

Final Evaluation Report

We ask all grant recipients to complete a project evaluation that helps us to gauge the success of your project. This must be sent in **MS Word and not PDF format**. We understand that projects often do not follow the predicted course but knowledge of your experiences is valuable to us and others who may be undertaking similar work – remember that negative experiences are just as valuable as positive ones if they help others to learn from them.

Please DO NOT fill in and submit this form until the project has been completed.

Complete the form in English. Note that the information may be edited before posting on our website.

Please email this report to jane@rufford.org.

Full Name	Laba K.C.
Project Title	Strengthening community engagement to conserve Ganges River Dolphin (<i>Platanista gangetica</i>) through a participatory-based approach in Koshi River, Eastern Nepal
Application ID	44815-2
Date of this Report	2/05/2026

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
<p>Updating information regarding dolphin numbers and prevailing threats, assess the water quality, and prey assessment in the Koshi River.</p>				<p>Dolphin and threat surveys were conducted using boat-based and shore-based methods during the pre and post monsoon season. The surveys covered approximately 50 km of the Koshi River, including both upper and lower river sections. In the pre-monsoon survey, 22 River Dolphins (15 Adults, 5 Sub-adults and 2 Juveniles) were recorded, while 19 River Dolphins (17 Adults and 2 Sub-adults) were recorded in the post-monsoon survey. Threat assessment showed that the most frequent threats to dolphins and aquatic life were illegal fishing using destructive methods like electrocution and fish poisoning, expansion of agriculture with extensive use of chemical fertilizers, land encroachment, waste dumping and human disturbance from high-speed jet boats and water-based recreation activities.</p> <p>Water sampling was conducted at 28 sampling points, distanced at 2 km intervals along the river from Chataradham to Gobargada near the Nepal-India border. Water samples were collected twice (pre- and post-monsoon). For the physio-chemical parameter, 9 different parameters were analysed. Prey (fish) surveys were also conducted during both seasons with support from local fishermen as resource persons. A total of 35 fish species were recorded in the pre-monsoon season</p>

				and 50 species in the post-monsoon season.
Training and mobilizing 10 community members as River Guards for regular dolphin monitoring and conservation efforts.				A two-day comprehensive training program was conducted for 10 River Guards, combining both theoretical sessions and practical field exercises. Following the training, the River Guard members carried out regular monitoring of dolphins and their habitats. This monitoring has continued for 9 months and is still ongoing. One of the most important achievements of the River Guard program was the confirmed sighting of the River Dolphin on two occasions in the upper section of the Koshi River: Madhuban (26.678275N, 87.056863E) and Borabadh (26.771026N, 87.124466E). This finding is highly significant because it confirms the species' presence in an area previously considered largely inaccessible due to the barrage. These records provide strong evidence of dolphin movement and distribution and contribute directly to conservation planning and threat mitigation in the Koshi River.
Engaging 2000 students and 1000 community members via conservation outreach programs adopting a participatory-based approach.				The participatory conservation awareness program targeted communities that had not been reached by earlier initiatives, with priority given to river-dependent and farming households. A total of 61 awareness events were conducted, reaching 3,122 community members and students. In addition to the planned activities, 14 additional awareness sessions (7 in schools and 7 in communities) were organized in the lower landscape of the Narayani River, an important dolphin habitat where dolphins are frequently recorded. These areas had not previously received conservation outreach and most residents were unaware of the

			<p>presence and importance of dolphins. This additional effort helped fill a major knowledge gap. To assess program effectiveness, pre- and post-awareness evaluations were carried out. The result showed a significant increase in knowledge and positive attitudes toward dolphin conservation (79.38% improvement in schools and 67.82% improvement in the community program). Furthermore, school-based activities such as street drama (2 events) and art competitions (3 events) were organized, drawing more than 340 students, teachers and staff. These creative approaches increased interest, improved understanding of dolphin conservation and encouraged wider community participation.</p>
Publications			<p>Project findings and conservation messages were widely shared via different online media and news portals (Onlinekhabar, Nagarik news, Koshipatra, e-kantipur, Nano Khabar, Gorkhpatra). These platforms played an important role in communicating dolphin survey results, highlighting the ecological importance of the Koshi River and promoting dolphin conservation. Through this coverage, information reached not only local communities in the Koshi but also a much broader national audience.</p> <p>In parallel, two scientific manuscripts are being developed. The first focused in River Dolphin ecology and threat assessment, while the second one focuses on water assessment and its correlation to fish diversity, its abundance. So far, we been able to generate the baseline data and the literature review is underway. Following consultation with the project supervisor and experts involved in manuscript</p>

