

HRP outreach activities



Education and outreach form the base for any successful conservation project. The Himalayan Restoration Project (HRP) makes sure to give equal importance to planting native saplings and connecting the local communities with the project. Through community meetings, awareness programmes, and regular interactions with local stakeholders, HRP seeks to build trust, encourage participation, and ensure that local communities become active partners in the restoration process. This month, our team engaged in three major outreach activities.

Conservation challenges: insights from Bharmour

The town of Bharmour is located approximately 60 km from Chamba and is home to diverse flora and fauna, including Asiatic Black Bears *Ursus thibetanus*. Lately, there have been multiple reports of increased human–bear negative interactions, with two unfortunate



Outreach in Bharmour. ©Amrin Ansari.

attacks on humans over the last month. This has caused increased rage and anger among the communities. In order to address the increased pressure of the communities to translocate bears, the Forest Department had organised a meeting with the villagers on 4 June in Khani Village. The meeting was attended by 68 participants, including 40 villagers and 28 forest department personnel. Our team was present to support the forest department by sharing our knowledge and field-based learnings from Chamba.

However, due to recent incidents of negative interactions, the villagers were visibly enraged. Many participants openly shared their anger, frustration, and deep concerns about repeated human–bear encounters and the safety risks they face in their daily lives. Because of this charged atmosphere, the discussion became very intense and interactive, and our team was unable to complete the planned presentation. The people expressed strong



Outreach in Sahoo. © Payal.

WSHG participants. © M. Nishigandha.



opinions regarding the translocation of bears from the landscape and demanded that the forest department initiate urgent translocation measures.

We tried communicating the practical challenges of translocation by emphasising how translocation is not a permanent solution in the long run. We shared that the eradication of one bear from the landscape would not necessarily reduce negative interactions because another individual might eventually move into the same space. In the emotionally charged situation, our words went to waste as it was very difficult to be heard. The DFO of Bharmour, Navanath Shivaji Mane, had to intervene and calm the raging crowd, but he was too bombarded with pressure from the villagers to translocate the bears.

Our team also suggested the possibility of ecological restoration to be one of the practical and long term solutions for the issue and explained how restoring degraded habitats can reduce pressure on villages over time. We also discussed about managing horticulture waste and using preventive measures such as travelling in groups and carrying torches at night to reduce interactions. Surprisingly, the villagers agreed to collaborate with the

forest department for restoration, and it was concluded that the department will actively take part in dibbling of native species seeds during the monsoon season to increase the natural regeneration of the surrounding forests.

Despite the tense atmosphere, this meeting provided valuable insights into local perceptions and concerns of the people. It also highlighted the urgency of conducting systematic research and extracting baseline data from the landscape to formulate conservation intervention methods to mediate coexistence in the landscape.

Environment Day celebration

On the eve of World Environment Day, a function was organised by the Paryavaran Chetna Evang Gramin Vikas Prashikshan Kendra (PCEGVPK), a local NGO working on environmental awareness in Chamba. The event brought together more than 100 participants, including students from three local schools, along with people from the village, fellow organisation members and a few chief guests. The event progressed with different types of activities like poster, quiz and debate competitions to encourage environmental awareness among the students. The HRP team also had the opportunity to address the



WSHG participants. © M. Nishigandha.

attendees, where we introduced our project and the importance of ecological restoration. The wildlife themed sticker sets were an absolute hit, especially among the students who found them informative and fun.

Moreover, PCEGVPK also launched their annual magazine titled “Paryavaran Chetna” during the event, which marked an important highlight of the programme. The magazine featured contributions from various participants, including Payal, a community intern with HRP, who shared her one-year journey, experiences, and learnings with the project. We expect that her story will resonate strongly with local readers, helping convey conservation messages in a relatable way. By sharing her personal perspective in Hindi language, the article has the potential to inspire others—especially young individuals from the region—to take initiative and actively participate in conservation efforts, fostering a sense of stewardship towards the local environment.

Beyond outreach, this event was also a wonderful opportunity for the team to follow up with the NGO members and build connections with local stakeholders like the forest department staff and Panchayat Pradhans for future collaboration. Participating in events like these not only helps spread awareness about ecological restoration but also creates opportunities for dialogue, partnership, and integrates a holistic approach with respect to the communities.

WSHG meeting

On 6 June, the HRP team held a meeting with the women’s self-help group (WSHG) in the village of Kakeda, attended by 16 women.

The meeting provided an opportunity for the team to engage with the communities and understand their personal experiences through open discussion. All the participants expressed concerns about crop depredation by local wildlife, such as langurs, macaques, and bears and agreed on the urgency for finding a landscape specific solution to their problem. The HRP team then introduced the project’s objectives, history and achievements to the participants to explain the importance of ecological restoration in the landscape. Posters helped simplify complex ideas and served as visual tools to explain the challenges faced and the goals envisioned for the future. The wildlife themed sticker sets further helped the team to spark their curiosity and engage better with the communities.

To our delight, two of the participants showed interest in collaborating with HRP for the plantation of native saplings in their non arable farms for the upcoming year. Meetings like this help us reach out to the communities, and one-on-one interactions help us further to build trust essential for long term connection of the communities to the project.

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Amrin Ansari

Himalayan Restoration Project, Zoo Outreach Organisation, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India.

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