

# Biodiversity rebounds in Qinghai

Protection efforts, national parks lure wildlife back to western province

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A wide-ranging drive to bolster biodiversity protection through the establishment of national parks and natural reserves in Qinghai province has brought back herds of wildlife and led the way for broader conservation efforts across the nation, officials and experts said.

The western province — home to China's largest lake and the source of Asia's three longest rivers — has spearheaded a national drive for the establishment of national parks, with over 39 percent of the region now placed under state protection.

With strict policies on ecological conservation being put in place, Qinghai, which has one national park and two others that are being developed, has seen a steady recovery of its endangered species.

The population of Tibetan antelopes has recovered from fewer than 30,000 to over 70,000, and that of Przewalski's gazelle, found in the wild only in China, has been restored to over 2,700 from about 300, according to the provincial forestry and grassland administration. The population of snow leopards has also seen gradual recovery in recent years.

Meanwhile, Qinghai is also developing a national park in the basin of the Qinghai Lake — China's largest lake — and another in the Qilian Mountains.

The establishment of the three national parks in Qinghai is part of a national plan released in December to develop 49 such parks across the nation, accounting for about 10 percent of the country's land area. Of the 49 parks, 13 will be located in the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, accounting for 70 percent of the total area of the national park candidates.

The State Council, China's Cabinet, said in a policy statement in November that the 49 parks will include regions with "unique natural landscapes, the most important natural ecosystems, the most essential natural heritages, and the most biodiverse areas".

Wang Enguang, an official with the Qinghai Forestry and Grassland Administration, said the province has been a trailblazer of innovative practices to lead the nation in ecological conservation, including adding related jobs and coordinating protection measures in urban and rural areas.

The nation started piloting the development of the Three-River-Source National Park, which contains the headwaters of China's three major rivers — the Yangtze, Yellow and Lancang — after a plan for the park was issued by the central government in 2016.

The national park, also known as Sanjiangyuan, received official designation as one of the first five in China in October 2021, becoming the world's highest and largest national park with an expanse of 190,700 square kilometers.

"The primary function of national parks is to ensure the authenticity and integrity of natural ecosystems," Wang said.

## Protecting areas

Efforts to protect the Sanjiangyuan area started in 2003 after China launched a national natural reserve in the region, with the nation investing 24.4 billion yuan between 2005 and 2020 for two phases of ecological protection and restoration efforts.

To boost the protection of the



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Qinghai Lake, a key habitat for migratory birds, the province launched a bid to begin developing the wetland into a national park in April 2022, drawing up plans for ecological conservation, the protection of the aquatic environment and the restoration of ecosystems, including wetlands.

Wang Xiangguo, head of the administration for the Three-River-Source National Park, said the degradation of the region's ecology has been contained, the population of wildlife has increased significantly and the wetland areas have stabilized.

The percentage of vegetation cover in Sanjiangyuan had reached 67.3 percent by 2020, with the percentage of land in severe and medium-level desertification down by 5.6 percentage points over the past decade.

However, he pointed out that due to its unique geographical location and harsh, high-altitude climate, the ecological system in Sanjiangyuan remains "sensitive and fragile".

"The stability of the ecological sys-

tem still faces severe challenges, and issues such as grassland degradation, land desertification, soil erosion, and ice and snow melting remain prominent," he said.

As one of the regions with the harshest natural conditions in China, the level of social participation in the conservation efforts remains inadequate, he said.

He explained that the channels remained limited for local herdsmen to increase their incomes, with the animal husbandry sector continuing to be a key source for their livelihood and the level of public services underdeveloped.

## Plans in works

Going forward, Wang said the administration has outlined a long-term plan to promote the high-quality construction of the national parks including steps to promote eco-friendly growth, expand the scale of green sectors and encourage the transfer of more herdsmen to other sectors until 2024.

By 2025, the region will see improved water quality in the three rivers, greater adaptability to climate change and more herdsmen being transferred, he said.

So far, the region has offered jobs related to ecological conservation to 17,211 local residents as part of broader steps to attract farmers and herdsmen to take part in protection efforts, he added.

Many experts have underlined the broader significance of the development of national parks on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau.

Erik Solheim, the former executive director of the United Nations Environment Programme, said the development of national parks in Qinghai "provides a valuable experience on improving ecological protection, alleviating poverty and promoting community development at the same time".

One of the big challenges for the development of the national parks, he noted, was "to gain the local herdsmen's support and secure the

communities' livelihoods".

"A public welfare mechanism has been established, ensuring each household gets a park ranger job with a stable monthly salary. Public service capacity has been greatly enlarged, such as medical care, pensions, education and e-commerce," he said.

"This is key to conservation everywhere, the mobilization of local communities. A beautiful China must be built with local buy-in," he added.

Chen Fahu, an academician from the Institute of Tibetan Plateau Research under the Chinese Academy of Sciences, told a forum earlier this month that the development of national parks on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau will serve as a key carbon sink for the nation.

