

Celebrating the International
Year of Rangelands and
Pastoralists (IYRP)

20
26



Picture Credit: Kalyan Varma

Rangelands, such as grasslands, deserts and mountains, cover nearly half of the Earth. In India, they sustain approximately 1.3 crore pastoralists, whose livestock produce about 53% of India's milk and 74% of its meat, as well as wool and manure.

These ecosystems are critical habitats for many threatened and endemic species of flora and fauna. They sequester carbon and hold immense socio-economic value. Yet they remain undervalued and are misunderstood as degraded ecosystems or barren lands, leaving them vulnerable to land-use conversions.

Climate uncertainty deepens the invisible burdens on pastoralists, leading to risky migrations, physical strain and stigma, pushing youth to abandon pastoral livelihoods and causing a gradual erosion of the intergenerational knowledge systems.

Recognising this urgency, the UN has declared 2026 the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists.



ASHOKA TRUST FOR RESEARCH IN
ECOLOGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT



INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF
**RANGELANDS AND
PASTORALISTS**
2026



Picture Credit: Peter Van Geit

Pastoralists and the landscapes they call home

JANUARY

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01 Jan, Thursday - New Year's Day
04 Jan, Sunday - World Braille Day
05 Jan, Monday - National Bird Day
15 Jan, Thursday - Makara Sankranti
26 Jan, Monday - Republic Day,
International Day of Clean Energy

The Gaddis of Himachal Pradesh migrate seasonally with their goats and sheep to alpine pastures, guided by intimate ecological knowledge. Today, fragmented commons, shrinking grazing routes and changing land uses increasingly disrupt these time-honoured pastoral movements and governance systems.



Picture Credit: Gulzar Hussain

Pastoral life rests on movement and access to land

FEBRUARY

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02 Feb, Monday
11 Feb, Wednesday

21 Feb, Saturday
28 Feb, Saturday

- World Wetlands Day
- International Day of Women and Girls in Science
- World Pangolin Day
- National Science Day

Herding sheep and goats across rapidly shrinking grasslands is no easy task. Each day, the Changpas have to search for fodder and water, find shelter, overcome barriers and avoid conflicts, ensuring their herds survive in a changing landscape.



Picture Credit: Kalyan Varma

Pastoralists lack access to services and resources

MARCH

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- 22 Mar, Sunday - World Water Day
- 26 Mar, Thursday - Anniversary of Chipko Andolan
- 30 Mar, Monday - International Day of Zero Waste

As nomadic pastoralists move across vast shifting landscapes, uncertainty is a constant. When the animals they depend on and care for as kin fall ill or are injured, timely veterinary care is often beyond reach, forcing them into desperate, last-resort measures.



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A lifestyle adapting to changes in climate

APRIL

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07 Apr, Tuesday
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14 Apr, Tuesday
17 Apr, Friday
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21 Apr, Tuesday
22 Apr, Wednesday

- Good Friday
- World Health Day
- National Safe Motherhood Day
- Dr B.R. Ambedkar Jayanti
- Bat Appreciation Day
- World Heritage Day
- World Fish Migration Day
- Earth Day

The Dhangars are among the Deccan Plateau's key pastoral communities, sustaining rural life with wool, milk and meat. As they face the challenges of shrinking pastures, shifting monsoons and rising temperatures, they continually adapt, managing their resources wisely to keep their herds and traditions alive.



Picture Credit: Kalyan Varma

Rangelands sustain biodiversity and provide valuable ecosystem services

MAY

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Pastoralists play a vital role in restoring grasslands as their nimble-footed livestock graze, loosen the soil, leave dung and spread seeds. Yet across India, their access to the commons is increasingly threatened by factors like infrastructure development, conservation enclosures, militarisation and land-use change.



Picture Credit: Kalyan Varma

*Pastoralism, a way of life that
revitalises soil, water and the land*

JUNE

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05 Jun, Friday - World Environment Day
08 Jun, Monday - World Oceans Day
22 Jun, Monday - World Rainforest Day

Grasslands need minimal water, store carbon efficiently, reduce soil erosion, support several endemic species, aid migratory birds and sustain pastoral livelihoods that underpin biodiversity and global food security. Yet, they have historically been misclassified as wastelands.