			writing, the remaining sections of both manuscripts will be finalized, after which they will be submitted for publication in appropriate scientific journals.
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2. Describe the three most important outcomes of your project.

a) Completed a comprehensive ecological survey and generated robust spatial-temporal data covering all sections of the Koshi River:

Following the standard methodology, we have successfully conducted the River Dolphin Survey, threat assessment, assessed the physio-chemical parameters (analysis of nine parameters), as well as prey species (fish) survey at the upper and lower sections of the Koshi River, covering both pre and post-monsoon to increase the sample size and generate robust data. For the River Dolphin survey, we followed a boat-based and shore-based survey. A boat-based survey was conducted in the upper and lower sections of the Koshi River, while a shore-based survey was conducted in the barrage sections where the majority of the dolphins were recorded. During the pre and post monsoon survey, a total of 22 River Dolphins (15 Adults, 5 Sub-adults and 2 Juveniles) and 19 River Dolphins (17 Adults and 2 Sub-adults) were recorded, respectively.

All individuals were recorded downstream of the Koshi Barrage. Despite extensive survey efforts, no dolphins were detected in the upstream, indicating a continued restriction of dolphin distribution to the lower river section by the Koshi barrage. Having said this, two dolphins sighting was recorded at two locations i.e. Madhuban (26.678275N, 87.056863E) and Borabadh (26.771026N, 87.124466E), both at the upper section of the Koshi barrage, which remains a key finding from the River Guard group.

- Surveys:
drive.google.com/file/d/1Bn6orH3gvgAaVBTNC1WdZifD03lhASl5/view?usp=sharing
- Sightings:
drive.google.com/file/d/1BtcTGMz_DXMSywohqaUWviduEt9HysMQ/view?usp=sharing

Along with the dolphin survey and monitoring by the River Guard groups, a threat assessment was simultaneously conducted. During the survey, several threats were recorded that are likely to have a negative impact to the dolphin and other aquatic species. The spatial distribution of recorded threats, mapped using GPS coordinates, revealed several critical hotspots of concern. These findings highlight the pressing need for integrated conservation actions that combine species monitoring, habitat protection, pollution control, and community engagement to mitigate threats and ensure the survival of the River Dolphin in the Koshi River

Key threats observed during this survey included:

- Increasing illegal fishing activities, often involving larger groups and the frequent use of destructive fishing methods such as the use of electric current and fish poisoning
- Expansion of agriculture along riverbanks, including land encroachment, high-capacity water pumping, and excessive use of chemical fertilizers, contributing to habitat degradation
- Unmanaged waste dumping, particularly plastic waste such as single-use bottles and household garbage, etc.
- Intensive human disturbances, including the operation of high-speed jet boats, water-based recreation, bathing, washing clothes, and loud noise. (e.g. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yb6zhENp3DQMZu2UlrngJWbidsWLR7qJ/view?usp=sharing>).

Regarding the water quality assessment, a systematic water sampling methodology was followed, where 28 sampling points were established at an interval of 2 km. The water sample was collected twice, covering pre- and post-monsoon seasons, from Chatara Dham to Gobargada, nearby international borders to India. For the physio-chemical parameter, 9 different parameters were analysed. In-situ determination was carried out using multi-meter test kits (WagTech), which include temperature, pH, Dissolved Oxygen (DO), conductivity and Total Dissolved Solid (TDS), while for the Phosphorous, Free Co₂, Potassium and Nitrate, 500 ml of water sample was collected from each sampling site and was analysed in the laboratory at Kathmandu.

