

Relocation to keep ancient village intact

Efforts made to avoid risk of damaging old buildings by human activities. **Palden Nyima** and **Daqiong** report

After he moved into a new settlement at the end of 2019, 70-year-old Sonam Tsering is pleased with his new home equipped with new appliances.

A traditional village protection project took place in Sonam Tsering's village of Tsogo, Tsogo township in Kongpo'gyada county of the Tibet autonomous region, contributing to cultural preservation and improved livelihoods.

Surrounded by snow-capped mountains and forests, Tsogo village is 10 kilometres away from Baksum Tso Lake, one of the region's most famous tourist sites. It is regarded as a well preserved traditional Tibetan village.

To ensure protection, the county government of Kongpo'gyada, which is under the administration of Nyingchi city, invested more than 93 million yuan (\$13 million) in building a resettlement close by. Sonam Tsering moved to his new home with another 106 households.

Featuring a spectacular natural landscape and unique Tibetan cultural resources, the village was deemed a historical village by the Tibet autonomous region's government in 2013. In 2015, the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development recognised it as a traditional Chinese village.

Thanks to the relocation project, all 63 traditional houses — with a history of between 200 and 600 years — are now under protection.

Tenzin Dondrub, Party secretary of the Tsogo township, said the relocation project aimed to preserve the village and improve livelihoods. The local government will encourage villagers to be involved in tourism as a way of income generation.

He said relocating the residents to the new settlement would better protect the village, which features many ancient Tibetan architectural



elements, and it will attract tourists as the villagers' new houses now have running water, heating and indoor toilets.

Tenzin Dondrub said the old houses were built hundreds years ago and most of them were vulnerable to strong winds and rain. The situation was a potential threat to people's lives and property.

Moving out of the traditional houses has halted the risk of damaging the ancient buildings by excessive human activities, he said.

As an effective measure to enhance preservation, a cultural relics protection team was set up in the village in early 2019.

Norbu Tsering, an official of the village, said he was happy with the relocation plan and the measures to protect the traditional houses.

"In the past, we put livestock on the first floor of the house and it was not tidy and clean as in the

new settlement. Now we keep all the livestock out of the villagers' houses," said Norbu Tsering.

"The old houses reflect the traditional architectural culture of Tibetan residences in the Nyingchi region; there is a high value for historical and cultural studies," he added.

Norbu Tsering is working on establishing a tourism company and plans to attract more tourists to the village.

Tibet currently has more than 30 traditional villages. Enriched with geographic and traditional elements, each village reflects a particular historical and cultural background.

"In the future, we will make sure that traditional buildings get proper protection and we can be proud of the cultural heritage when outsiders visit our village," said Norbu Tsering.



From top: Residents in Tsogo village in Kongpo'gyada county entertain tourists with folk dance. Snow-capped mountains can be seen from the ancient village of Tsogo. PHOTOS BY PALDEN NYIMA / CHINA DAILY

Preservation leads to increase in wildlife

By **PALDEN NYIMA**

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 was part of the Qomolangma National Nature Reserve and is home to rare species such as snow leopards, langur monkeys and gorals — animals on the State's first and second-level lists for protection.

Protecting animals is part of a Tibetan tradition, Tenzin Gyime said.

"When drivers see langur monkeys or other animals crossing the road, they 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."

The regional government of Tibet spent more than 11.7 billion yuan (\$1.74 billion) in improving the ecological environment last year.

As a result, the number of wild animals has continued to grow in recent years.

The Tibet Wildlife Conservation Society says, the population of Tibetan antelopes rose from 50,000-70,000 in the 1990s to more than 200,000 at present, and the number of wild Tibetan donkeys has risen 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, while the number of wild yaks rose to about 10,000.

The population of snow leopards and blue sheep has also increased significantly.

The region's development of reserves to protect animals dates back to 1974. Since then, it has established nature reserves for rare species including Tibetan antelopes, black-necked cranes, wild yaks, takins, wild Tibetan donkeys and white-lipped deer.

