

Project Update: February 2016

In the first update of this project that we submitted in December 2015 we included flying fox localities, colony size and roost status of 20 flying fox colonies nationwide. In this update, we focused our project activities to survey bat hunting by the local tribes at Siwalik Hills of Chitawan District, central Nepal. We undertook a public awareness programme among local communities and school children - 500 bat posters and 500 stickers were designed, printed and supplied for outreach programmes in the areas.

We confirmed bat hunting by local people for generations as a source of bushmeat. Hunting principally occurred at flowering trees of *Diploknema butyraceae* of family Sapotaceae. *Diploknema butyraceae* is a mass flowering canopy tree that has a remarkable ethno-biological relation with the indigenous Chepang ethnic community of Nepal. The tree is commonly called as butter plant, as its seed is collected and processed to extract cooking oil using a local technique. We identified two medium sized pteropodid bats *Rousettus leschenaulti* Desmarest, 1820 and *Eonycteris spelaea* Dobson, 1871 visiting to drink nectar from the flowers of *D. butyraceae*. We identified local hunters as well as hunting net builders in the area and talked to them to understand their experiences and opinions. Locals shared their experience that the number of bat hunts per night by them has decreased. They further commented that many hunters in recent years returned home with nothing from a night-long hunting effort. They wondered whether the number of bats had reduced in the environment.

Public awareness programmes were conducted in among the villagers, community forest user groups and school children of Korak, Siddi and Shaktikhor VDC. IN total, 700 students from five schools - Shree national secondary school-Kirantar (50 students), Shree National Lower Secondary School, Thakaltar (150 students) and Shree National Secondary School Charkilla (100 students) of Korak VDC, Shree Kalika National Secondary School Nibuwataar (100 students) of Siddi VDC and Chaturmukhi higher secondary school of Shaktikhor VDC (300 students). We think the impact of our outreach programme reached a large population of the areas. We informed locals about the positive role of flower visiting bats in pollination of their valuable butter plant. In addition, probable risk of bat borne disease from eating bat meat was highlighted during outreach programmes. Bat drawing competitions were held among student participants at schools. Prize distributions were made to the winners in such programmes.

Following selected pictures are attached in separate files – 1. Image of printed poster: Title in Nepali script saying “Bats are friends of butter plant. Do not kill bats, do not feed on bush meat! Large image of mature tree of *D. butyraceae* is surrounded by the flower visitors of the tree. Below, dry flesh of culled bats found in local marketplace. The information delivered on the side mentioned bats are probable source of harmful bacteria and virus, hence avoids the hunting culture. All information were duplicated in Chepang ethnic language on either side.



Bat poster



A student showing her drawing made for competition



Hunted bats by the locals



Locally made net to hunt bats spread under flowering *D.butyraceae* tree



PI holding captured bat before In Situ release



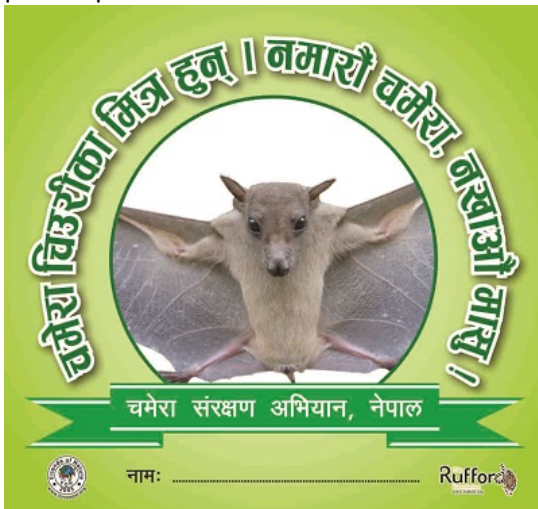
Research Assistant with students after outreach interaction for bat conservation



Co-Investigator Ms Bidhya Sharma delivering poster prize to a student



A branch of *Dipklonema butyraceae* with inflorescence



Bat sticker