

New Horizon Rescues the critically Endangered Avian Species White bellied Heron (*Ardea insignis*) from Koilamoila.

The **New Horizon**, the only society of Koilamoila for biodiversity Conservation and eco tourism promotion, noticed that a villager has captured a big size heron like bird, which nobody seen it before and could not identify the bird. The members of New Horizon NGO rescued the Bird and immediately contacted the Nature's Foster, Bongaigaon for identification of the bird. Accordingly a two-member team visited Koilamoila and identified the bird as **White Bellied Heron** (*Ardea insignis*), a Globally threatened critically endangered species, which indicates extremely small and rapidly declining population.



It came to the notice that on the morning of 15th August, 2007 a villager named Mr. Nathanel Basumatray aged about 50 years from Koilamoila captured a big size bird which came to near their residence along with the flock of their domestic duck and. Initially the villager thought it to be a stork but could not identify. The villagers never came across such bird in and around their area and people started crowding the residence of Mr. Basumatray for a glimpse of the unknown avian species. The matter was intimated to the **New Horizon**, who has been dedicating their services for conservation of rich Biodiversity and promotion of eco tourism in the area since 2000 in association with communities of the locality. They requested the villager not to do any harm to the bird also taking all steps for proper care and appropriate steps for identification and rehabilitation of the bird in its natural habitat.

White bellied heron is known from the eastern Himalayan foothills in **Bhutan** and north-east **India** to the hills of **Bangladesh**, north **Myanmar** and, historically at least, across west and central Myanmar. These birds occasionally visit the **Brahmaputra lowlands of Assam** in winter. Most of the few recent records come from five or six sites in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in India and a few regular nesting sites in Bhutan. Bhutan has an estimated **only 24 herons** with more concentration along the Puntshgangchhu river basin in western part of Bhutan. The recent breeding records of the *White bellied heron* are only limited to Bhutan.



The 2007 IUCN Red List Category has uplisted the status of the White-bellied Heron from **endangered** to **critically endangered** species on the basis of new information, which indicates extremely small and rapidly declining population. In the near future, this decline is expected to increase due to the loss and degradation of lowland forest and wetlands, and through direct exploitation and disturbance. This relegation calls for further strengthening of concerted conservation efforts from countries in which the herons are residing.

The rescue of the white-bellied heron from Koilamoila is of very remarkable for the conservation world in the sense there was no recent reporting of occurrence of the species from the Himalyan foothills of Western Assam. It was apparently “not very rare” in Assam (Baker 1922–1930), with small numbers appearing in wetlands of the Brahmaputra valley during winter (Stevens 1914–1915), but again has become a “very rare” visitor to this area (Saikia and Bhattacharjee 1990b).

The IUCN – The world conservation Union has for more than four decades been assessing the conservation status of species, subspecies, varieties and even selected subpopulations on a global scale in order to highlight taxa threatened with extinction, and therefore promote their conservation. The real potential of this species as a tool for environmental monitoring still remains largely unexplored.



In Bhutan, a two-year study (April 2003- April 2005) on the White-bellied Heron, initiated by RSPN, Bhutan 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. They are still carrying out the systematic study of the species.

But till 2005, no such systematic studies have been conducted in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh where some scattered sightings are observed. Nature's Foster, an environmental activist group from Bongaigaon is carrying out a study on the occurrence of White-bellied Heron in the Manas Biosphere Reserve in the Himalayan foothills of Assam under the grant from the Birdfair/RSPB Research Fund for Endangered Birds to give emphasis to record the occurrence of the species in the Indo Bhutan bordering areas of Manas Biosphere Reserve and other wetlands of Western Assam.

New horizon and Nature's Foster expressed their happiness for arrival of such a critically endangered species at Koilamoila and appeals all concerned for active support and cooperation in conservation of rich biodiversity of their locality. They are also making people aware about not to do any harm to such important species incase they visit their villages anymore. The forest department has also been informed about the rescue. Both the above organizations are taking steps for safe rehabilitation in their natural habitat.

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