

Project Update: February 2022

Duration: December 2021 to February 2022



Project progress

In the second quarter, we completed four activities as proposed.

- 1) Coordination with stakeholders.
- 2) Stakeholder meeting.
- 3) Market observation and survey.
- 4) Video documentation.

The details of the accomplishments are presented below.

Coordination with stakeholders

Like in the first quarter of the project, we continued the coordination with stakeholders. We consulted (through emails, in-person meetings, telephone) with the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, Division Forest Offices-Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, and Lalitpur. Similarly, we reached out to Central Zoo-National Trust for Nature Conservation, Birdlife International, WWF Nepal, IUCN Nepal, Greenhood Nepal, Bird Conservation Nepal, Central Investigation Bureau-Nepal Police, and Jane Goodall Institute Nepal. From this consultation, we planned for a stakeholder meeting.

Stakeholder Meeting

We proposed a stakeholder meeting before the market survey because it is likely to improve the project outcomes. For this, we invited stakeholders from various organisations. Fourteen individuals (including the project team) from nine agencies participated in the meeting. We had two interaction questions for the discussion

focused on bird trade issues and areas to work on during this research. The participants provided their views on both of the interaction questions.

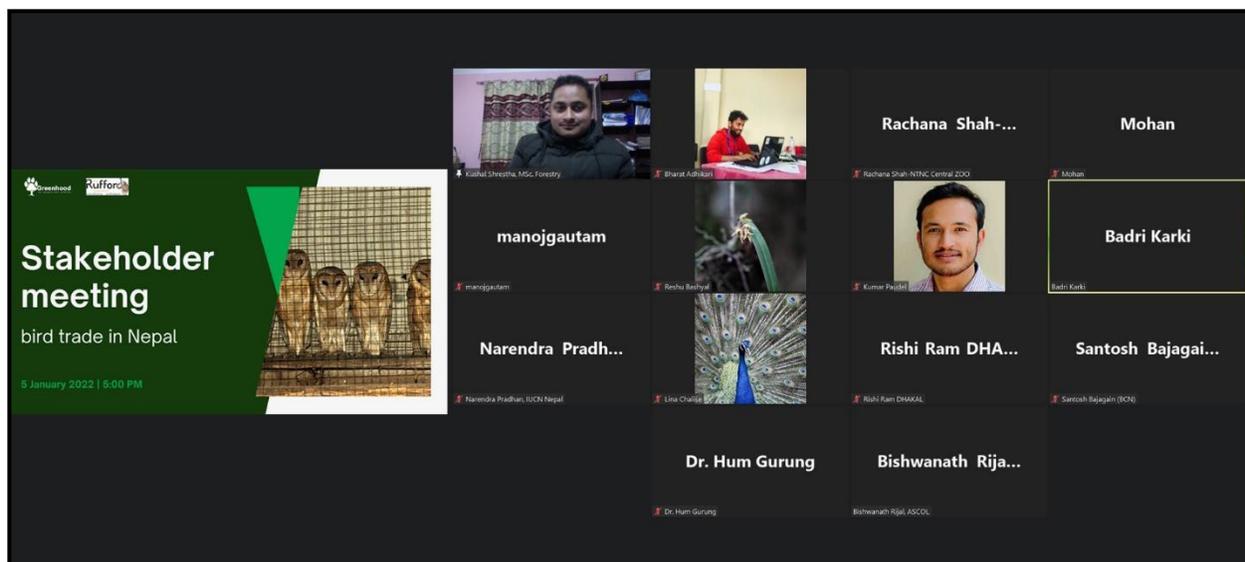


Photo 1 – Stakeholder meeting over Zoom where 14 people participated from nine agencies

