

Project Update: March 2012

A field survey team including volunteers has been established. The whole team was divided in four subgroups and equipped with necessary gear (vehicle, GPS, camera, laptop etc.). A series of joint fieldwork has been undertaken over 5 days in order to train volunteers and clarify the methodology.

Existing satellite and topographic images were analysed to identify suitable sites for Eurasian otter survey. The whole country was divided using 100 km square grids and at least one potentially good otter site was identified. Maps provided by Google Earth were used to identify best vehicle roads in order to reach potential otter sites in best way. It allowed us to spare time and resources during the fieldwork. Also based on images provided by Google Earth, fish ponds were mapped in our GIS database. Fish ponds were later visited during the fieldwork. Fish pond owners and guards were interviewed in order to estimate level of conflict.

The nationwide otter survey was started at 24th March 2012. At the moment more than three regions of Georgia are already studied. Online conferences were used every day to share and analyse the results of survey by whole team.

Unfortunately many sites near or on fish ponds could not be visited and were postponed for autumn survey set due to private property. We hope to make agreement with most of them and visit such places in autumn.

The survey was undertaken in Lagodekhi Protected areas but unfortunately no evidence of otter presence could be found. Nevertheless, a short training was provided to the local rangers. Also potential sites for otter monitoring were identified for the future.

