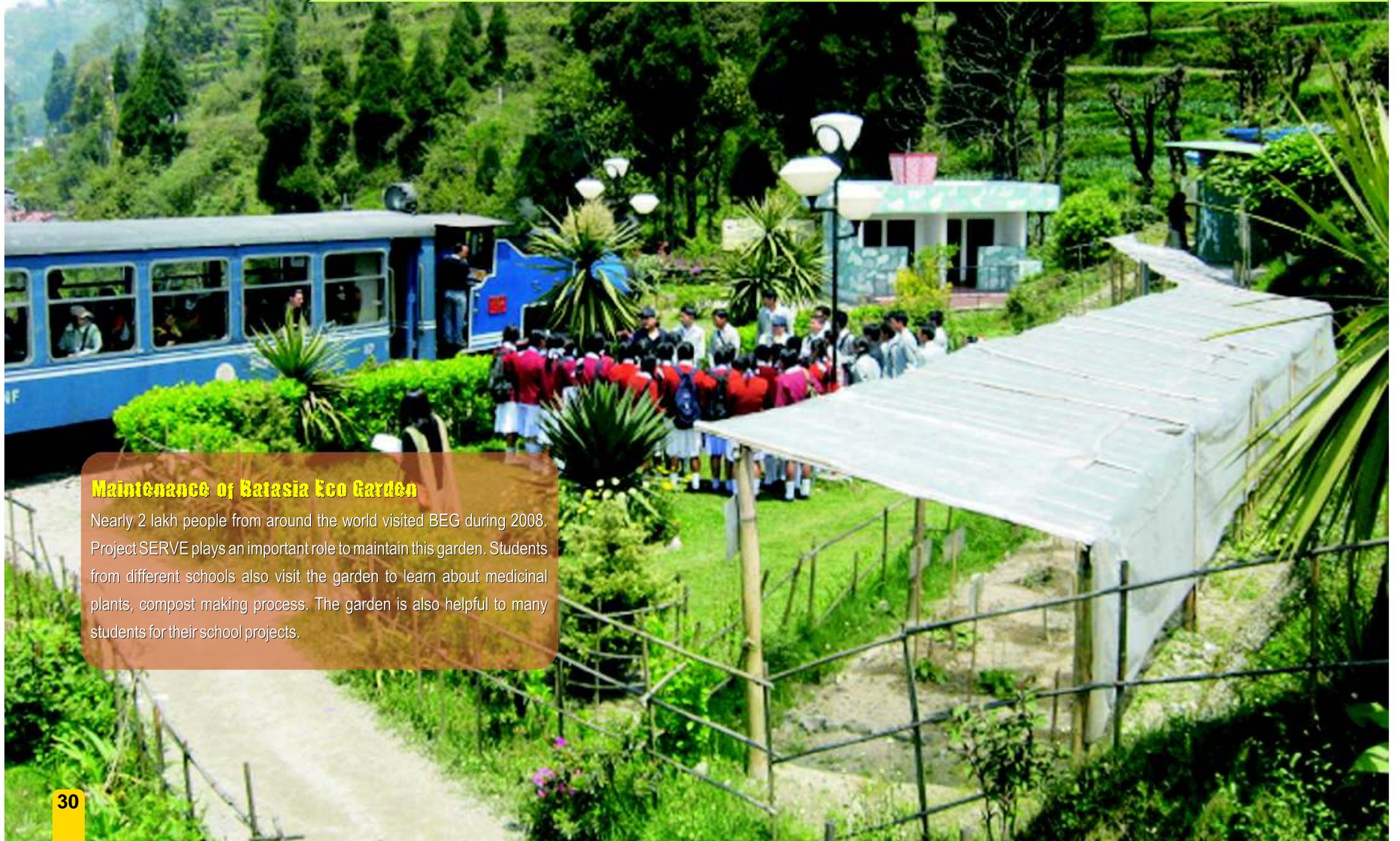
My
Red PANDA
note book



A red panda happily smiles at the Gangtok zoo while adjacent to its enclosure the "Red panda notebook" is formally released by the Hon. Minister for Forests, Government of Sikkim, Mr. SB Subedi.

The notebook was published jointly by WWF- India and FEWMD with support from Gorlitz Zoo, Germany for the Himalayan Zoological Park in Gangtok. A similar notebook was also published jointly with the Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park in Darjeeling, West Bengal.





Maintenance of Batasia Eco Garden

Nearly 2 lakh people from around the world visited BEG during 2008. Project SERVE plays an important role to maintain this garden. Students from different schools also visit the garden to learn about medicinal plants, compost making process. The garden is also helpful to many students for their school projects.

Training and Sensitisation Programmes for enforcement agencies like SSB, Army etc. also forms an important part of the Khangchendzonga Landscape Programme.





Children celebrate Earth Hour at Gangtok on March 28, 2009. The event caught the attention of the local youths who took initiatives on their own to promote it. Earth Hour was observed very successfully in Gangtok and also other parts of the state.

The Team

Programme Team in Sikkim

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Mr. Dinesh Sharma
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Ms. Rajni Pathania
Ms. Sunitha Jaykumar
Mr. DC Pant

Our Partners

Sikkim

- Forest, Environment and Wildlife Management Department
- Department of Science and technology, Government of Sikkim
- Human Resource Development Department, Government of Sikkim
- Department of Home Affairs, Government of Sikkim
- Rural mangement and Development Department
- Police Department
- 17 Mountain Division along with brigades and units under this, Sikkim
- Educational Institutes
- Khangchendzonga Conservation Committee, Yuksam
- Sindrabong Khangchendzonga Ecofriendly Society, Sindrabong
- The Mountain Institute, Sikkim Unit
- Kabi Endeavours
- Pokhri Sanrakshan Samiti
- Greater Rangit Eco-tourism Committee

National

TRAFFIC - India

West Bengal

- Planters' Association
- Forest Department, Government of West Bengal
- Police Department
- Customs and Excise Department
- Department of Revenue Intelligence

International

WWF- US
WWF- UK
WWF- Germany
German Zoo Directors' Association
WWF- Netherlands
WWF- International
Projektwerkstatt Teekampagne, Berlin, Germany
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