

Final Evaluation Report

Your Details	
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Project Title	Status Assessment and Conservation of Critically Endangered Elongated Tortoise in Southeastern Nepal
Application ID	42887-1
Date of this Report	30 July 2025

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
To assess the present status and conservation challenges of Elongated tortoise in Jhapa district				Six community forests were surveyed following discussions with local stakeholders and turtle researchers working in Jhapa district. No individuals were encountered during the field survey. Key conservation challenges included targeted hunting using dogs, local consumption and low level of awareness.
Capacity-building of undergraduate students for outreach sessions through ToT program				Eleven undergraduate students were trained through a one-day ToT session and successfully conducted outreach programs in 25 schools, reaching over 1300 students.
Carry out conservation activities to reduce the threats				A range of conservation actions were implemented, including two community workshops, stakeholder discussions with forest and local government authorities, production and broadcasting of a radio jingle, installation of hoarding boards, and a conservation rally on World Turtle Day. These efforts contributed to increased awareness and community engagement, which directly facilitated the rescue of three Elongated tortoises during the project period.

2. Describe the three most important outcomes of your project.

a) Identification of challenges and conservation opportunities

We surveyed six community forests, each of which was known to be inhabited by Elongated tortoise through questionnaire surveys and shell evidences. We adopted a combination of two survey methods: sweep survey and time constrained area search to maximize our chance of encountering the tortoise in the wild. A total of 5-10 team members, always accompanied by few local forest guards surveyed the area during the day time (9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.). Despite our effort, we couldn't record any live specimen of the tortoise, therefore attempt to obtain associated natural history and environmental information were not fulfilled. Several evidences of consumption by local community members were recorded from these areas.



Photo 1: Snippets of field surveys. a) Project team members crossing the river to reach adjacent field site; b) A potential habitat of Elongated tortoise in Dahijhoda CF; c) A shell of Elongated tortoise hung as a decorative after consumption d. Carapace of a softshell turtle kept in home for medicinal purpose.

However, the impact of our continuous presence and intervention with communities were reflected through three independent events of rescues we made from the area. Of these, one rescue was made from the Ilam district where our project didn't operate directly, and two were made within the Jhapa district. All tortoises were wild caught

and kept as pet, therefore it was transferred to Turtle Rescue and Conservation Centre (TRCC). As informed by the lead keeper of the TRCC, one rescued female was gravid and laid 3 eggs later. The incident was important in two ways, 1) Saving a gravid female tortoise of the species that is highly threatened 2) pro-active involvement of community members to co-ordinate rescue efforts. Fortunately, two of the three rescued individuals were female. It is a general fact, and was also stressed within the proposal how saving even one individuals of this species mattered, and in that sense our efforts were highly rewarded.



Photo 2: A rescued female Elongated tortoise maintained at Turtle Rescue and Conservation Centre (TRCC).

Upon inquires with the whereabouts of these tortoises, two forms of acquisition were mainly noted: fortuitous and targeted. Certain group of people used hunting dogs to locate tortoise in the burrow. They belong to a marginalized community with high knowledge about forest resources and possess traditional hunting skills. One of our rescues were made from similar group of people, who gave away the tortoise in fear of prosecution. One visible reason for such action was poverty, which makes sense as they were initially demanding a price for this individual as well.

While conservation can follow different approaches, research on the species' biology, population and other ecological aspects require guaranteed search methods. One holistic way to ensure conservation and monitoring of the tortoise species could be the integration of people with such skills in field activities. Given our inability in locating the species and similar trends in contemporary studies, I believe this learning is also an important outcome from this project.

Field Vlog can be viewed from this link: [We Spent a Day Tracking the Elongated Tortoise in the Wild](#)

b) Wide reach of conservation message through volunteers' mobilization and media outreach

Eleven undergraduate students attended a one-day training of trainers (ToT) sessions on conservation outreach. The aim of this training was to build the capacity of these students as conservation leaders. Each student were assigned to conduct education program at 3-5 schools. The participants successfully covered 25 schools reaching over 1300 students. During the school visits, one group of participant was also able to gather information about Indian flapshell turtle (*Lissemys punctata andersoni*) and Yellow-bellied roofed turtle (*Pangshura tentoria flaviventer*) being kept as a pet. Necessary coordination were promptly made to rescue these turtles.