As part of the prey base assessment, a fish survey was carried out along both the upper and lower sections of the Koshi River (drive.google.com/file/d/17d9UhhFn2sLCn1lv-5h_BBNk1lvKkRq-/view?usp=sharing).

Given that fish constitute the primary food source for River Dolphin, assessing fish diversity and abundance provides vital insights into habitat suitability, ecological health, and potential threats to dolphin populations. The survey adopted a purposive sampling approach, wherein ten permanent sampling plots were strategically selected to represent diverse habitat types along the river stretch. Site selection was guided by ecological criteria such as variation in depth, flow regime, substrate composition, and riparian features, thereby enhancing the likelihood of capturing a wide array of fish species.

For the fish survey, the River Guard and local fishermen were selected as local resource persons/field assistants. Their extensive knowledge of fish, aquatic ecology and water has been an asset to the survey. Their familiarity with local fish names and habitat associations significantly strengthened the efficiency and accuracy of the survey. Various locally accessible and traditionally used fishing gears, including gill nets, cast nets, hook lines, and indigenous fish traps known as Dadiya, were used during the survey. To maximize species detection, sampling was conducted multiple

times, where cast nets, hook lines, and traps were deployed in the early morning and late afternoon, while gill nets were set in the evening and retrieved the following morning. Each site was surveyed for five consecutive days to ensure consistency and comparability. A total of 35 and 50 species of fish were recorded during the pre and post-monsoon season survey respectively. These findings are critically important for dolphin conservation, as they provide a baseline for monitoring changes in prey abundance and help identify areas of high ecological value that may require enhanced protection.

b) Identified, trained and mobilised 10 local people representing different communities as River Guard (RG)

In the first Rufford-funded grant, we have successfully trained and mobilised 15 local youths as citizen scientists, where they play a pivotal role in dolphin surveys, school-based awareness campaigns, and habitat monitoring activities, yielding promising results. Evolving this concept, we have envisioned the River Guard (RG) initiative in this project, where 10 individuals from fishing/river-dependent communities were selected to serve as River Guards. Following the selection, two days of capacity-building training were conducted with the aims to integrate river-dependent/fishermen into the mainstream of dolphin and aquatic ecosystem conservation by enhancing their understanding of river dolphin ecology, threats, and monitoring techniques as well as acquainting them with the legal framework (national and international), treaties, conventions, CITES, IUCN, etc. Adding to this, the RG also received hands-on training in the use of survey equipment such as GPS, binoculars, digital cameras, telescopes, and water quality testing kits, where they practically applied the learning in the field as guided by the project team. This guidance and support helped them to contextualize the importance of community engagement and reinforced the role of River Guards as long-term stewards of river health, thereby supporting in the conservation of dolphins and the aquatic ecosystem.

Reflecting the data of the impact assessment, an improvement of 65% in knowledge and understanding of dolphin ecology, survey techniques, prey species, and water quality monitoring, among the participants, against the 5% in the pre-assessment have highlighted the positive impacts of the comprehensive training. This training not only built capacity but also laid the foundation for a locally driven conservation network. Following the training, the RG members carried out regular monitoring of dolphins and their habitat for more than nine months and continued to do so. During each visit, they recorded key information, including dolphin sightings, habitat conditions, potential threats, and other ecological indicators. Besides the monitoring, the RG members also provided educational materials developed under this project to the local people, especially people from river-dependent communities, local youths, and students, while on-field, briefly shared information about the dolphin, its ecological and environmental importance, and legal perspectives. These initiatives

have not only improved understanding of the species' ecological importance but also encouraged more responsible use of river resources and fostered a sense of local stewardship for dolphin conservation.