Picture Credit: Pema Yangden

*Enduring use of
livestock products*

JULY

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01 to 07 Jul - Van Mahotsav
16 Jul, Thursday - World Snake Day
26 Jul, Sunday - International Day for Conservation of Mangrove Ecosystem
28 Jul, Tuesday - World Nature Conservation Day
29 Jul, Wednesday - International Tiger Day

High in the Himalaya, Chhurpi, a hard cheese, has found its place beyond local kitchens. Although pastoral products from these remote landscapes contribute to global markets, pastoralists themselves seldom receive fair returns for their labour or for the vital ecosystem services their herds provide.



Picture Credit: Pema Yangden

Celebrating pastoralist knowledge, traditions and culture

AUGUST

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26 Aug, Wednesday
23 to 27 Aug

- International Clouded Leopard Day
- World's Indigenous people
- World Lion Day
- World Elephant Day
- Independence Day
- Eid-e-Milad
- World Water Week

For the pastoral communities of the Himalaya, the yak is deeply tied to culture and ritual. One cherished tradition involves releasing a domestic yak into the wild. This "god yak" is a gift to the landscape that nurtures the pastoralists and their herds.



Picture Credit: Pema Yangden

*Using pasturelands
sustainably*

SEPTEMBER

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14 Sep, Monday - Ganesh Chaturthi
20 Sep, Sunday - World Cleanup Day
26 Sep, Saturday - World Environmental Health Day

In Sikkim's Lachung landscape, yak herders practise sustainable agriculture in their high-altitude summer pasturelands, integrating yak rearing with subsistence kitchen gardens. Nutrient-rich yak dung nourishes hardy radishes and other crops, replenishing soils and ensuring income security.



Picture Credit: Jayshree Borgohain

Recognising women in pastoral communities

OCTOBER

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- Gandhi Jayanti
- Wildlife Week
- World Animal Welfare Day
- World Habitat Day
- World Migratory Bird Day
- Mahanavmi, Ayudha pooja
- International Snow Leopard Day
- International Day of Climate Action

Like in most pastoral households, Drokpa women do it all – milking, processing and tending to everyone. As grasslands disappear and livestock health declines, they absorb disproportionate burdens through exhausting care work, food insecurity and emotional stress, yet their labour goes unrecognised.



Picture Credit: Jayshree Borgohain

*The future of pastoralism
rests on its youth*

NOVEMBER

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01 Nov, Sunday
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14 Nov, Saturday
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- World Ecology Day
- Deepavali
- Children's Day
- International Men's Day
- Constitution Day

For the pastoral youth, classrooms and migratory trails both teach valuable lessons. As transhumant life becomes more difficult in a rapidly changing world, very few feel driven to continue their age-old tradition.



Picture Credit: Mahesh, Shepherds of Himalayas

*Merging tradition
with innovation*

DECEMBER

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04 Dec, Friday - Wildlife Conservation Day
05 Dec, Saturday - World Soil Day
11 Dec, Friday - International Mountain Day
25 Dec, Friday - Christmas Day
31 Dec, Thursday - New Year's Eve

Age-old shearing traditions in high alpine ranges, practised just before winter as the herds descend, produce a natural fibre that is renewable and biodegradable. This good quality wool weaves tradition with innovation, telling stories of co-dependency and coexistence with local ecologies.

20 26

Celebrating the International
Year of Rangelands and
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Picture Credit: Jayshree Borgohain

The lives of pastoralists are shaped by movement. Pastoralist-reared livestock provide a variety of organic, free-range products, including milk, wool and manure. Their livelihood, optimising the use of landscapes they move through, needs to be recognised as sustainable and resilient. But they face growing challenges due to shrinking commons, dwindling access to natural resources and scarce veterinary care, along with the repercussions of climate change.

For pastoralists, livestock are kin as much as capital, their loss bringing grief and deprivation. Yet, the mental and emotional toll of these disruptions remains invisible, rarely informing policy and climate assessment debates.

The International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP) is important not only for raising awareness among the public, scientists and policymakers, but also for pastoralists themselves. It provides a platform for their voices to be heard on both the global and national stages, helping to create an understanding of the diverse pastoral systems, the innovations and locally rooted solutions from around the world.



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A lifestyle adapting to changes in climate

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Picture Credit: Pema Yangden

*Using pasturelands
sustainably*

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Rangelands sustain biodiversity and provide valuable ecosystem services

MAY

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*Celebrating pastoralist
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