

**Editor's note:** As protection of the planet's flora, fauna and resources becomes increasingly important, China Daily is publishing a series of stories to illustrate the country's commitment to safeguarding the natural world.

By YAN DONGJIE  
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In the grasslands of the Xizang autonomous region, Kyizom's work can be solitary.

With a motorcycle, binoculars, a bag of dry rations and a notebook in hand, she ventures alone into the grasslands, embarking on a new day's patrol.

"The black-necked crane is considered a sacred bird in Tibetan culture. People believe they are loyal in relationships, and I admire their dedication to guarding their loved ones," said Kyizom, a wildlife ranger at the Siling Lake National Nature Reserve.

The reserve in Shanza county, Nagchu city, Xizang, is an important breeding ground for black-necked cranes. As the only species among the 15 crane species globally that breeds and winters in highland areas, the black-necked crane is revered locally as the "highland fairy" and the symbol of happiness, auspiciousness and love.

Kyizom, a 29-year-old Tibetan, has been protecting black-necked cranes here for 10 years.

Late every March, black-necked cranes that winter in the Yarlung Tsangpo River Valley fly to Shanza to nest, lay eggs and hatch their young. Around November, as the grasslands enter winter on the plateau, the cranes fly to warmer southern regions.

From March to November is Kyizom's busiest time. She is responsible for recording the number of the wild animals, especially the migration patterns of black-necked cranes, and preventing human activities that may harm their habitats.

"During the breeding season, they are more vulnerable and in need of my protection," she said. "Seeing the hatching of black-necked crane chicks makes me both happy and fearful because I worry wild dogs and foxes may eat them. Therefore, I increase the frequency of my patrols.

"The survival status and migration patterns of black-necked cranes reflect changes in the highland wetland ecology, serving as a pointer for the health of highland wetlands," she said.

In recent years, Xizang has increased efforts to protect their habitats, and the scattered wetlands in Shanza have attracted a large number of black-necked cranes for breeding and raising their young.

According to the second terrestrial wildlife survey in Xizang and the joint survey on wintering crane resources organized by the China Wildlife Conservation Association Crane Conservation Committee in 2020, the population of black-necked cranes in Xizang exceeded 10,000.

In the 1970s, it was estimated that there were fewer than 1,000 in the area.



Black-necked cranes winter at a reservoir in Lhundrub county, Lhasa, Xizang autonomous region, on Saturday. When it gets warmer, they will fly to areas including the Siling Lake National Nature Reserve to breed. TENZIN NYIDA / XINHUA

# Tibetan keeps close watch on 'sacred' black-necked cranes

Conservationist guards birds' nesting grounds on plateau lake



**Left:** Kyizom shares her stories on wildlife conservation with a team of photographers and documentary makers. **Right:** Black-necked cranes winter on Siling Co (Lake) in the Xizang autonomous region. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



In November, Kyizom visited Beijing to share her experiences in nature conservation at the 10th China International Oral History Week organized by the Cui Yongyuan Center for Oral History of the Communication University of China. She shared her story with participants from 11 countries and regions, receiving much appreciation.

In recent years, a growing number of young people born in the 1990s and 2000s have joined wildlife protection teams on the plateau. In the internet age, they continue to fulfill their duties in sparsely populated areas with no network signal and harsh environments, contributing a unique strength to protecting the highland ecology, said Kyizom.

"I have loved wildlife since I was a child. My father taught me how to interact with animals, and my passion for them is the main reason I love this job," she said.

However, her path has not been completely smooth. In the early days she struggled with riding her bike in rough terrain and suffered many scrapes and bruises. The remote and sparsely populated areas also fostered a fear of attack from nature's predators such as bears.

Over the years, Kyizom has mastered her skills and overcome her fears, and started to pass on her experience to her own children.

A mother of three, she guides her children just as her father taught her. When they are on vacation, she takes them to observe wildlife, teaching them how to identify animal species.

The children learn to look up, carefully counting the cranes flying across the sky, just like their mother.

Through her years of interaction with black-necked cranes, Kyizom has gained an in-depth knowledge of their behaviors.

"In wetland environments with good weather, safety and abundant food, black-necked cranes will gently flap their wings and make giggling calls to express their joy. Now, this sound also brings me happiness," she said.

"I hope to participate in more training on scientific wildlife rescue. Through my efforts, I want to ensure that wildlife can live safer and happier lives," she said.

With people's increasing enthusiasm for exploring nature, bird-watching activities are becoming more popular, making Kyizom's grassland more lively than before.

"When tourists visit, we remind them not to disturb the lives of black-necked cranes," Kyizom said. "They are our auspicious birds, and I hope more people will love and help them, making Xizang a beautiful home for black-necked cranes."

Shi Yudie, Zhang Lina and Yang Meiduo contributed to this story.



Tourists walk a raised path by the Siling Co (Lake) in the Xizang autonomous region in June. The lake and its surrounding natural reserve serve as an important habitat for black-necked cranes. TENZIN NYIDA / XINHUA

By YAN DONGJIE and LI YINGQING  
in Chuxiong, Yunnan

## Patrollers protect precious green peafowls

Deep in the Dinosaur River Natural Reserve in Southwest China's Yunnan province, Wang Xiaoyan and her husband Zeng Guofu wait patiently, silently in their hide for a glimpse of the elusive green peafowl.