Table 1 - Attendees of Stakeholder meeting

S.N.	Attendees	Agency
1.	Badri Kumar Karki	Division Forest Office, Kathmandu
2.	Bharat Adhikari	Greenhood Nepal
3.	Bishwanath Rijal	Amrit Science Campus, Tribhuvan University
4.	Hum Bahadur Gurung	Birdlife International
5.	Kumar Paudel	Greenhood Nepal
6.	Kushal Shrestha	Greenhood Nepal
7.	Lina Chalise	Central Zoo, National Trust for Nature Conservation
8.	Manoj Gautam	Jane Goodall Institute Nepal
9.	Mohan Bikram Shrestha	Bird Conservation Nepal
10.	Narendra Man Pradhan	IUCN Nepal
11.	Rachana Singh Shah	Central Zoo, National Trust for Nature Conservation
12.	Reshu Bashyal	Greenhood Nepal
13.	Rishi Ram Dhakal	Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation
14.	Santosh Bajagain	Bird Conservation Nepal

The highlights of the meeting are along with this quarterly update.

Market Observation and Survey

Before the market survey, we observed various suspected areas of Kathmandu Valley. The places visited for observation were Bouddha, Pashupatinath, Gongabu, Budanilkantha, Swyambhu, Kalanki, Kalimati, Balkhu, Kritipur, Chabahil-Kapan, Koteshwor and new road-Ason in Kathmandu district. Similarly, Sanepa, Gwarko,

Satdobato, Godawari, Jawalakhel and Mangal Bazar in Lalitpur district. In the Bhaktapur district, we observed markets of Kamal Pokhari, Sanothimi, and Sallaghari. We selected above mentioned suspected areas for observation based on the consultation with bird researchers and experts. We also observed the market of durbar square areas – Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, and Lalitpur.

We planned to survey those areas where we witnessed trading activities during market observation. As per our plan, we re-visited markets and interacted with traders purposively. We found a wide range of bird species on illegal trade. It includes species ranging from least concern to globally threatened.



Photo 2: Project leader interacting with bird trader in a shop in Kathmandu

Video Documentation

Simultaneously along with market observation and survey, we continued video documentation. In this period, we documented footage that includes bird trading activities, the bird inside cages, and the crowd. We will use the captured footage during the post-production of the video.

Challenges

- We planned to organise a stakeholder's meeting in-person. However, considering the rising cases of the Omicron variant, we switched for a virtual meeting.
- Omicron variant hiked during our market survey days. It was challenging to perform a market survey amidst the third wave of COVID-19. But considering smart lockdown (imposed by Nepal Government) and discussion within the team, we continued survey following safety protocols.

- It was challenging to get a response from traders during the market survey. We only interacted with the traders who showed interest and comfortable to respond us.

Further plan

- In third quarter of the project the following activities are proposed.
- Awareness materials creation and dissemination.
- Data entry and analysis.

Highlights and Key Notes of the Meeting

The image is a promotional poster for a stakeholder meeting. It features a dark green background on the left with white text. At the top left, there are two logos: 'Greenhood' with a paw print icon and 'Rufforo' with a small animal icon. The main text reads 'Stakeholder meeting' in large white font, followed by 'bird trade in Nepal' in a smaller white font. At the bottom left, the date '5 January 2022' is written in green. On the right side, there is a photograph of four owls perched on a wooden branch inside a wire cage. A large green triangle is positioned between the text and the photograph.

Welcome remark

Reshu Bashyal, Project Member (Research Fellow at Greenhood Nepal)

Miss Bashyal thanked all the invitees for attending the event and welcomed them on behalf of the organizing team. She said that bird trade is an ongoing debate, a serious issue that needs more attention from all stakeholders.

Kushal Shrestha, Project leader (Research Associate at Greenhood Nepal)

Mr. Shrestha presented a PowerPoint giving an overview of the project. He opened the event for discussion and moderated the whole interaction session.

Interaction session

We had two interaction questions focused on key bird trade issues and areas to work on during this research. The participants provided their views on both of the issues.

Below is the keynote from the event participants.

Bishwanath Rijal, Lecturer - Amrit Science Campus, Tribhuvan University

- Mr. Rijal briefly presented a PowerPoint. He said that there are several issues in bird conservation in Nepal like poisoning, retaliate killing, habitat loss, trade, etc. He said that like other species, birds are also traded illegally in a huge quantity these days because it is easy money for the traders/middlemen and people involved in it. Birds that are in high demand for trade are several species of owl, eagle and hawk.
- There is a weak Government institutional process to manage the trade including limited priority, given that there are many other high-profile species like Tiger, Rhino to prioritize for them. Additionally, there is very little awareness on the extent of bird trade and also on the impacts of bird trade on the ecosystem. Having said that, there have been good attempts from the Government, conservation organizations, and some individual efforts to counter the illegal bird trade in Nepal. These efforts should be recognized, maybe an appreciation certificate/gift for their good deeds.

