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World Wildlife Day 2023 marked for Dark Sitana *Sitana fusca* conservation in Nepal

Every year, World Wildlife Day is celebrated on 03 March to commemorate the conservation efforts. Nepal Conservation and Research Center (NCRC) and Mithila Wildlife Trust (MWT) jointly marked the day in Madhesh province of Nepal with two different activities for Dark Sitana *Sitana fusca* aligning the theme of the day “Partnership for Conservation” among women group and school students.

The Dark Sitana *Sitana fusca* is a highly threatened lizard endemic to Nepal, so far only known from Madhesh province of Nepal. Therefore, with support from the Rufford Foundation, UK, Auckland Zoo, New Zealand and Katie Adamson Conservation Fund, USA; a conservation and research project for Dark Sitana has been initiated. The outreach sessions were conducted to raise awareness on ecological and conservation importance of the species for peri-forest women group of Dudhpani community forest, Dhanusha.



Team leader Santosh Bhattarai delivering a session on ecology and conservation of Dark Sitana to the members of Dudhpani community forest.



Group photo after the session.

We explored the local names and beliefs to respect the indigenous perceptions towards reptiles. We presented slides and video sessions to know if they were aware of the presence of Dark Sitana in their community forest or not.

Most of the women confused the Dark Sitana with juvenile Common Garden Lizard *Calotes versicolor*. However, they could differentiate when we played videos of male Dark Sitana displaying its dewlap. After the video session, some



Group photo with students and teacher after the session.

of the women could inform us that they had seen the species in their community forest while collecting firewood and grasses. We distributed a copy of printed poster of Dark Sitana to the participants. The session also provided us insights to select sites for ecological survey of the species.

Some of the key information take home messages from the session were: Most local women were ignorant about Dark Sitana presence, its conservation criticality and threats the lizards are facing due to human activities. They were made aware that Dark Sitana is only restricted to Madhesh province and should

be protected. They could be convinced not to kill any lizard species.

Session with students

We also marked the day with the students at Mahadev Adharbhoot school to impart conservation importance of Dark Sitana and other wildlife in young minds. We found students were very keen and inquisitive to learn about biodiversity around them. We displayed the video of Dark Sitana and other wildlife and presented about their behaviour, ecological significance and how students could be a part of the larger conservation arena.

The aim of the session was to encourage the students and motivate them towards wildlife conservation. We distributed a copy of poster of Dark Sitana to each student so that they could remember the species. We also conducted outreach sessions for students in ten other schools and communities for Dark Sitana conservation.

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