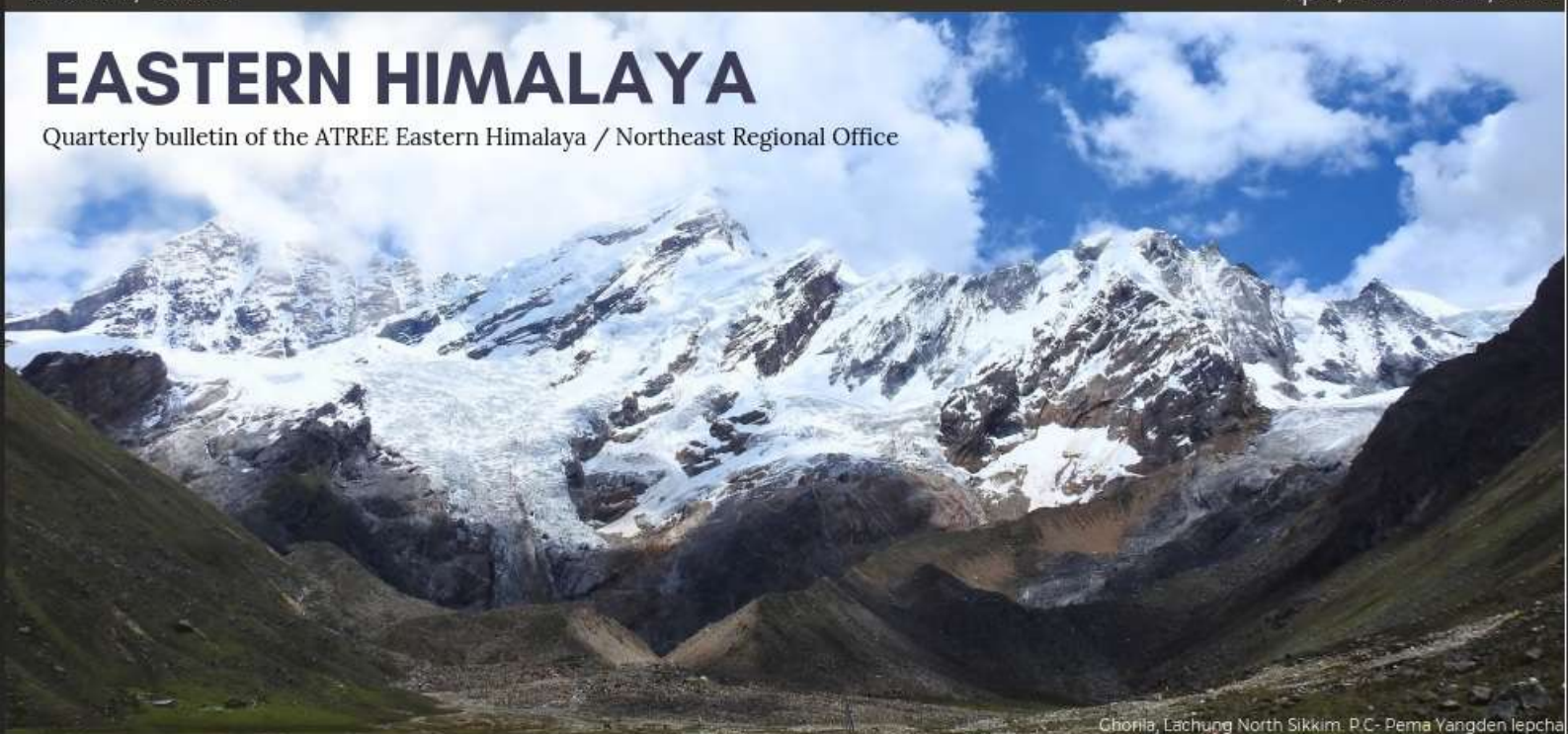


EASTERN HIMALAYA

Quarterly bulletin of the ATREE Eastern Himalaya / Northeast Regional Office



Chorila, Lachung North Sikkim. P.C- Pema Yangden Iepcha

Assessing the impact of bird guide training in Darjeeling and Kalimpong

In the past three years, ten capacity-building workshops have been organised by ATREE across the Darjeeling-Kalimpong Himalaya to promote bird conservation through community engagement, with support from the Oriental Bird Club, United Kingdom (UK), and the Rufford Foundation, UK. These trainings were carried out to build local capacity in bird identification, citizen science tools, and conservation awareness, while also introducing alternative, nature-based livelihood opportunities to local communities.

As part of a follow-up initiative under the Rufford-funded project, a detailed assessment is being carried out to evaluate the long-term impact of these trainings by interviewing participants of trainings that were conducted at least a year earlier. Localities where previous trainings were held were revisited to gather insights into the experiences of trained guides ($n = 50$). The assessment focused on how the training supported income generation, opened up opportunities for tourism and guiding activities, encouraged contributions to citizen science platforms, and instigated a change in perception towards birds and other biodiversity components.

Participants reported increased confidence in identifying birds by sight and sound (94% of interviewees), with many continuing to use binoculars (12%), and field guides and/or birding apps (34%). Several shared how the training deepened their appreciation for local biodiversity and inspired conservation actions such as protecting nesting areas and discouraging hunting (88%). Some trainees guided tourists (56%), and contributed to local homestay initiatives (10%), while others led bird walks for schoolchildren (4%) after the training.

Preliminary findings indicate that these trainings have fostered personal growth (94%), conservation leadership (80%), and early livelihood opportunities (36%). Participants suggested the need for refresher training (94%), access to equipment like binoculars (40%), and stronger connections with tourism and research platforms (48%). Thus, suggesting that these workshops not only enhanced local ecological knowledge but also catalysed a growing grassroots conservation ethic in the landscape.

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Interviewing a participant of the Birding Guide training conducted in Samsing, as part of the follow-up impact assessment.