

Project Update: August 2012

Following the winter count which showed recent movements of the species towards a new area as longer term habitat, efforts are being made to raise awareness in these areas where these major species were not present for longer periods in the past. These efforts were also triggered by the discovery of dead dolphin in the western channel of Karnali River at Janaknagar ghat which weighed around 60 kg and was estimated to be a 7 year-old female dolphin measuring 7 feet 2 inches. The dolphin was believed to have been poisoned but no confirmed reports were made available.

At the same time, the western channel of Karnali and its major tributary Mohana (and its smaller tributaries) has become rich in aquatic biodiversity not thoroughly studied before. Recent estimates concluded around 152 Critically Endangered gharial crocodiles in the Mohana river system. These animals were recorded from Chaugurdi, Khakraula, Bardahawa, Ratanpur, Lalbojhi, Pawera, Dhansinghpur, Narayanpur areas on Kaanda, Kanara, Pathraiya and Kateni rivers which are tributaries of Mohana River in Kailali. This news comes as a big hope for conservationists and also brings additional challenges to raise awareness in that region which lies outside any protected area system of Nepal naturally raising conservation challenges. Local communities are widely mobilized for rescue and release of any important aquatic species in the area which has had cases of dolphin calf entanglement in fishing hooks in the past. Dolphin Conservation Centre at Thapapur along one of the tributaries of Mohana.

The shift or movement of dolphins and Gharials in a large number towards the western channel and tributaries is believed to be a result of channelling of larger volume of water towards the western channel during bridge construction in the eastern channel at Kothiaghat. This has resulted in a very small volume in the eastern channel which flows along the Bardia National Park boundary and was comparatively very rich in aquatic biodiversity. This has instigated more focus



towards western branch and Mohana river system on awareness raising at community level through meetings and discussions and in schools prior to the monsoon vacation in schools. A total of 5 schools along the river system were covered as a part of awareness program whereas 12 community level discussions were also held along the same river system. Such events have raised interest and awareness among the local people prior to the monsoon season which sees a great rise in number of dolphins and Gharials in the region. A final phase of awareness events are planned before the completion of the present project and efforts will be made to sustain the programme through local organisations in the area.