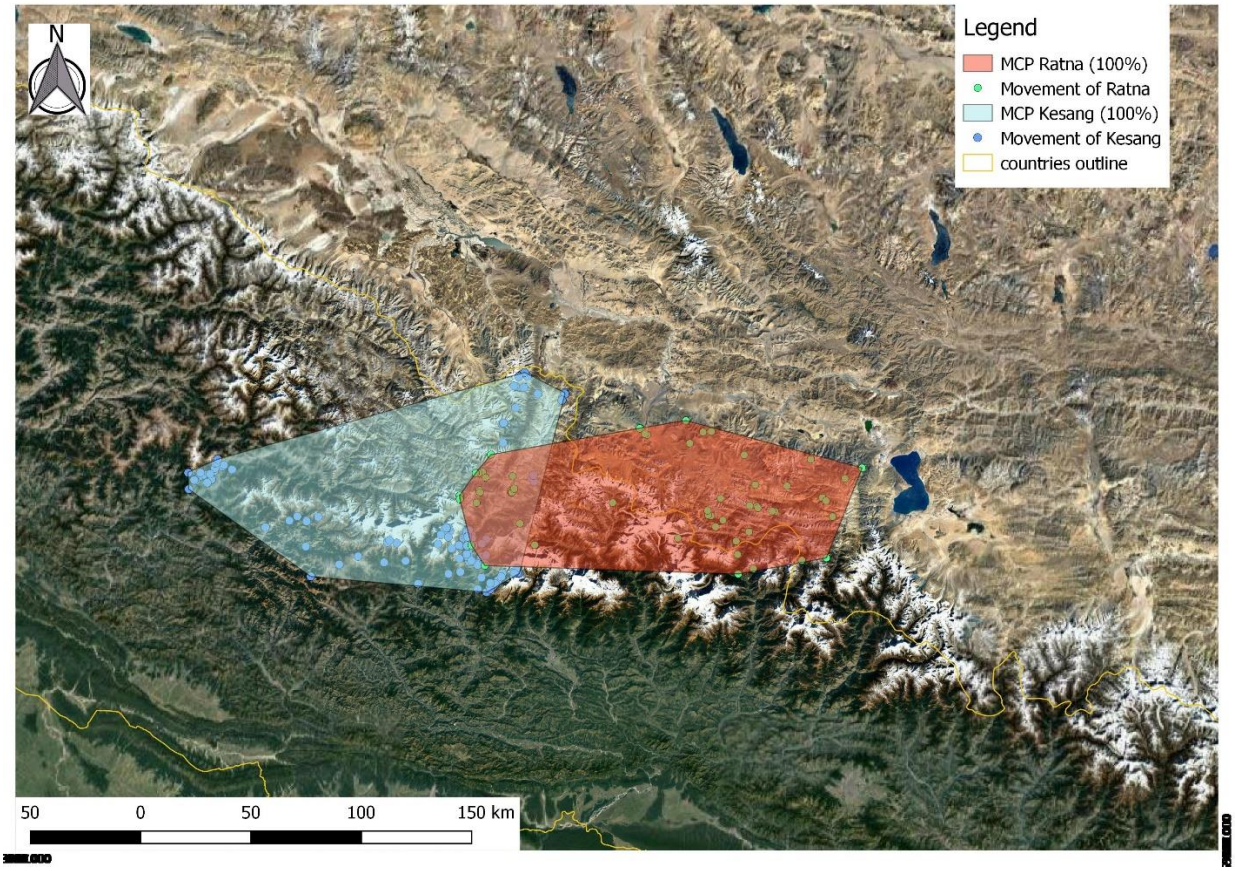
Project Update: December 2016

Bearded vulture *Gypaetus barbatus* is a vulnerable species in Nepal and holds <500 individuals in the mountainous area across the country; with much concentration along the Annapurna Himalayan Range. Little is known about the ecology of Himalayan race, therefore we are doing this project in Nepal since early 2016. Our project is first of its kind in Asian range using the GPS transmitter. The major objectives of our project are to provide the quantitative information on the movement ecology and to investigate the threats to bearded vulture in the Himalayan habitat, where it is supposed to decline rapidly between 2002 and 2008. Currently GPS/GSM transmitters have been attached on nine individuals (four adults and five juveniles) including one entire family. Four units were equipped in May 2016, while five more individuals were caught and equipped with transmitters recently in October and November2016, those providing unfold mystery on the movement ecology. Our recent birds were one adult and two juveniles at Muktinath (4000 m altitude) in Mustang district and one adult and one juvenile from the Karanse hill (1950 m) along the southern border or Annapurna Conservation Area in Kaski district. We are expecting to attach more transmitter in the near future (most probably in late spring 2017) as we need good sample size.

Initial results showing that some high altitude individuals perform frequent transboundary movements between Nepal and China, which suggest the needs of multinational conservation approach for the survival of bearded vulture population in the Himalayan range. Data also revealed they fly above the altitude of 7500 m over the Himalayan Mountains and most probably nest above the snow line of 5500 m. Also we suspect those rural electrification powerlines are extremely lethal for these birds in the mountainous area of Nepal and urgent consideration should be made. We hope the results of our study will support the government and other conservation organizations to prepare bearded vulture conservation and management plan in Nepal.

Our project was possible due to the joint collaboration of many organisations and peoples. We thank to The Rufford Foundation – UK, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Centre for Marine and Coastal Studies – Malaysia, The World Academy of Sciences- Italy, The Peregrine Fund – USA, Korea Institute of Environment Ecology – Korea and Savanah Tracking – Kenya for their financial and equipment support to make this project live. We thank to Dr Hansoo Lee and Henrik Rasmussen for providing the GSM transmitters and Simon Thomsett and Sandesh Gurung to their field support in the extreme environment. This is the PhD project of Tulsi Subedi, who likes to thank his supervisors' Prof. Shahrul Anuar Mohd Sah, Munir Virani and Hem Sagar Baral.



Picture 1. Movement map and home range area of two juveniles (Kesang and Ratna) they were tagged in Muktinath. Both the individuals showing transboundary movement along Nepal China boarder.

Picture 2. Tulsi is about to release adult Bearded Vulture (Devi) in Muktinath after tagging with GPS/GSM transmitter (left), Sandesh with adult Bearded Vulture (Durga) at Karanse hill (Right).

Picture 3. Tulsi holding juvenile Bearded Vulture – Kesang (left) and Henk (Right).

Picture 4. Simon Thomsett with juvenile Bearded Vulture – Ratna at Muktinath 4000 m altitude.