A major achievement of this effort was the confirmed sighting of a River Dolphin on two occasions in the upper section of the Koshi River, about 30-40 km upstream of the Koshi barrage near Madhuban (26.678275N, 87.056863E) and Borabadh (26.771026N, 87.124466E). This finding is highly significant because it confirms the species' presence in an area previously considered largely inaccessible due to the barrage. These records provide vital evidence of dolphin movement and distribution, directly supporting conservation, planning and threat mitigation. The outcome highlights the effectiveness of the River Guards' monitoring work, their networks and their contribution to long-term River Dolphin conservation. The RG's regular monitoring has generated important data on dolphin presence, habitat conditions, and emerging threats. Together, these monitoring and outreach efforts demonstrate the value of sustained, community-based engagement in strengthening conservation planning and support the long-term protection of River Dolphins in the Koshi River.

c) Promote evidence-based awareness program using multi-media approaches, prioritizing river-dependent and farming communities and youths, students

Through this project, we expanded our outreach program across the larger landscape of the Koshi River, reaching communities and schools that were not covered in the previous project. In total, we have successfully conducted 61 awareness events involving 3,122 community members and students. Priority was given to schools located near the river and to river-dependent or farming communities whose livelihoods rely heavily on river resources. In doing so, we revisited previously sensitized communities and schools to assess retained knowledge, synergize their confidence and to reinforce conservation messages with new information, updated data and details about River Dolphins.

Although the outreach program outside the Koshi areas was not originally planned, we successfully conducted 14 additional events (7 schools and 7 communities) in the lower landscape of the Narayani River, a prime habitat of dolphins and frequently recorded areas. This initiative addressed a major knowledge gap, as most local residents were unaware of dolphins and no prior outreach programs existed. Activities were implemented through coordination with the buffer zone user committee, community-based anti-poaching units, schools, river-dependent communities and local governments. The program was largely facilitated by a local resource person in collaboration with the project, making it cost-effective and efficient.

During the project's period, 36 school awareness programs were conducted (Koshi=29 and Chitwan=7), reaching 2,141 students (Koshi=1840 students and Chitwan=301

students), targeted classes 4-17 and the age group 8-17. Each session used interactive methods, including presentations, documentaries, videos and question-answer session and was delivered by trained citizen scientists/River Guard members. To measure the learning outcomes of the awareness sessions, a pre and post-assessment surveys were administered.

Period-wise, the results of pre and post-effectiveness survey of school awareness program, highlighted below in the table.

School Awareness Program on the River Dolphin				
S.N	Timeline	Pre-Assessment (%)	Post-Assessment (%)	Averaging (%)
1	Period 1	5.63	82.54	76.91
2	Period 2	8.27	89.06	80.79
3	Period 3	6.73	87.17	80.44
Averaging		6.87	86.25	79.38

At the outset, students demonstrated very limited knowledge, with an average pre-assessment score of 6.87%, but post-assessments revealed a strong improvement (average: 79.38%). Each session has proven to be highly effective in engaging young learners and strengthening conservation awareness at the grassroots level as well as enhancing students' knowledge, awareness, and attitudes toward River Dolphin conservation. These results strongly support the continuation and expansion of an evidence-based awareness program for building long-term conservation stewardship among young learners.

Similarly, we conducted three art competitions where 90 students participated under the theme of dolphins and its conservation. All the winners were awarded with the medal, certificate, stationery sets, and a T-shirt with dolphin print as merchandise. Two events of street drama, led by student were conducted at different schools. The drama performances drew significant attention, with over 250 students, teachers, and school staff attending. The students acting in the play successfully brought the script to life by portraying realistic scenarios, illustrating conservation challenges, and demonstrating practical solutions to protect the River Dolphin. The play's content was carefully tailored to the local context, making it both accessible and deeply meaningful to the audience. Feedback from spectators was overwhelmingly positive as they found the drama to be informative, engaging, and entertaining, which helped maximize its educational impact. Beyond spreading awareness, this activity also helped empower participating students, enhancing their communication skills, confidence, and conservation knowledge.

