

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarterly Report

## Assessment of Distribution, Habitat Characteristics and Awareness of Eurasian otter (Lutra lutra) in Kali Gandaki River, Nepal



**Submitted to:**

Rufford Foundation

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## **Background**

The survey carried out in November- December 2022 in three major rivers of Mygadi district: Kali Gandaki, Myagdi, and Rahuganga confirmed the presence of Eurasian otter. However, the population in these rivers is yet to be surveyed. Based on the field survey, it can be presumed that small populations dwell in the area. The current survey noted that the otter population is at high risk in the project area due to human disturbances, illegal poaching, developmental projects (Hydropower dam, Road construction), decline in prey availability, unsustainable fishing and habitat destruction. The disproportionate conservation effort and habitat protection inside and outside the protected areas has exposed otter outside the protected areas to a large number of anthropogenic threats leading them to be highly vulnerable. Otters in the habitat could be secured from the anthropogenic threats upon the communities are provided with the knowledge on conservation benefits and ecological significance.

Local people have a better understanding of their surrounding ecosystems, including the rivers where the otter reside. However, communities are deficit of the knowledge on ecological significance of otter in freshwater ecosystem, and coexistence benefiting both. Locals have been applying electric fishing that is detrimental to the fish population and themselves in the long run. Sensitization helps to empower the community with knowledge, while engaging local people in conservation provides stewardship towards the otter and their habitat conservation. Therefore, adhering to the necessity, community awareness and outreach programs tailored with field study were carried in local communities living near to rivers and schools. Besides, otter clubs in schools were formed to involve students in monitoring and conservation. Likewise, an interaction programme was organized in Division Forest Office in Mygadi district and local enforcement agency in Dana to inform about the Eurasian otter and measures that can be adopted for otter conservation.

The activities that we conducted in the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase of the project are detailed below:

### **1. Community outreach programme for otter conservation**

An otter awareness program was conducted in seven communities along the Kali Gandaki corridor where the ecological value of otters and conservation measures were shared. A total of around 200 local people were reached through a community otter awareness programme. The awareness program includes a presentation on the Eurasian otter, followed by a discussion with the local people and sharing of the events and experience by local people interlinked with the otters. Awareness materials such as brochures and posters were also distributed to each individual who participated in the program. During the presentation participants were provided with the otter identification knowledge and differences with species that resemble otter such as Civet and Yellow Throated-marten. Local people showed enthusiasm and willingness to know about the conservation benefits of otters and their ecological role in freshwater ecosystem.

Local leaders, presidents of the Women group, members of youth clubs, representatives of local government, presidents of local area conservation committee and youths were the major participants of the community awareness program.

The list and name of the communities we conducted the awareness programmes are listed as below:

- a) Thasang Rural Municipality-4, Ghasa Mustang
- b) Annapurna Rural Municipality-4, Thadeshwara Myagdi
- c) Annapurna Rural Municipality-4, Dana, Myagdi
- d) Annapurna Rural Municipality- 4 Narchyang, Myagdi
- e) Annapurna Rural Municipality-6, Pokhrebagar, Myagdi
- f) Rahuganga Rural Municipality-1, Tiplyang, Myagdi
- g) Rahuganaga Rural Municipality-3, Galeshwor, Myagdi



*Picture 1: Photo of the participants involved in community teaching program in Thadeshwara-4 Annapurna Rural Municipality, Myagdi.*



Picture 2: Photo of the participants involved in community teaching program in Narchyang -4 Annapurna Rural Municipality, Myagdi



Picture 3: Photo of the participants involved in community teaching program in Pkharebagar -6 Annapurna Rural Municipality, Myagdi.



Picture 4: Photo of the participants involved in community teaching program in Tiplyang -1 Rahuganga Rural Municipality, Myagdi.



Picture 5: Photo of the participants involved in community teaching program in Galeshwor -3 Rahuganga Rural Municipality, Myagdi.

## 2. School otter awareness program for otter conservation

A school otter awareness program was conducted in 10 schools located along the Kali Gandaki corridor, mainly focusing on sharing knowledge and information about Eurasian otter and its ecological importance in freshwater ecosystems. A total of 300 students were provided with the otter information. In school teaching programs, presentations were delivered, followed by discussions and responses to the queries of students. Brochures and posters were also distributed to each student who participated in the programme. A quiz

was also conducted following the presentation in order to gauge the student's understanding towards the Eurasian otter. The brochures and posters were also provided to the libraries of every school where we conducted the awareness program.