Likewise, a mass awareness program was organized on World Turtle Day 2024. This program took place at Hetauda, which although didn't come under our original project site, was much needed due to visible exploitation of turtle species including Elongated tortoise. The program featured creative initiatives such as face painting, conservation rally and education stall as well as community awareness program.

Two community workshops at Dahijhoda Community Forest and Jukekhadi Community Forest were also organized to sensitize conservation awareness among local community members. A total of 35 community members were directly reached through these two workshops. Positive attitude was observed among participants who appreciated learning about a species so highly threatened found in their forest areas. Although informal, the community forest officials committed to protecting tortoise from exploitation and circulating information when found.

Another important media outlet used for information dissemination was radio jingle which was shared using both radio channels and social media handles. The material was received with high accolades with some popular wildlife related social media pages separately sharing the content. The content has received over 18k views on social media. As for radio station, the content is broadcasted by Aagan F.M. 89.6 MHz six times per day for eight months (Jan-July).

Radio Jingle can be listened through this link: [Radio Jingle for Elongated Tortoise Conservation](#)



Photo 3: Activities associated with volunteers; a) Participants of Training of Trainers (ToT) sessions with organizers; b) Conservation rally on the occasion of World Turtle Day 2024; c & d) Volunteers carrying out school education program on Elongated Tortoise

c) Bringing stakeholder together as a unified approach for turtle conservation

This event brought together important stakeholders that included officials from Division Forest Office, Local Government Authorities (Mayor, Ward Chairperson, Municipal and Ward Community Members), Community Forest Officials, Local Youth Groups, Women's Group and other local community members to discuss on the importance of turtle conservation. Presentations on turtle conservation history, status of turtles in Nepal and local context were shared. The program aimed to develop local stewardship in turtle conservation through information dissemination. Two important commitments were made by Division Forest Officer and Mayor of Arjundhara Municipality which are as follows:

1. The Division Forest Officer reinforced the role as an authoritative body for the conservation of local biodiversity, and committed to remain steadfast for the conservation of tortoise and turtles with equal importance.
2. The Mayor of Arjundhara Municipality committed to allocate budget in local government to support turtle conservation through research, or action-based conservation works.

3. Explain any unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled.

Working with wild animals and in wild places is fun but also comes with its share of challenges. During one of the field trips, I unexpectedly got trapped in quicksand. It was a difficult moment that took nearly two hours to resolve. Thanks to the experience of the local forest guards and the combined efforts of my team members, I was safely pulled out.

Likewise, as part of the planned activities, I intended to install a conservation hoarding board along a section of the East-West Highway in eastern Nepal. However, due to ongoing road expansion work, I couldn't find a suitable location for installation. As an alternative, I placed the information board at the office of the Dahijhoda Community Forest.

4. Describe the involvement of local communities and how they have benefitted from the project.

Almost all project activities involved strong participation from local communities. During the survey phase, eight forest guards from six different community forests were actively engaged, along with two field assistants and myself as the Principal Investigator, all of whom belong to the local area. Beyond the financial benefits, the team members gained valuable experience and knowledge by working together. The forest guards, who typically focus on patrolling and timber resources were introduced to wildlife survey techniques and learned about the broader biodiversity of their forest including birds, herpetofauna, and mammals.

We also trained eleven undergraduate students, all permanent residents of the project area. Their role as volunteers enhanced their understanding of the Elongated Tortoise, boosted their confidence and communication skills, and marked the beginning of their conservation journey. As a former student from the same academic institution, I understand how rare such opportunities can be for students in this region. Encouragingly, these students also learned about the Rufford Foundation and may one day apply for their own conservation projects.

My interactions with the broader community were encouraging, particularly because learning about the presence of the threatened Elongated Tortoise in their forests seemed to increase their interest in conservation efforts. The awareness and knowledge gained during the workshops could be vital in supporting future rescue operations and conservation efforts for the species.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

Yes, definitely! My motivation to work for tortoises and turtles has only grown stronger ever since. Through this project, I was able to build meaningful rapport with various

stakeholders, and the commitment shown by local authorities along with active support from community members during the turtle rescues has made me even more determined to continue this work.

