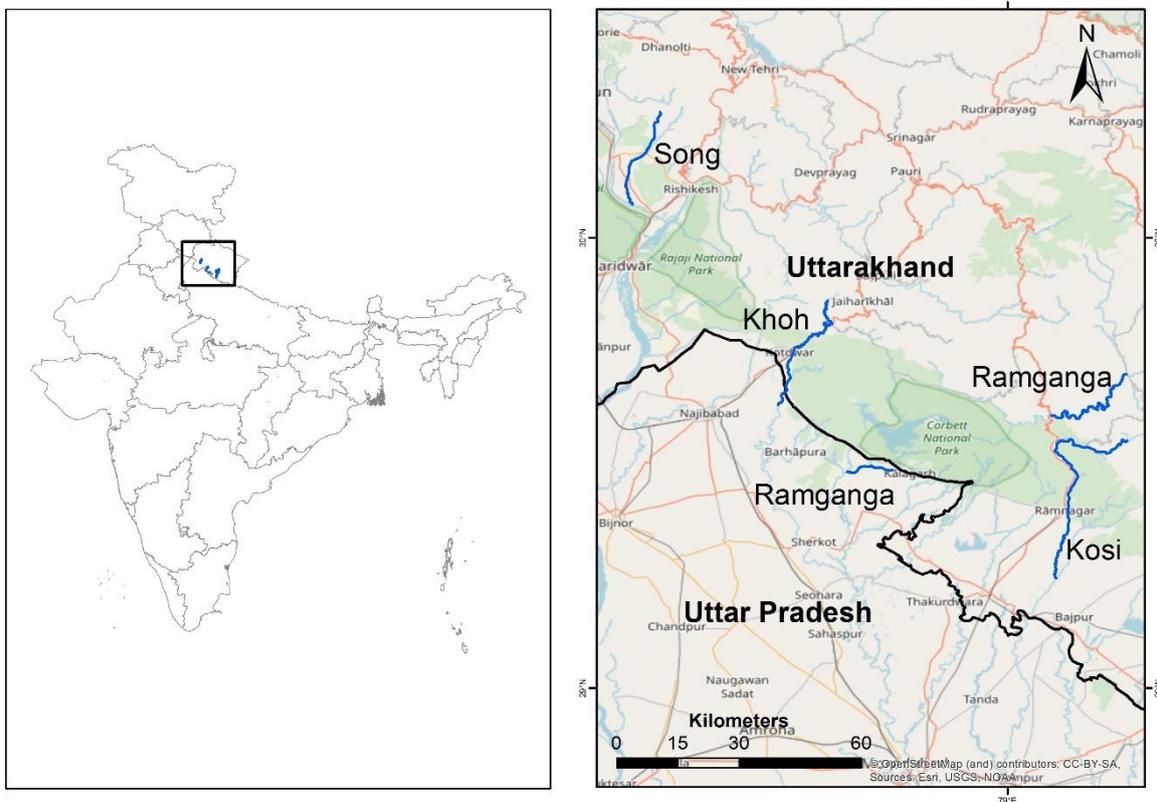


Project Update: March 2019

Although I was awarded the grant amount during this time last year, I began the survey work only from October 2018 onward as mentioned in my application. This is because the fieldwork was planned to be conducted post-monsoon and in winter months. The monsoon season often results in indirect signs, (e.g. scat, tracks, dens, latrines) getting washed away, and accessibility to some sites is challenging. Post-monsoon is good as declining water levels exposes muddy banks that record tracks.

I am very pleased to inform you that the following activities have been completed till date:

1) Identifying distribution of otters in riparian habitats of Kosi, Ramganga, Khoh and Song Rivers (October and November 2018). This involved site selection to identify distribution and habitat of otters. Field surveys were conducted on foot along banks of rivers to collect direct/indirect evidence of otters.



2) Collection of qualitative data on communities' knowledge, attitudes and perceptions towards otters through social science survey (30 days; November and December 2018). Semi-structured interviews were conducted among fishing and local communities living along rivers. There were five focus group discussions conducted within these community groups.



3) Preparation of an updated location map identifying existing/emerging anthropogenic and climatic threats for the otter species (December 2018 and January 2019). A GIS-based potential habitat map has been created to provide information on status of current/possible future habitats to be targeted for conservation efforts.



4) Awareness camps for local stakeholders (February 2019) has been completed. An otter conservation awareness course was organized for local youths, adult people and schoolchildren. Ten local schools were selected, and a 1-day awareness programme was conducted in each. Hoarding boards and flyers related to otter conservation were displayed in each programme area.



5) Providing critical information to policy makers towards developing a targeted, species-specific conservation program – (March – June 2019). Detailed analysis has been conducted of collected quantitative and qualitative data. Based on the analysis, a manuscript (research paper) has been prepared with key recommendations and submitted to the journal 'Aquatic Conservation: Marine and Freshwater Systems' (manuscript number AQC-19-0070; under review). In addition, two supporting manuscripts have been prepared based on the supporting bird and fish data collected during the survey. The bird paper has been submitted to the journal 'Journal of Threatened Taxa' (manuscript number 4911; under review), and the fish paper is currently under preparation (to be submitted to a journal hopefully by the end of this month).