Zhang Tianhua, head of the Tibet Department of Ecology and

Environment, said the number of nature reserves in the region reached 47 in 2019. The reserves now cover more than 410,000 square kilometres.

As China's largest, the Changthang National Nature Reserve covers more than 290,000 sq km, including seven counties in Nagchu city and Ngari prefecture.

The reserve has recruited 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 of wild animals and has liked being around animals since he was a child.

He was trained to learn more about animal protection years back. Now he and his colleagues can skillfully use equipment such as satellite navigation, telescopes, satellite phone and cameras.

"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 way of protecting animals as it offers a sound legislative basis for punishing wildlife-related infringements.

On Oct 6, 2017, the story of off-road vehicles chasing Tibetan antelopes was widely discussed on social media.

After investigations by forestry police, seven people were charged with illegally approaching wild animals and were fined more than 100,000 yuan.

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

Aviation a game-changer for locals

By **YUAN SHENGGAO**

Jangra Yeshe, a girl from an impoverished family of herders in Damxung county in Tibet, did not expect she would live a life different from other children in her neighbourhood.

Life was simple throughout her childhood. After attending school, she did jobs such as sheep herding and shearing.

While herding on the grassland, she loved to fly paper planes.

"I hope someday I can fly a real aircraft," Jangra Yeshe used to say.

Her dream came true three years ago, with the help of a local general aviation company.

At the end of 2016, when she studied at a vocational school in Lhasa, Jangra Yeshe received a call from the Lhasa-based Snow Eagle General Aviation. The company made her dreams come true when it selected her as one of several pilots from poverty-stricken families.

Funded by Nanjing, Jiangsu-based Ruor General Aviation Development Group, Snow Eagle was founded in 2016 in Lhasa.

"I couldn't believe I would have a chance to receive training for a pilot," Jangra Yeshe said.

According to Snow Eagle, the cost for training a helicopter pilot is about 1.45 million yuan (\$216,000).

Jangra Yeshe departed from Lhasa for Nanjing on Jan 12, 2017.

Once arriving at the Ruor General Aviation training school in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, she found that learning to fly is a far more arduous task than she expected.

Helicopter training started on Feb 24, 2017.



Local residents in Chamdo sing and dance during a horse racing festival. ZHANG RUFENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

"Flying a helicopter is much more difficult than flying other aircrafts because all the operations are manual," the girl said.

The girl said she encountered her biggest challenge in training during a flying test.

"I was flying alone. The ground positioning system malfunctioned during the process, which made me extremely nervous.

"Fortunately the system quickly returned to normal," Jangra Yeshe said.

After 150 hours of flying training, the girl said she became capable of responding to many kinds of emergency.

"Even without GPS, I can fly guided by my eyesight and land safely," Jangra Yeshe said.

After obtaining licenses for flying a helicopter in March 2018, she started her career as a pilot in Snow Eagle.

"The training programme and the job as a helicopter pilot have brought fundamental changes to me and my family," Jangra Yeshe said.

She said she currently has a monthly salary of 11,600 yuan.

Jangra Yeshe said she hoped to buy an apartment in Lhasa and live together with her parents.

She said her parents and neighbours have expressed their pride in her since she became a pilot.

"Once I flew a helicopter back to Damxung on a mission, the villagers praised me as a fairy flying into the blue sky and the pride of Damxung," she said.

According to Sumtsen, deputy general manager of Snow Eagle, the company has currently employed 110 staff members, with 75 per cent of them being residents of Tibet.

"Now the first group of young Tibetans has flown civilian helicopters to destinations such as Qomolangma base camp after professional and intensive training," Sumtsen said. "We will continue to train more local professionals to better serve the socioeconomic development of Tibet and help more young people realize their dreams."



Black-necked cranes are spotted in one of the nature reserves in Tibet. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY