

## Final Evaluation Report

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Your Details	
<b>Full Name</b>	Rupesh Maharjan
<b>Project Title</b>	Fishing cat: Status and its conservation in wetlands of Chitwan National Park, Central Nepal
<b>Application ID</b>	34117-1
<b>Grant Amount</b>	£5930
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<b>Date of this Report</b>	2022/04/07

**1. Indicate the level of achievement of the project's original objectives and include any relevant comments on factors affecting this.**

Objective	Not achieved	Partially achieved	Fully achieved	Comments
1. Use wildlife monitoring tools and methods to record their presence.				Knowledge of local people was extremely helpful in capturing fishing cat images from three different locations.
2. Understand the perception of local community people towards the fishing cat.				We've used fishing cat images to confirm whether people know about the species before asking them the relevant questions. People from the various occupational backgrounds were interviewed to maintain the diversity of their answers.
3. Building local capacity for continuous monitoring.				Wildlife technicians, local community leaders and local wildlife guides were given wildlife monitoring training to motivate and strengthen their capacity for long term monitoring and conservation of the species as a citizen scientist.
4. Awareness program to educate people about the status of the fishing cat and their role in the habitat conservation of the species.				School awareness programmes were found to be much more effective in relaying our message, regarding the conservation of fishing cat and its habitat, to wider and diverse audiences. To make our message clearer we've used posters, pictures and videos showing the need for fishing cat and its habitat conservation to our audiences.

**2. Please explain any unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled.**

Initially, we had planned to carry out a reconnaissance survey inside and outside the national park to identify the possible camera trap locations before carrying out actual field research. However, due to the delay in permission from DNPWC, the reconnaissance survey couldn't be done inside the park within the intended timeframe. So, identifying a suitable camera trap station took more time than expected during the field survey.

To determine the presence of fishing cat outside the park boundary we had installed infrared cameras in bufferzone areas as well. But there was a high risk of trampling and theft of those cameras as there were heavy movements of people in the area. So, we had used additional local personnel to look after those cameras.

Although our fieldwork was carried out during the dry months of the year, unexpectedly there was heavy rainfall for a few days and most of our cameras were placed inside the wetland area near Rapti river. To ensure the safety of our cameras from over flooding, we had to rush to those camera trap sites. So additional team had to be mobilized to cover all of those camera trap locations within a short period of time to assess the conditions of those cameras and adjust the location of a few of those cameras as per required.

Due to the COVID restrictions imposed by the Nepal Government, the mass gathering of local community people for executing awareness programmes was challenging. Instead, we gave conservation training to community leaders, local wildlife technicians, local wildlife guides and their associates so that they can share it with their community members. Additionally, we also performed door to door awareness campaign targeting those community people who are dependent on the wetland for their daily survival.

### **3. Briefly describe the three most important outcomes of your project.**

#### **a. Distribution of fishing cat within the study area**

Using camera trap and sign survey methods, we were able to capture images of fishing cat from three different locations, which were more than 2 km from each other. All those images were captured within the wetland of the Kasara sector of Chitwan National Park (CNP) near the Rapti river.

#### **b. Awareness on the existence and conservation of fishing cat to larger audiences**

Initially, during our questionnaire survey, we found that most of the local people living close to the boundary of CNP don't know about the existence of fishing cat. However, when they were shown the images of species, they conformed its existence inside their locality as well. It seems that people get confused with jungle cat and fishing cat. To address the problem, a mass awareness campaign was carried out through both community and school level programmes. We've used posters, videos and images to address the need for and importance of community level participation in fishing cat conservation. With this campaign, the effort of the project has reached more than 500 households directly and indirectly. Most importantly, the school awareness programmes were found to be much more effective in relaying our message, regarding the conservation of fishing cat and its habitat, to wider and more diverse audiences.

#### **c. Strengthening the capacity of local resource personnel**

The project has given wildlife monitoring and conservation training to more than 25 personnel from different occupational backgrounds (local wildlife technicians, local community leaders and local wildlife guides) to motivate and strengthen their capacity for a long-term monitoring and conservation of the species as a citizen scientist.

#### **4. What do you consider to be the most significant achievement of this work?**

The research and conservation of fishing cat species have always been undermined, especially in bufferzone area of Chitwan National Park, because their existence and conservation needs were known to limited people. This project, however, has helped to understand the status of fishing cat within and outside of the protected areas as well as able to gain the trust and support of local community people for future fishing cat conservation activities, which I consider to be the most significant achievement of this work.