6. How do you plan to share the results of your work with others?

We plan to share the results of this work through an experiential op-ed in local/national newspaper. A manuscript is also underway to share the outcome of this work as a conservation news. Emphasis will be placed on sharing conservation actions and lessons learned from the project through timely updates on WILD CARE Nepal's social media platforms. The PI participated in Rufford Learning Event 2024 in Nepal to share his work, and will continue to present findings at relevant platforms as opportunity arises.

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

There is a greater need to build consensus among people that turtles and tortoises are not for consumption, and that they play an important role in nature and the ecosystem. This can be achieved in coordination with community forest user groups, who are the authority over the forest. Based on our experience, certain individuals who possess traditional skills can be employed in incentive-based monitoring surveys. Future work should focus on improving the livelihoods of local people while engaging them in conservation activities. Since other species of turtles are also present in the area, some form of capacity-building program should be conducted on species identification, handling, and the safe release of rescued turtles. I also see a clear need to support local undergraduate students to undertake small-scale research on species trends, threats, and habitat conditions. Their involvement will not only help fill existing knowledge gaps but also foster long-term commitment to conservation. Continued awareness campaigns, especially targeting schools and youth groups, will help keep the conversation alive in the community.

8. 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?

Yes, we proudly used the Rufford Foundation logo on all conservation materials and program banners. During presentations and outreach events, we made sure to acknowledge and introduce the foundation as key supporter. Within the student community, receiving RSG was perceived as an aspiration. We also made a verbal acknowledgement in the radio jingle we produced.

9. Provide a full list of all the members of your team and their role in the project.

Below is the list of team members engaged during the project.

i) Sabin Adhikari – Served as team leader, responsible for coordination and overall implementation of project activities.

- ii) Tapil Prakash Rai – Served as advisor of the project and took part in every field trips to provide expert guidance and enhance survey efficacy.
- iii) Dr. Rama Mishra – Served as advisor of the project, reviewed and provided comments during the development of conservation materials.
- iv) Prakriti Koirala – Ms. Koirala, a forestry undergraduate assisted in field surveys and data collection.
- v) Kusum Koirala – Ms. Koirala, a forestry undergraduate as well, assisted in field surveys and data collection.
- vi) Saroj Chauhan – As a local resident, he helped build a rapport in Dahijhoda Community Forest and assisted in field surveys throughout. He had a major role to accomplish the hoarding board installation.
- vii) Bigyan Kharel – He helped with content designs for the creation of promotional materials.
- viii) Sapana Rimal – Ms. Rimal was originally a participant in Training of Trainers (ToT) sessions, but with her experience as media personality she played a key role in developing radio jingle, including co-ordination, facilitating communication, providing voice and manging other voice artists for the recording.

10. Any other comments?

I'm truly grateful to the Rufford Foundation for not only supporting this project but also helping me grow as a conservation practitioner. This opportunity pushed me beyond fieldwork, it challenged me to coordinate, facilitate, organize, and lead every initiative that came forward. More importantly, the project sparked genuine interest in conservation among the younger generation, which I see as a hopeful sign for the future.

Nothing can match the joy of knowing that a few tortoises were saved through this initiative, individuals that might have otherwise ended up on someone's plate. Throughout this journey, the support of my referees, team members, and the local community has been instrumental. I'm deeply thankful for their involvement, and I hope to continue nurturing this connection between turtles and people in the years to come

ANNEX – Photographs



Photo 4: Project activities at different phase; a) PI holding an elongated tortoise kept as pet; b) Mind mapping of participants of Training of Trainers (ToT) sessions; c) PI trapped in a quicksand during the field survey; d) An individual of Indian tent turtle *Pangshura tentoria flaviventer* found by volunteer; e) Cap provided as souvenir to students of Phaktanglung Education Foundation; f) Participants during stakeholder discussion program; g) & h) Volunteers carrying out school education program on Elongated Tortoise



Photo 5: An information board on Elongated tortoise installed at Dahijhoda Community Forest

ANNEX – Financial Report

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