For the students of lower grade, we adopted a simpler approach to engage them in learning about Eurasian otter. A picture of otter is displayed and encouraged them to draw the picture of it.

The list and location of schools we have reached for the awareness programmes are listed as below:

S. N	Name of schools and location	Grades of students participated in the programmes
1.	Shree Janata Aadharbhut school, Thasang Rural municipality-4, Ghasa Mustang	6,7 and 8
2.	Shree Narchyang Aadharbhut school, Annapurna Rural Municipality, Gadpar-4, Myagdi	6,7 and 8
3.	Shree Nilgiri Aadharbhut school, Annapurna Rural Municipality-4, Gharap, Myagdi	3,4 and 5
4.	Shree Prabha Secondary School, Annapurna-4, Narchyang, Myagdi	7,8,9 and 10
5.	Shree Pokhrebagar Aadharbut school, Annapurna-6, Pokhrebagar, Myagdi	1,2,3,4 and 5
6.	Shree Sarbodaya Secondary School, Annapurna-2, Vurung, Ttaopani Myagdi	7,8,9 and 10
7.	Shree Kalika Secondary School, Raghuganga-1, Tiplyang Myagdi	6,7 and 8
8.	Shree Dhaulagiri Abasiya School, Risanchautari, Rahuganga-2, Myagdi	1,2,3,4 and 5
9.	Shree Jadvarat Salgram Gandaki Sanskrit School-Rahungaga Rural Municipality-9, Galeshwor, Myagdi	5,6,7 and 8
10	Shree Balmandir Higher Secondary School, Beni Municipality-8, Kalipul, Myagdi	7,8 and 9



*Picture 6: Photo clicked after the school teaching programme in Janata Aadharbhut School Ghasa, Mustang.*





Picture 7: Photo clicked after school teaching programme in Shree Narchyang Aadharbhut School Gadapar, Myagdi.



Picture 8: Photo taken after school teaching programme in Shree Nilgiri Aadharbhut School Gharap-4, Myagdi.





*Picture 9: School teaching programme in Shree Prabha Higher Secondary School, Annapurna 4, Naryang, Myagdi.*





Picture 10: School teaching programme in Shree Kalika Secondary School Tiplyang, Rahuganga, Rural Municipality -1, Myagdi.





Picture 11: Students of Dhaulagiri Lower Secondary Schools drawing a picture of Eurasian otter and holding the brochure.



Picture 12: School teaching programme in Shree Sarbodaya Secondary School Annapurna-2 Vurung Tatopani, Myagdi



Picture 13: Photo clicked after school teaching programme in Shree Jadbharat Gandaki Sanskrit School Galeshwor, Myagdi.



Picture 14: Photo clicked after school teaching programme in Shree Balmandir Higher Secondary School Beni Municipality-8 Kalipul, Myagdi.

### 3. Otter-club formation in schools and citizen scientist development

Otter clubs were formed in high schools. As a whole, seven otter clubs were formed with five members each, and each member from the clubs was trained and developed as an emerging citizen scientist. Members from each Otter club were trained to identify the otter spraints and pugmarks and teach them to distinguish otters from other similar species as well.

#### 4. Interaction programme

A short interaction program was conducted in the Division Forest Office of Myagdi District and the local enforcement agency in Dana. Otter survey field experience, status and distribution was shared during the interaction programme. The interaction session at the Myagdi Division Forest Office involved 15 participants from the forest office. The participants include key personnel such as Division Forest Officer (DFO), Assistant Forest Officer (AFO) and Ranger. Additionally, interns from the division forest office and other office members also took part in the program.



Picture 15: Photo clicked after the interaction session in Division Forest Office in Myagdi District.



Picture 16: Discussion about Eurasian otter among the officials of Division Forest Office of Myagdi District.



*Picture 17: The photo clicked after the interaction programme with the police officials in Dana and officials of Division Forest Office of Myagdi District.*

##### **5. Affixing poster in different places along the Kali Gandaki corridor**

Posters on Eurasian otter was pasted in various public locations along the Kali Gandaki corridor in order to raise awareness on Eurasian otter conservation and to minimize the illicit activities such as illegal poaching and killing. The legal action relating to illegal poaching and trade was highlighted in the poster. In total 100 posters were pasted in various locations along the Kali Gandaki corridor.





Picture 18: Our team affixing posters in various places along Kali Gandaki Corridor.