Likewise, we reached a total of 25 communities (Koshi=18 and Chitwan=7) during the community-level awareness programs, accommodating 981 participants (Koshi=737 and Chitwan=244). While scheduling the awareness program, settlements were

selected based on their proximity to river systems and their livelihood dependence on riverine resources, particularly fishing and farming communities who regularly interact with river ecosystems. Broadly, the community level awareness program covered a wide range of topics, including;

- Ecological and environmental importance of the River Dolphin
- Current threats and conservation challenges
- National legislation and protective measures
- Community roles and responsibilities in conservation

These sessions were designed to promote local ownership and support for conservation efforts, ensuring that the knowledge imparted is both practically relevant and culturally appropriate. By increasing local understanding, it is expected to promote more responsible resource use, community-led advocacy, and wider dissemination of conservation messages, fostering long-term support for River Dolphin conservation. To assess the effectiveness of the awareness program, a pre and post-assessment was conducted in terms of knowledge and confidence of the participants.

Community-level Awareness Program on the River Dolphin				
S.N.	Timeline	Pre-Assessment (%)	Post-Assessment (%)	Averaging (%)
1	Period 1	11.17	81.41	70.23
2	Period 2	13.07	80.05	66.97
3	Period 3	16.25	82.51	66.26
Averaging		13.49	81.32	67.82

The data in the above table indicates a substantial increase in knowledge, with awareness level increasing from an average of 13.49% to 81.32%, reflecting an overall improvement of 67.82%. These figures demonstrate the high effectiveness of awareness campaigns. The community awareness program has proven to be an essential component in bridging the gap between scientific conservation goals and community-level action, fostering a shared responsibility for biodiversity protection. The results also suggested a strong potential for upscaling similar initiatives to other river-dependent communities, ensuring broader, sustainable impacts for both local livelihoods and aquatic biodiversity.

Story book created:

drive.google.com/file/d/1qt2sdDatBg8YzeSdlDQgf6ua0Nsex7AF/view

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

At the beginning of the project, there was a delay in obtaining research permission from the Department of National Park and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC), which also postponed approval from the Social Welfare Council (SWC). To minimize time loss, the team used this period for preparatory work, including developing training modules, drafting storybooks, collecting preliminary field data, a recce visits to identify community and schools for the conservation outreach program and building rapport with river-dependent communities for the River Guard program. This allowed smooth implementation once permissions were secured.

Scheduling activities with schools was another challenge, as most schools were busy with their academic calendar. This was addressed by coordinating closely with schools and authorities and conducting sessions mainly on Friday during their extracurricular activities. A school-based wall magazine activity was initially planned, but the school management committee and eco-teacher raised concerns about students' availability due to ongoing academic and extracurricular activities. In response, we consulted with them and opted for an art competition instead. This alternative proved highly effective, encouraging enthusiastic student participation while aligning better with their interests.

Our primary focus for the community awareness program was river-dependent and farming communities. Organizing community awareness programs was difficult as they were often occupied with fishing, planting and harvesting, especially during the monsoon and post-monsoon seasons. To overcome this, a focal person was identified in each community to share information in advance and help schedule sessions during less busy hours, such as early morning or mid-day.

In addition, unprecedented rainfall in October disrupted post-monsoon surveys. High water levels increased safety risks and the Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve temporarily restricted river activities. As a result, the field survey was postponed and rescheduled once conditions became safer.

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

Local communities living along the Koshi River were central to this project, as most activities were designed considering the information gaps and their level of interaction with the river. Building on the success of earlier initiatives, community engagement was strengthened through multiple approaches.

Members of river-dependent communities were selected as River Guards, recognizing their close connection with the river and their ability to provide first-hand information on dolphins and threats. This ensured continuous local participation in conservation efforts and brought them together at the forefront of River Dolphin conservation and assured their involvement in the project.

For field activities such as dolphin survey, threat assessment and prey species survey, local resources like a wooden boat were hired and locals were recruited as field assistant, which benefits them economically (received Daily Subsistence Allowance as per organizational policy) as well as allows them to participate in the research and field-level activities, hence enhancing their knowledge about dolphins and the aquatic ecosystem.

