

TIBET SPECIAL

Environment, ecosystem status in Tibet encouraging

Tibet remained one of the regions in the world with the best environmental quality and more stable ecosystem in 2019, according to the region's latest environment report issued last month.

The report, released by the Tibet Department of Ecology and Environment, shows that water quality in major rivers and lakes, as well as local air quality, remained high last year. In 2019, the region's rate of days of good air quality reached 99.6%. And the rate in Lhasa, the region's capital, reached 99.7%, ranking first among China's 168 big cities. Nyingchi, Shigatse, Lhokha, Chamdo, Nagchu, and Ngari ranked first, 13th, 4th, 15th, 18th and eighth respectively in air quality among 337 Chinese prefectures and cities.

Air quality around Mount Qomolangma, the highest mountain in the world, remained good.

Zhang Tianhua, deputy chief of the department, said Tibet's biodiversity and ecosystem also remained stable in 2019.

"Since last year, all levels of government have followed the decisions made by the regional government," Zhang said. "Efficient measures have been taken and great efforts have been made to protect air, water and soil.

"As the region launched special campaigns to reduce discharge from diesel trucks and dispose rural agricultural waste, the battle against pollution has gained progress," Zhang added. "In 2019, Tibet continued to enhance its ecological safety, with more than 11.7 billion yuan (\$1.65 billion) invested in 10 related projects."

By the end of last year, Tibet had set up 47 nature reserves covering 412,200 square kilometers, accounting for 34.35% of the region's total land area.

In 2019, more than 87,000 hectares of land in Tibet was planted with trees. The region currently has more than 14.91 million hectares of forests, accounting for 12.14% of its land and ranking it fifth in China in terms of forest area.

The rare wildlife population in the region has been growing, with the Tibetan antelope population growing to around 200,000. The wild yak population exceeded 10,000.

Tibet has about 6.52 million hectares of wetlands, ranking second in China behind Qinghai province.

The report also shows there are 9,600 wild plant species in Tibet. Among them, 855 are unique to the province.

— DAQIONG AND PALDEN NYIMA



As a result of the local people and governments' efforts in environmental protection, the Tibet autonomous region remains one of the most pristine lands in the world. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Pollution under control as authorities and residents take action

Yungdrung Tsering, a herder in Dengchen county in Chamdo city, the Tibet autonomous region, is pleased with the government's efforts in pollution control in his home village.

Thanks to the efforts, he said his fellow villagers now enjoy a better living environment that is very different from a few years ago.

"Garbage was found everywhere on the hills and in the rivers, and it caused hidden danger to our health," Yungdrung Tsering said. "There were incidents of animals dying after eating plastic bags in my village several years ago," he added.

Yungdrung Tsering said the situation has improved thanks to government efforts in recent years, with pollution coming more under control.

Dengchen county has implemented a series of measures to deal with pollution.

The government has made heavy investments in this field, with locals hired for ecological patrols and companies commissioned for waste disposal.

Collecting precious caterpillar fungus is a source of revenue for residents in Dengchen. And littering is a problem during the fungus-collecting season.

The county started a pollution prevention campaign in March, dispatching garbage bags, installing dustbins and educating people on environmental protection.

"Thanks to the efforts, the



Volunteers collect garbage on a hillside in Dengchen county.

PALDEN NYIMA / CHINA DAILY

environment in rural areas has been improving, with fewer animals dying from eating garbage," Yungdrung Tsering said. "Residents' awareness of environmental protection has also improved."

Courses on environmental protection are being taught in schools.

In the Yiri Township Primary School of Chamdo's Riwoche county, environmental protection is part of the school's curriculum.

Sonam Tsering, a student at the school, said caring for nature is as important as caring for his own home.

"Environmental protection requires everybody's collective effort and we should develop awareness from a very young age," Sonam Tsering said.

Known as the "eastern gate of the Tibet autonomous region", Chamdo stands at the upper reaches of Asia's big rivers such as the Yangtze, Lancang

(Mekong) and Nujiang (Salween).

The city was accredited a national model city for ecological environment by the Ministry of Ecology and Environment in 2019.

Environmental protection measures of Chamdo city include pollution control, water source protection, reforestation and control of desertification.

According to the Chamdo bureau of ecology and environment, 11,800 people have participated in the city's reforestation projects in the past four years, turning 38,400 hectares of land into forests.

The city has spent more than 190 million yuan (\$26.9 million) in the development of three regional-level nature reserves.

Chamdo has carried out a campaign to clean and improve the area's living environment since 2016.

By the end of 2019, 6,170

dustbins had been installed and 64 waste disposal facilities were built in rural areas. In addition, 1,194 trucks were purchased for garbage transportation in rural areas.

