

Progress Report II (June 2025):

**Project Title: Niche overlap and awareness initiatives for the conservation of Smooth-coated otters and Fishing cats in the lowland region of Far-western, Nepal.**

This report provides an update on the activities conducted regarding the project “Niche Overlap and Awareness Initiatives for the Conservation of Smooth-coated Otters and Fishing Cats in the lowland Region of Far-Western Nepal”. In the second phase of the fieldwork, we particularly conducted community outreach and awareness programs and completed the following activities:

**a) Preparation and printing of awareness materials**

We prepared and printed two different posters containing essential information about each Smooth-coated otter (SCO) and Fishing cat (FC) in the Nepali language. The information mainly includes a description of SCO and FC, the conservation challenges, ecological information, the importance of conservation, and ways to conserve SCO and FC. For each species, 2000 posters were printed, and in total, 4000 posters were printed and distributed among students and local people.

We also prepared and printed stickers containing valuable messages about the conservation importance of SCO and FC in both the Nepali and English languages. Similarly, T-shirts were also printed with the conservation message for both species. A few pieces of these were distributed among the local people.

**b) School awareness programs**

We conducted a school awareness program across 11 schools in Kanchanpur and Kailali Districts, with seven in Kanchanpur and four in Kailali. Students were provided with ecological information, the importance of conservation, major threats, the role of students in conservation, conservation measures, and policy provisions for both species. To make the awareness sessions interactive and engaging, we held a quiz competition among the students at the end of each class. Students who answered correctly were provided with a prize.

In the case of lower secondary students, we adopted a slightly different approach to disseminate information. We showed a picture of both species and described information about them in very simple language that students could understand. Then, we asked them to draw pictures of SCO and FC, and the three best drawings from each class were rewarded with a prize.

At the end of the program, the posters of both SCO and FC were distributed among students, and a few pieces of the posters were given to the library of each school so that our conservation material remains in school for a long time and more interested students can read and learn about SCO and FC for years to come. In total, we reached out to more than 500 students directly who lived in and around the habitat of SCO and FC in Kailali and Kanchanpur Districts.

Table 1: The names of schools, location, and the number of students who participated in the SCO and FC awareness programme in Kanchanpur and Kailali Districts.

S.N	Name of Schools	Grade of the participating students	Total number of students
1.	Retina International Boarding School, Bhimdatta Municipality-1, Kanchanpur District	7 and 8	43
2.	Saraswoti Higher Secondary School, Bhimdatta Municipality-1, Kanchanpur District	6,7,8, and 9	38
3.	Shree Ganhesh Higher Secondary School, Beldandi, Rural Municipality-5, Kanchanpur	8, and 9	25
4.	Shree Baijanatha Higher Secondary School, Beldandi Rural Municipality-5, Kanchanpur	8, and 9	30
5.	Shree Saraswati Janata Higher Secondary School, Beldandi-4, Kanchanpur	10	85
6.	Kanchan Galaxy Boarding School- Beldandi Rural Municipality-02, Kanchanpur	9, and 10	35

7.	Shree Baijnatha Secondary School, Bhimdatta Rural Municipality-14, Kanchanpur	7 and 8	38
8.	Shree Shanti Secondary School, Bhimdatta Rural Municipality-14, Kanchanpur	8	28
9	Shree Birat Sanatan Higher Secondary School, Ghodaghodi Municipality, Kailali District	9	35
10	Shree Janajyoti Secondary School, Ghodaghodi Municipality-04, Kailali District	8	39
11	Shree Kapilmuni Lower Secondary School- Ghodaghodi Municipality-01, Kailali District	4, and 5	31



Picture: Kanchan Galaxy Boarding School-Beldandi Rural Municipality-02, Kanchanpur





Picture: Shree Saraswati Janata Higher Secondary School, Beldandi-4, Kanchanpur



Picture: Shree Janajyoti Secondary School, Ghodaghodi Municipality-04, Kailali District





Picture: Shree Birat Sanatan Higher Secondary School, Ghodaghodi Municipality, Kailali District



Picture: Shree Kapilmuni Lower Secondary School- Ghodaghodi Municipality-01, Kailali District





Picture: Shree Baijanatha Higher Secondary School, Beldandi Rural Municipality-5, Kanchanpur



Picture: Shree Baijnatha Secondary School, Bhimdatta Rural Municipality-14, Kanchanpur



Picture: Retina International Boarding School, Bhimdatta Municipality-1, Kanchanpur District

### c) **Community Outreach Programs**

The community outreach program primarily took place in five communities, three in Kanchanpur and two in Kailali Districts, respectively. The awareness initiative includes a presentation on the SCO and FC, distribution of posters, followed by discussions with local residents who shared their experiences related to the SCO and FC. Additionally, whenever we get the opportunity in communities, we engage with the local people to discuss and share knowledge about both the species and distributed informational posters. Throughout the outreach program, local participants were informed about the ecological value, conservation significance, conservation measures, and policy provisions concerning both species. Participants also gained knowledge of otter identification and how to distinguish them from similar species, such as the Civet and Yellow-Throated Marten. Local individuals demonstrated enthusiasm and a desire to learn about the conservation benefits of the SCO and FC, as well as their ecological roles in freshwater ecosystems. While most were aware of the SCO presence, many did not recognize the FC. We directly engaged with over 300 local people residing in and around the otter habitat in Kanchanpur and Kailali Districts.













#### **D) Installation of Informational Hoarding Boards**

We installed four informational hoarding boards in two different locations for each SCO and FC, in Kanchanpur and Kailali Districts. The locations were chosen after consultation with local people and local authorities. They were placed in the most striking location, easily visible to pedestrians and local people. The hoarding boards display important information about the ecology, conservation measures, the importance of conservation, and threats to both species in



the Nepali Language. These can be instrumental in spreading conservation messages to local people for a long term.

Table 2: The description of the location where the hoarding board has been installed.

<b>S.N</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Hoarding board of which species?</b>	<b>Description</b>
1.	Majhgau, Kanchanpur District	Smooth-coated otter	It was installed outside the main gate of Suklaphanta National Park.
2.	Daiji- Kanchanpur District	Fishing cat	It was installed on the main road that connects the East-West highway to the southern region of Suklaphanta National Park.
3.	Ghodaghodi Lake, Kailali District	Smooth-coated otter	It was installed inside the Ghodaghodi Lake, where the people mostly gather for photos and to see the view of the lake.
4.	Ghodaghodli Lake, Kailali District	Fishing cat	It was installed outside the main gate of Ghodaghodi Lake.









### E) Affixing stickers on the local vehicles and in public places

The stickers containing the conservation message of both the species, SCO and FC, were pasted on the local vehicles such as autos, buses, jeeps, bikes, and tractors. We take permission from the vehicle owner prior to affixing to the vehicles.





