

Project Update: April 2007

A detailed field study on “Status of and Threats to Ganges River Dolphins (*Platanista gangetica*) in Koshi River, Nepal” was conducted in between October and January 2006 for more or less 4 months. The data were collected using different methodologies to achieve the goal and objectives of the project. Three different surveys were conducted at three different times with standard methodologies. A stretch of 38 km of Koshi River was surveyed and dolphins were counted directly by synchronized surveys after identifying the hotspots of dolphins in the river. More or less entire stretch of surveyed area was travelled by raft and wooden boat wherever feasible and also by foot along the river banks. Apart from counting dolphins, social data were also collected by using different Participatory Rapid Assessment tools to know threats to Ganges River dolphin at local level and national level.

Moreover, data collected from Nepal were scrutinized under the supervision of Supervisors during February and March 2007 at University of Klagenfurt, Austria. Simple statistical tools charts, tables and graphs and GIS tools were used for analysis, mapping and interpretation the data. The progress reports on field study in Nepal and data analysis in Austria were presented to Management Committee and participants of the M.Sc Management of Protected Areas at University of Klagenfurt and their feedback were taken into consideration.

Reconnaissance/Population survey: A preliminary survey was conducted prior to population survey in the area with technical inputs from WWF Nepal. A stretch of 38 km was surveyed by rafting in Koshi River at first to know about dolphin hotspots, its distribution and population trend which was followed by a detailed population survey in collaboration with local people in the river section upstream of the barrage. The first section of 36 km was started from Chattara up to upstream of Koshi Barrage and a stretch of 2 km was surveyed for dolphin counts in the section downstream of the barrage in Nepalese part.

A direct count method was used for first two surveys along the mainstream of the first section. The areas of high dolphin activity were also assessed during survey based on the information gathered and standardized points were finalized for final counting. Following the recent survey conducted in the Karnai river basin by WWF Nepal for status surveys of dolphins, synchronized survey was conducted at selected points.

Key Informants Survey: The fishermen and local residents of that area were interviewed with open ended questions to gather local knowledge on population trend and abundance of dolphins in the area. Moreover, the park administration of Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve was also interviewed to know the status of dolphins and required information of that area. The fisherman and indigenous people (Jhagad, indigenous ethnic group of that area) who are living along Koshi river basin and completely depending upon Koshi for their livelihood since decades were more focused during interviews. The current threats of river dolphins were also assessed during interviews.

Focus Group Discussion: To identify the existing threats and their sources to River dolphins in Koshi River, a focus group discussion was conducted in a comprehensive way. Detailed

discussion was started with factors threatening dolphin's existence in the river at local level, their distribution, and information on recent sightings and ended up with their views on measures to reduce the threats at local level. Moreover during discussion, problems associated with management and conservation of dolphins was also discussed and standardized points counts which were analyzed during reconnaissance survey were also discussed.