Manoj Gautam, Founder - Jane Goodall Institute Nepal

Mr. Gautam said that the bird trade dynamics is a complex thing to understand involving multiple actors in different capacities. He added that this is a growing issue that will need planned efforts, serious attention, and beyond the traditional community awareness approach – probably strong (and sincere) efforts from the Government/enforcement could be helpful.

Some of the key issues encountered are:

Local bird trade/local poaching:

- There are very "loose" policies relating to the bird trade, probably in form of brochures. The traders can manipulate and take advantage of such weak/non-responsive policies.
- The ongoing illegal practices do not match our constitutional legacy thereby creating problems for enforcement as well as for rescuing agencies. For instance, we can see many wild Chayakhura, Cheer Pheasant, Kalij etc. being sold in the market in the name of captive bred. There is no proper method/procedure that monitors/digs into these wild/captive differences which traders easily take advantage of.
- One can find many protected (some even endangered) species that are being locally poached and traded.

Nepal as a transit:

- Birds have high international market demand and Nepal acts as both source and transit. India, Israel, Oman, Pakistan, are some of the known destinations. Some species like owls are highly fetched in India and Pakistan for their use in black magic/religious purposes. Likewise, love birds, normal albino crows are also highly traded from Nepal. Birds are also used in bionics eye research in Israel (this was long back around 2009/10 but not sure if it is still prevalent), and as normal pets.
- Hetauda, Bara, Gandaki areas are the key hubs for owl trade in Nepal.
- Besides owl, Golden Eagle also fetches a high price in the international market but there are limited seizures of this species because the trade is very organized.
- Overall, the bird trade is very organized involving all key stakeholders' collectors, middlemen, traders, and buyers.

Some issues & solutions:

- Mr. Gautam shared a story regarding the confiscation of over 250 high fetching international birds (bought from different parts of Africa i.e., Guinea, Kakadu; Asia, and others) that were being traded to their destination through Nepal. There were rumors that the birds were supposed to be killed in seizure.
- The limited capacity of rehabilitation centers OR they prefer species that attract visitors.
- Misuse and manipulate the laws and provide license of species that are strictly banned for trade.
- We need to strengthen the enforcement and demotivate the corruption/internal setting – this can be done through multi-stakeholder's support.

He further added

- There are so many issues in conservation, especially in the illegal wildlife trade. He was happy that the Government is taking things positively and working with its full efficiency to address this issue.
- The government authorities agreed that less priority on these species is because of the limited human resources. We acknowledge that the Government, as well as rescue centers, are working despite the limited human resources. Maybe we need another event to discuss more on how things could be prioritized and what capacities are needed to address them – more on limitations and solutions.
- Concerted efforts are required from everyone to address the issue.

Rachana Singh Shah, Office-Incharge - Central Zoo, National Trust for Nature Conservation)

- Mrs. Shah said that the illegal bird trade is rampant.
- While there are some unsuccessful attempts/loopholes that need to be improvised, we should also appreciate some good attempts.
- We should also think towards commercial captive breeding as a solution to reduce pressure on wild birds BUT this has to be done under the strong laws.
- The zoo is trying to incorporate and support the rescued species, but one should understand that the rescued species are very vulnerable and have a 60-70% mortality rate. Even in this scenario, the zoo/rescue center tries to accommodate beyond their capacity.
- NTNC/Central Zoo is always happy to help researchers/studies.