The community awareness program focused primarily on river-dependent and farming communities. Women's participation was encouraged to promote gender and social inclusion in line with the Himalayan Nature policy. These sessions helped improve understanding of dolphin conservation and reduced harmful practices affecting dolphin habitats and are expected to bring a positive change in their perception while disseminating the learning on a wide scale, including neighbours and other local people.

Besides the awareness sessions, educational materials such as storybooks and brochures were distributed to the local and students were engaged through street drama and art competitions. These activities increased students' confidence and strengthened their understanding of river dolphins and its importance.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

We aim to build on the lessons learned from this project to expand monitoring, strengthen community engagement and promote wider conservation collaboration across Nepal's waterscapes. Aligning with Nepal's River Dolphin Conservation Action Plan (2021-2025), our future work will focus on inter-river ecological research and conservation activities, especially in areas where threats are more pronounced and community awareness is very low. We will continue to conduct a regular ecological survey in the Koshin River to generate long-term spatio-temporal data. Adding to this, we plan to extend the dolphin survey to the Narayani River in Chitwan National Park, where updated information on dolphins is currently limited.

Based on the successful experience of developing skillfull manpower and mobilizing them in research and conservation efforts, onboarding local youths like CBAPU, nature guides as citizen scientists will remain our key priority in Chitwan. This approach will help strengthen local capacity, bridge information gaps and support ongoing research and conservation actions. We also plan to increase the use of simple and user-friendly technology in our research. This includes developing a digital toolkit or mobile application to record dolphin sightings, habitat conditions, threats, photographs and GPS locations in the field, improving data quality and accessibility.

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

So far, key findings from the River Dolphin survey have been shared through local and national media outlets, coinciding with World Environment Day on June 4, 2025 and through online news portals highlighting dolphin records from Borabadh. These media reports helped raise public awareness of dolphin conservation and project outcomes.

- <https://english.onlinekhabar.com/number-of-dolphins-goes-up-in-saptakoshi-river.html>
- https://naagariknews.naagariknetwork.com/social-affairs/1478191-1749109854.html?fbclid=IwQ0xDSwKuo6hleHRuA2FlbQlxMQABHqA1nOGDxSfwpGaTme9YfVv wZ_thFkrjcpz8fMW7UTzvbUbgTxWqT706O2IO_aem_kDa81RBECtonpq5rOaNKWq
- https://koshipatra.com/news/2025/06/05/9494.html?fbclid=IwQ0xDSwKudZRleHRuA2FlbQlxMQABHoxnAsA8IU683H7qbh3uWG3DgtFZNVTiOTh-AtZeROu3AyJbJk-J8rsWbqAe_aem_1nzRHPQM2ChXizHAVzxbkw
- <https://gorkhapatraonline.com/news/187793>
- <https://www.facebook.com/reel/2260141084840000>

The project details and major activities are also regularly updated on the Himalayan Nature website and the organization's social media platforms, making the information accessible to a wider audience. We also plan to present project findings, lessons learned and conservation recommendations at the national forum and meeting and share data upon request with interested institutions and researchers.

The final project report will be shared with the relevant government agencies and conservation partners and will be made publicly available through our organization's website. For the scientific dissemination, we are preparing a manuscript for submission to a national or international peer-reviewed journal. Currently, the team has completed fish taxon identification and physio-chemical parameter, while the literature review is underway and manuscript writing will begin once data analysis is finalized.

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

The majority of dolphin habitat is shared between the two countries, thereby the prevalent threat extends beyond the country's boundary. Therefore, future efforts should focus on landscape-level and cross-border collaboration between Nepal and India to address shared threats and promote coordinated conservation actions.

In line with global trends, future research should pilot technology-based monitoring, such as mobile application-based data collection, remote monitoring to improve accuracy, reduce human efforts and generate more robust ecological data for decision-making. Thus, we are also envisioning a similar concept in future interventions, which might be a paradigm shift in River Dolphin research and conservation efforts in Nepal.

Extensive human dependence on river resources was observed during field activities, which is similar in other river systems. Without addressing their livelihood needs, conservation outcomes are less likely to be sustained. Hence, future work should prioritize incentive-based alternative livelihood approaches, in collaboration with local government and development partners, to release pressure on river resources and promote positive behavioural changes towards dolphin and aquatic ecosystem conservation.

