

Project Update: January 2014

Field surveys and interviews in the second phase (winter) of our project started in December 2013. We covered the lower section of the Ken River between Chilla Ghat and Banda in the second and third weeks of December and subsequently surveyed the Ken Gharial Sanctuary in the last week of December. We plan to start surveys in the Son Gharial Sanctuary next week.

Surveys were carried out using rowboat / inflatable kayak, and occasionally through stationary observations. Two observers equipped with binoculars scanned the river and both banks. All observations were noted in a standardised format, photographed and their locations recorded in a GPS unit. Data on habitat variables (e.g. depth) were collected in tandem with these surveys. We also conducted semi-structured, opportunistic interviews of local fishermen (with the help of species photographs as visual aids) to record their observations and perceptions of gharials and other associated aquatic species in the lower Ken. This methodology will be repeated during surveys of the Son Gharial Sanctuary.

Over the course of this project, we now realise that the conservation challenges facing gharials in our study area are more severe than expected mainly due to the levels and intensity of fishing and sand mining, and also from the fact that river flows are heavily regulated and compromised. We have also obtained information on the frequent entanglements of gharial hatchlings in fishing nets in the lower Ken River and that there may be demands for crocodilian body parts for use in local medicine. We hope to address these issues as the project progresses over the next few months.

The second phase of the project is expected to continue till April / May 2014, and more updates (reports / photographs) will be made available after that period.