Participants in environmental protection include officials, residents, monks, nuns, students and volunteers.

Ngakwang Lhundrub, a resident in Zoba village of Kharo township in Chamdo city, said he has made a hobby of collecting waste along the National Highway 214 near his village with his fellow villagers.

"We volunteer to collect garbage to preserve the image of our home village, and improve our living environment," Ngakwang Lhundrub said.

"Activities are not limited to our village," he added. "The riverbanks and neighboring areas benefit as well."

Kang Haiqiang, an official at the Chamdo ecology and environment bureau, said the idea of green development prevails everywhere in his city.

"In addition to improving living conditions, urban and rural residents of Chamdo also financially benefit from the environmental protection moves, as many of them are employed by the government as ecological patrollers," Kang said.

"Protecting the environment has become a consensus of all people in the city. It is a long-term promise and a glorious mission."

— PALDEN NYIMA

Preservation leads to increase in once-threatened wildlife populations

Wild animals such as Tibetan antelopes and wild Tibetan donkeys are no longer hard to find in Tibet, thanks to recent efforts in local protection.

Tenzin Gyime is a forestry patroller in Gyirong county, which is part of the Qomolangma National Nature Reserve.

Tenzin Gyime said protecting animals is part of a Tibetan tradition.

"When drivers see wild animals crossing the roads, they would stop right away to make way for them," the patroller said. "Protecting wildlife is a common practice in my village. Even when wild animals spoil crops, villagers never take revenge."

In recent years, local governments have been stressing work of wildlife protection. The regional government of Tibet invested more than 11.7 billion yuan (\$1.67 billion) in improving the ecological environment in 2019.

Thanks to the efforts, the number of wild animals has kept growing in recent years.

According to statistics released by the Tibet Wildlife Conservation Society,

the population of Tibetan antelopes increased from 50,000-70,000 in the 1990s to more than 200,000 at present, and the number of wild Tibetan donkeys has increased from 50,000 to about 90,000. The number of endangered black-necked cranes grew to 8,000, up from 1,000-3,000 in the 1990s.

The region's development of reserves to protect animals dates back to 1974. Since then, Tibet has established nature reserves for various rare species.

Zhang Tianhua, head of the Tibet Department of Ecology and Environment, said the number of the region's nature reserves hit 47 in 2019. The total area of the reserves has surpassed 410,000 square kilometers.

As China's largest, the Changthang National Nature Reserve covers more than 290,000 sq km. It has hired 780 rural residents as wildlife patrollers.

Tashi Sonam from Nyima county is one of the patrollers.

Born in a nomadic family,

Tashi Sonam said he grew up in an environment with wild animals around and has liked being around animals since he was a child.

He was trained to learn more about animal protection years back.

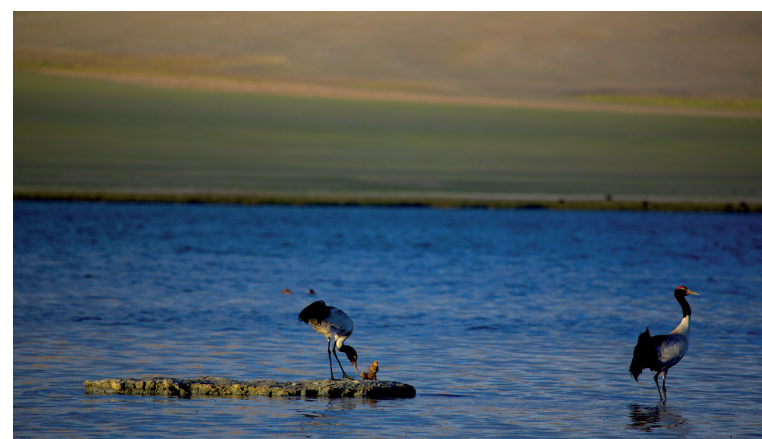
"In our monitoring zone, we can film and record what we see and send reports regularly," the 25-year-old said.

Tashi Dorje, an official at the Tibet Department of Forestry and Grassland, said the wildlife protection law is an effective means in animal protection as it offers a sound legislative basis for punishing wildlife-related infringements.

In an illegal poaching case announced in May in Chamdo, for instance, three criminals were sentenced to 11 to 12 months in prison and fined 60,000 yuan.

The law also stipulates the government's compensation for incidents when residents' properties were damaged by wild animals. To date, 640 million yuan has been paid to residents in such compensation.

— PALDEN NYIMA



Black-necked cranes are spotted in one of the nature reserves in Tibet. The number of the endangered species has grown to 8,000 at present, from 1,000-3,000 in the 1990s. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Wild animals live in harmony with human beings in Tibet.