"Let's be quiet... Listen, this is the sound of the green peafowl," Wang whispers.

A few moments later, Zeng gestures to a clearing in the shrubbery where a male green peafowl emerges displaying its crown feathers and splendid plumage as it pecks at the ground.

The green peafowl, an inspiration for the phoenix in traditional Chinese culture, has been recorded in history for thousands of years as a symbol of auspiciousness, cherished and respected by people.

However, due to increased human activities and changes in the ecosystem, by the end of the last century, the number of green peafowls in China was estimated to be only a few hundred, distributed in Yunnan province.

Thanks to conservation efforts over the past decades, the population of green peafowls has now recovered to over 800.

Wang and her husband work as guardians of the green peafowls in the reserve in Shuangbai county of Chuxiong Yi autonomous prefecture, and are known locally as the "green peafowl couple".

Every day, they shuttle back and forth on mountain roads for tens of kilometers between the reserve office in Shuangbai and the green peafowl activity areas deep in the mountain, tracking the movements of the birds.

"They are very shy. We have to arrive at the mountain before sunrise, hide ourselves in the shed, and wait quietly until they come out for food after spending the night in the forest," Wang said.

The couple provide food to the birds during the winter months, as the food supply can be short. Preventing poaching and assisting in habitat restoration are also part of their work. Wang has been protecting what he calls these "mountain spirits" for more than seven years.

"The green peafowl is our auspicious bird, the elders say it brings us good luck," Wang said.

"When I was young, around two or three years old, I could only hear their calls. As I grew older, I occasionally caught some glimpses in the fields. I remember how they walked with their long tail feathers shimmering, and they captured my heart instantly," she said. "Later, it seemed like the number of peafowls decreased significantly, and they were not seen as often."

Researcher Yang Xiaojun from the Kunming Institute of Zoology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences said that in the late 1980s and early 1990s, economic activities such as hunting, mining and agriculture led to the destruction of green peafowl habitats. At that time, people lacked awareness of the importance of protecting the species, resulting in a sharp decline in the green peafowl population.

In 2018, the nature reserve began to recruit patrollers, and Wang volunteered.



Wang Xiaoyan and her husband Zeng Guofu patrol the Dinosaur River Natural Reserve in Yunnan province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Over the years, she has promoted ecological conservation among locals and encouraged them to participate in the protection of green peafowls and other wildlife.

"Patrolling isn't easy. There are pythons, wild boars and other big animals in the mountain, and even macaques throwing stones sometimes. It's still dark when we enter the mountains in the early morning," she said.

"At first, my family and villagers thought I wouldn't last long in the job, but here I am,

seven to eight years later. Initially, I was afraid of walking the dark mountain roads, but hearing the bird calls and knowing that the green peafowls were there with other creatures settled my heart. Over time, I got used to it," Wang said.

Her husband Zeng, a former miner, joined the team in 2021 as infrared cameras were being installed to expand the monitoring of green peafowls.

Shuangbai county used to have many silver and mineral mines, but most have since shut down.

"We record what we see on our patrols, and also the data collected from the infrared cameras, which both help researchers and experts better understand this precious creature. It's important to understand the survival status of green peafowls and to protect their habitats," Zeng said.

"In recent years, during our regular patrols and monitoring, the sightings of green peafowls have increased. Last year, I saw 18 green peafowls in a single outing," he said.

Over the years, Wang and her husband have become experts on green peafowls. She said that green peafowls typically inhabit areas at elevations of 800 to 1,200 meters. They usually mate in February, lay eggs in mid-March, and by late April, the baby peafowls hatch.

"The chicks resemble adult peafowls in six to seven months, and by two to three years old, they are fully grown, displaying beautiful tail feathers," Zeng said.

According to statistics from the reserve, there are currently 30 green peafowl patrol officers and over 400 infrared monitors. They have built dozens of wildlife drinking spots and feeding stations in areas where the green peafowls are frequently seen, and even do sand baths.

"Green peafowls have long feathers, so they don't bathe in water but in sand. That's why sand baths are important for their feather health," Wang said.

"They enjoy eating sorghum, wheat, corn and peas, and the food we provide undergoes strict safety checks. We have also planted sorghum and similar foods around specifically for them, without pesticides or fertilizers, ensuring their food safety," she added.

The reserve has allocated a piece of farmland specifically for green peafowls. Farmers take care of the fields but don't harvest them, welcoming the peafowls to feast.

"We hope they never go hungry and can grow strong," said Wang.

The reserve's director, Wang Sineng, said that the variety of wildlife seen in the reserve is becoming increasingly diverse, with infrared cameras frequently capturing images of green peafowls with rare companions in the same frame.

"Our monitoring results show that as of last year, we had approximately 430 green peafowls here in Shuangbai, compared to only 56 in 2015," said Wang Sineng.

Shi Yudie contributed to this story.  
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