The development of the Three-River-Source and Qilian Mountains national parks will enable the ecosystems of grasslands, forests and wetlands to play more important roles as carbon sinks and help the nation honor its climate commitments, he said.

## Policy Digest

### Tough measures reduce number of drug crimes

China has effectively curbed the incidence of drug crimes by employing tough measures, the Ministry of Public Security said at a news conference on June 21.

The country cracked 1.07 million cases involving drug crimes from 2013 to 2022, capturing 1.28 million suspects and seizing more than 650 metric tons of drugs, the ministry revealed.

The number of drug cases cracked across the country dropped from a peak of more than 160,000 in 2015 to 35,000 in 2022, it said.

The country has also been working actively to improve the rehabilitation of drug users. By the end of 2022, there were about 1.12 million users in the country, a year-on-year drop of 24.3 percent, according to a report released by the office of China National Narcotics Control Commission.

In another development, the National Immigration Administration said immigration authorities across the country cracked 361 drug cases at ports and borders in the first half of this year, capturing 528 suspects and seizing 4.74 tons of drugs.

### NEVs, charging facilities see explosive growth

China has made significant progress in establishing charging facilities for new energy vehicles, according to the National Development and Reform Commission.

The number of such facilities rose from fewer than 100,000 in 2015 to more than 6.3 million by the end of May this year, the commission said at a briefing on June 21.

The numbers of both new energy vehicles and charging facilities in the country have "grown explosively" since 2021, the commission said, adding that 65 percent of the country's expressway service areas are equipped with charging stations.

Annual sales of new energy vehicles in 2022 exceeded 6.88 million, about four times more than in 2020, according to the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

In addition, about 3 million new energy vehicles were produced and about 2.9 million were sold in the country in the first five months of this year, the ministry said.

### Fisheries urged to ensure aquatic product supply

The General Office of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs has issued a notice asking local fishery authorities to guarantee the stable production and supply of aquatic products in summer.

Summer is an important time for the growth of aquatic animals and plants, but the frequent occurrence of extreme weather during the season, such as droughts, high temperatures, typhoons and floods, can have a strong negative impact on aquaculture, the notice said.

Local fishery authorities should enhance communication with meteorological, water resources and marine departments to monitor climate disasters and issue alerts in a timely manner, the notice said.

It also asked local authorities to watch out for and issue alerts about diseases sustained by aquatic animals, help aquatic farms prevent and treat the diseases and strengthen inspection to ensure medications are used properly.

WANG QINGYUN

# Organization encourages herdsmen to lead eco-friendly lifestyle

By XU WEI

For years, Dondrub Chopel has spearheaded efforts to encourage herdsmen from communities in Yushu Tibetan autonomous prefecture, Qinghai province, to lead a zero plastic waste lifestyle.

The secretary-general of the Snowland Great Rivers Environmental Protection Association, a nongovernmental organization, said an eco-friendlier lifestyle for residents is the key to protecting the source of Asia's three longest rivers and the habitat of many

endangered species.

"The best way to protect the fragile environment and ensure the water sources in the region are free from pollution is to guarantee that the local communities will not be generating garbage or pollutants that cannot be recycled," he explained.

Dondrub Chopel said he came up with the idea to promote a zero plastic waste lifestyle among the Tibetan communities years ago, after he and other volunteers tried painstakingly to recycle plastic waste at the core region of the

Three-River-Source National Park — also known as Sanjiangyuan — only to find that the collection process would be endless if new garbage continued to be generated.

One challenge they faced in encouraging the herdsmen to refine their lifestyle was to persuade their children to stop consuming carbonated beverages.

He and other workers from the association have visited herdsmen's homes to explain the ingredients of the beverages, their potential effects on health and the negative impact

plastics have on the environment.

The herdsmen, who generally harbor a sense of awe toward nature, have gladly accepted his promotion of a healthier lifestyle, he added.

Behind the organization's efforts in Sanjiangyuan is a growing level of official support for grassroots participation in ecological conservation in the area.

Dondrub Chopel's association has been working to encourage more local herdsmen to take part in the environmental protection efforts over the past 20 years, with

over 1,000 volunteers now working to safeguard wildlife in Sanjiangyuan.

"More importantly, the local herdsmen have now benefited from the wide-ranging protection efforts," he said, explaining that the government has offered ranger jobs to residents at the national parks being developed.

There are also more ways for them to boost their incomes, including monitoring snow leopards and organizing cultural experiences and activities related to nature education.

"The better the people are able to protect vegetation, wildlife and biodiversity, the more chances they will have to increase their incomes and improve their living standards," Dondrub Chopel said.

With wildlife populations continuing to recover in the Three-River-Source National Park, he said enabling the harmonious coexistence between man and nature should be further explored in the near future.

"The lifestyle of local herdsmen had been integrated into the ecosystem for centuries, and we should encourage them to revive their eco-friendly lifestyle in the future," he said.