

Eastern Himalayas

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Climate science is common knowledge

A study looking at climate change impacts on patterns of resource use by Dokpas, the nomadic pastoralists of North Sikkim, has reported some very definite observations. “There is less snowfall—where once there would be over 5 ft (1.5m) of snow outside our temporary dwellings, today there is only a couple of feet of snow; the lowest altitude that received snowfall has shifted upwards, to a village at a higher altitude.” Similar observations were recorded for an increase in overall warming, earlier summers, delayed monsoons and shorter winters.

The Dokpas also say that as a result of less snow, shorter winters (when pastures are snow covered) and erratic rainfall (heavier but shorter spells) the grazing pastures are drying up. The quality of grass is of immense significance to the pastoralists. They believe that the poor quality of grass has resulted in a large number of sheep dying; as a result, Dokpas have started replacing the physically weaker sheep with more yaks as an adaptation strategy.



A Dokpa woman with yaks, North Sikkim; and, (below) meandering stream and ox bow lakes at Jachu Valley

This study by Tenzing Ingty, a doctoral student at ATREE, also found that climate change has had a profound impact on religious sentiments. The communities worshipped the surrounding mountains and mountain deities, which they believed protected and provided for them, but are now “losing their power”. Nima Gyansen, an aged Dokpa laments: “The mountains have been reduced to balding old men, the snow cover reduced to a few wisps of white hair. We worshipped the mighty snow clad mountains, alas our gods and culture are threatened.”

In the Eastern Himalayas, where there is limited knowledge on the impacts of climate change, indigenous communities and their wealth of traditional ecological knowledge could guide and complement scientific studies.

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Community needs and conservation

In Mimi village, in the far flung Kiphire district of Nagaland, on the border with Myanmar, ATREE has worked with a local organisation—International Border Area People’s Welfare Organisation (IBAPWO)—to help the village council provide drinking water for the village. The water supply system consists of seven community taps and three storage tanks and provides water to all 180 households of Mimi village. By addressing this basic need, the project has been able to mobilize people for conservation. Now IBAPWO is having a series of dialogues with the Village Council and the people of Mimi for protecting the watershed from where this water is drawn.



Community representatives at the inauguration of the water supply system at Mimi.

The land belongs to different clans and individuals who have provided consent for declaring the area of the watershed a Village Reserve Forest. IBAPWO will be continuing the dialogue with the community and Village Council of Mimi to establish a Village Reserve Forest and protect the watershed. It is estimated that this will result in conservation of around 25 sq. km of forest. This will be the first of its kind in Nagaland and an exemplary model for replication in the region.

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Supporting the children of Manas and Kaziranga

180 high school students from poor and human-wildlife conflict affected families around Manas and Kaziranga National Parks were awarded scholarships by the World Heritage Biodiversity Programme in India (WHBPI). This is the third year of the scholarship programme in Assam.



Tiger at Kaziranga National Park.

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“Kaziranga is my home and our pride and we students have an important role in preserving it. The scholarship has been a source of encouragement and I used it to purchase additional books and stationery.”
- Bonapriya Kalita, Class X, Kaziranga Girls High School.

TN Khoshoo Award 2011

Two professionals from North East India have been conferred the TN Khoshoo Award for 2011. Dr. Sandeep Tambe, Special Secretary in the Department of Rural Management and Development, Government of Sikkim, and Hemalata Pradhan, a botanical illustrator from Kalimpong who specializes in orchids, received the Award at a ceremony in Bangalore on 3 February 2012.

The awards were presented by Prof. Elinor Ostrom, Nobel Laureate in Economic Sciences and Distinguished Professor at Indiana University, USA. Prof. Ostrom also delivered the TN Khoshoo Memorial Lecture.



Prof. Elinor Ostrom flanked by recipients of the TN Khoshoo Award 2011 – Hemalata Pradhan (left) and Dr. Sandeep Tambe.

Dr. Tambe received the award for his efforts in sustainability and community-based governance of common property resources in Sikkim. Hemalata Pradhan's work on Indian wild and jewel orchids are part of her effort to immortalize the biodiversity she sees disappearing. She is currently setting up a Natural History Art Institute in Kalimpong.

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New staff

Sunil Dahal has joined the Eastern Himalayas Programme in Gangtok as Administration and Accounts Officer. Born and raised in Pakyong, Sikkim he completed his early education from St. Xavier's School, Pakyong and his B.Com from Bhawanipur College, Kolkata where he passed a professional course from the Institute of Cost Accountants of India (ICWAI). He has worked at Berger Paints India Ltd as a Junior Accounts Officer in their Jammu plant and with URS Scott Wilson India Pvt. Ltd., a British Engineering Consultant, on the ADB funded project 'Master Plan for Land Transport Management in Sikkim'. His other interests are travelling, reading and web surfing.



Karuna Gurung has joined the Eastern Himalayas Programme as a Junior Research Fellow on the project 'Promoting the use of Invasive Plant Species in Sikkim for dye making: a strategy for enhancing livelihoods of rural communities'. Born and raised in Gangtok, she completed her Bachelor's degree in Biotechnology from M.S. Ramaiah College of Arts, Science & Commerce, Bangalore and Master's degree in Life Sciences from Mount Carmel College, Bangalore in 2011. Her hobbies include gardening, listening to music and travelling.

ATREE's mission is to promote socially just environmental conservation and sustainable development by generating rigorous interdisciplinary knowledge that engages actively with academia, policy makers, practitioners, activists, students and wider public audiences. ATREE's Northeast/Eastern Himalayas Programme has a direct presence in the Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalayas and Assam, and works with a range of local partners in the other states of north east India.

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