Badri Kumar Karki - Division Forest Officer, Division Forest Office, Kathmandu

- While illegal bird trade is ongoing, there are also some good conservation efforts to address this. The DFO always supports the researchers with the data required.
- There are definitely some loopholes, but the DFO has also worked beyond their capacity and succeeded in seizures. We have received more cases of local bird trade than international trade except that to/from India.
- Some priority bird species that need consideration are Parrot, Maina, Owl, Love birds.
- Wildlife crime is a growing issue that gets into our discussion as well. However, there are many cases (in all species) for limited manpower to look after so we often have no choices but to prioritize.
- The most critical cases are linked to religious purposes for e.g., peacock dance – when things are linked to religious beliefs, it gets complicated to deal with.
- There are also issues with the commercialization of the bird trade – such things should be dealt properly with stronger policies/laws.
- There are also some cases of fake seizures which gets an unnecessary hype in the media.
- Besides everything, there are also some positive attempts. The DFO is always happy to help and will raise the issues raised in this meeting during our next WCCB meeting.

Narendra Man Pradhan, Program Coordinator - IUCN Nepal

- We should go into the deep root causes of bird trade (maybe beyond the scope of research) – we could do a follow-up event to come up with some important outputs for the management.
- Regulated trade is important to reduce pressure on wild birds.
- There are many issues on bird trade – these issues should be dealt with in a holistic approach.

Hum Bahadur Gurung, Regional Project Manager - Birdlife International, Malaysia

- Birdlife International has prepared an infographic focusing on the illegal bird trade – this issue is also the priority of their institutions, so they/he is happy to help. Also, given that there are limited studies on bird trade, it is good that this research is being initiated/going at a good pace – we need more research in bird trade because this trade issue has so many dimensions.
- Singapore is a bird trade (research) hub.
- The bird trade is ongoing and there are different aspects of this trade. For instance, the multiple actors involved, dimensions of culture/tradition – some birds are left in temples with their feathers cut so that they will not fly/emotionally attract visitors – we should identify the root causes associated with this issue.
- We need to work together/collaborate at various stakeholders' levels to understand the root cause, spectrum on why it is happening, and also explore the opportunities in and beyond the country for regional trade if that is non-detrimental.

Mohan Bikram Shrestha, Research Officer - Bird Conservation Nepal

Mr. Shrestha said that there are four major bird trade-related issues:

- Species that are illegal in Nepal may be legal in neighboring countries.
- We need a serious review of cases where the culprits of seizure are released.
- There are some personal interests that create issues to conservation. WCCB should take lead/ownership to lead such wildlife crime issues.
- Some species are specifically traded to/for religious reasons – it is difficult to address this religious perspective. We should find a way to deal with these issues that are linked to emotional attachments.

Rishi Ram Dhakal, Head - Wildlife Crime Control Unit, Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation

- We need to be serious and sincere towards the bird trade.
- We are collaborating with different stakeholders, institutions because the illegal wildlife trade needs concerted efforts from different people/institutions.
- Definitely, there are loopholes that need to be addressed.
- This workshop has opened discourse on the bird trade in Nepal.

Lina Chalise, Conservation Education and Information Officer - Central Zoo, National Trust for Nature Conservation

- Mrs. Chalise said that this event has been more like a brainstorming session where different dynamics of bird trade were discussed. As IWT is a network of several stakeholders, a collaborative effort is needed to address this.
- The current extent of IWT in Nepal is because it has become a transit. However, most of the details are anecdotal and we need more research to prove this, to find solutions out of it.
- The rehab center is working with all its capacity acting as a care home and providing a secure environment to the rescued animals.
- As a rescue/rehab center, the institution is happy to help researchers.

Concluding remarks:

Kumar Paudel, Co-Founder, Director at Greenhood Nepal

- Mr. Paudel said that this is just the beginning of our project and thanked all the participants for attending and providing their important insights during the event. He said that the team is eager to connect the dots, get deeper to understand the root causes/solutions, and come up with some useful insights that will go beyond the peer-reviewed journal publications. The team will collaborate with different stakeholders at different levels.
- He reiterated that there are many questions, concerns, limitations, issues at this point but the team will organize another workshop (probably an in-person event) to share the research insights and way forward.
- Definitely, conservation needs collective efforts – we all should collaborate to discourage negative things and encourage positive attempts in controlling the illegal trade.