#### **5. Briefly describe the involvement of local communities and how they have benefited from the project.**

There was a huge role played by the local community people on the success of the project. Knowledge from some of the community members about fishing cat helped us substantially to gather its information within the project area. Also, most of our field team members were from a local conservation organisation and from local communities which made us easier to coordinate with local community leaders to convey our message to a large audience as well navigate the localities. Most importantly, during the project period, local community people from different ethnic groups and occupation backgrounds were engaged in fishing cat monitoring and conservation training programme so that we could encourage them to be citizen scientists and get their support for long term monitoring and conservation of the species. Also, according to the local community people of the project area, it was the first community-based awareness programme to address the importance and conservation of fishing cat species, which proved to be highly effective, as most people don't know about its existence or gets confused with other wild cat species.

#### **6. Are there any plans to continue this work?**

To conserve and increase the population of fishing cat, I am still continuing the conservation effort by collaborating with local stakeholders, conservation partners and fishing cat conservation groups. Based on the current understanding of fishing cat in CNP, still more awareness of conservation is required. So, in the coming days, I will be extending my conservation work not only in the Kasara sector of CNP but also in other parts of the park as well.

#### **7. How do you plan to share the results of your work with others?**

I have presented my findings at the "Second Rufford In-Country Conference- Sri Lanka" organised by Bio Conservation Society (BCSL) as well as sent my abstract to be published in the proceedings of the same conference. Also, I have shared my experience and findings from the project in the workshop on "Biodiversity Conservation of Jagadishpur Reservoir" organised by Nature Conservation and Study Center, Nepal. Further, I have shared and published my work on the BlogSpot of Nepal Tiger Trust (NTT) website (<https://www.nepaltigertrust.org/blogs/post/conservation-of-fishing-cat-in-the->

wetlands-of-chitwan-national-park) and different other social media platforms and also working to publish my results in peer-reviewed journals as well.

**8. Timescale: Over what period was the grant used? How does this compare to the anticipated or actual length of the project?**

The grant was used for over 12 months. We started our project as soon as the funding was received in March. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, we had to postpone our remaining questionnaire survey as well as community and school-based programmes by a few months than our intended time schedules. But all activities were carried out smoothly afterwards and we've managed to complete it within project period.

**9. Looking ahead, what do you feel are the important next steps?**

Long term monitoring and conservation of the species outside of the protected area are major steps that need to be addressed. Both steps can be undertaken only through community level intervention. So, it is highly significant to enhance the capacity of local communities through conservation training and provide them with the opportunities to participate in local conservation activities in future. Also, more awareness campaigns must be carried out among other communities, living close to fishing cat habitats, to educate people about the importance of fishing cat and its habitat conservation.

**10. Did you use The Rufford Foundation logo in any materials produced in relation to this project? Did the Foundation receive any publicity during the course of your work?**

The logo of Rufford Foundation was used in every poster, banner and education materials developed for awareness/education campaigns about the conservation of fishing cat. It was also used in t-shirts which were distributed to community members involved in the projects. Besides the logo, name of the foundation was also included in every presentation and platform while sharing my experience and results of the projects with other conservation groups.

**11. Please provide a full list of all the members of your team and briefly what was their roles in the project.**

**Mr. Rupesh Maharjan (Project Leader):** Designed and managed the project by coordinating with local stakeholders (local community members, conservation groups) and all the members of the project. Carried out field surveys such as reconnaissance survey, Questionnaire survey, camera trap and sign survey. Also, organized both community and school level awareness programs related to fishing cat conservation in the bufferzone areas.

**Ms. Rama Mishra:** Provided her advice and support in the development of awareness campaign modality and materials for the project.

**Dr. Jhamak B. Karki & Dr. Him Lal Shrestha:** Provided technical and education guidance while designing the project research plans.

**Mr. Pratik Bajracharya & Sanju Lamichhane:** Provided field assistance while carrying out research and conservation work within the project period.

**Mr. Baburam Mahatto, Mr. Manesh Limbhu, Mr. Raju Kumal, Mr. Bir Bahadur Kumal:** Provided local support in the field while carrying out research work and conservation awareness campaign.

## **12. Any other comments?**

Fishing cat is one of the highly neglected and undermined species in comparison to other large, endangered mammalian species. It seems that very less to no effort has been given to the conservation of this particular species by local communities and authorities surrounding the areas of CNP. It is primarily caused due to lack of awareness about the existence and conservation of the fishing cat within those localities. So, more fishing cat research and conservation awareness programmes are still needed to be carried out in the larger areas of CNP. This will not only aware local communities of the need for fishing cat conservation but also will help us to further gain community level support in our long-term fishing cat conservation activities.