We have successfully engaged local manpower in project activities through the citizen scientist or River Guard concept. Thus, strengthening and expanding skilled local teams will be essential to ensure regular monitoring, remain watchful and vigilant to get first-hand information about dolphin presence, any prevalent threats and ecological data.

Due to scattered settlements and wide river coverage by the Koshi River, the participatory and community-based awareness programs should be expanded. Locally led and community-driven approaches are likely to be more effective in disseminating information and fostering long-term stewardship of the River Dolphin and their habitats.

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?

In line with our communication plan and to acknowledge the financial support for the project, the Rufford Foundation logo was used consistently across all project-related platforms and materials. Furthermore, the logo was displayed on educational materials and presentation slides used during community interactions, school programs and training sessions. For the River Guard (RG) program, field gear such as hats, T-shirts and field jackets was provided to the team members with the Rufford Foundation logo printed on them, ensuring regular visibility during field-level activities. Under the conservation program, educational materials, including storybooks (2,000 copies) and brochures (1,000 copies), were produced with the foundation logo and other key partners. Likewise, in school-focused activities such as art competitions, street drama, and interaction sessions, the logo was clearly shown in banners, certificates and presentations, directly promoting the Foundation among students, local communities and key stakeholders. To minimize plastic use, we avoided single-use flex banners made of plastic and instead used digital banners where possible or hand-written cotton banners, ensuring the Rufford Foundation logo was visible.

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

For this project, four core team members were actively involved in implementing the project, each with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

- **Prof. Karan Bahadur Shah**, as a project supervisor, provided technical and academic guidance to the project team. He supported the team in the conceptualization of the study design and reviewed the methodologies for dolphin surveys, prey (fish) species survey and water sampling. He also helped develop standardized data sheets for field data recording. Besides that, he has supported the team in reviewing and evaluating the overall project performance and provided his expert guidance to meet the project's goals and deliverables. He is currently supporting the team in finalizing the scientific manuscript and identifying a suitable journal for publication.
- **Mr. Laba K.C**, the project lead, has led the project from conceptualization to completion of all the planned activities. He was responsible for overall project management, including revisiting project indicators and monitoring Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). He obtained research and project implementation permission from the Department of National Park and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) and the Social Welfare Council (SWC). He also coordinated and communicated with all the key stakeholders in the Koshi areas alongside the local resource person, and all those individual take part in this project and managed logistics for the team members for the field work. Besides that, he also led the ecological survey (dolphin and prey species surveys, water sampling), maintained regular communication with Citizen Scientists/River Guards, drafted monitoring guidelines for River guards and supported other team members in report preparation and updated project progress to The Rufford Foundation and key stakeholders.
- **Heena Maharjan**, as a team member, led on-field activities by managing field assistants during ecological and supporting the project lead in finalizing survey schedules, developing data sheets and validating survey methods as well as onboarding key stakeholders in the project activities. She prepared training modules for the River Guard (RG) program and developed pre and post-assessment questionnaires. Besides that, she also led the conceptualization of educational storybooks, including content development, illustration layout and design. In addition, she provided technical support for street drama and art competition activities, reviewed project reports and provided technical feedback and corrections.
- **Bishal Koirala**, a local resident of the Koshi area, led the conservation outreach program. He identified, selected and coordinated with the authority for the community and schools' awareness program. He developed the presentation slides, design medal and certificates for the art competition and prepared pre and post-assessment questionnaires. Furthermore, he managed all the project's

data sheets, including scientific survey data and participants' records. He also supported River Guard members in regular habitat monitoring by assisting with data recording and handling equipment such as GPS, binoculars, and digital cameras. Additionally, he maintained regular communication with the RG members to collect field-level information and data.

10. Any other comments?

It has been realised that although the River Dolphin is recognised as a threatened and legally protected species in Nepal, it has received limited conservation priority and advocacy attention from conservation organisations. Its habitat continues to face a serious threat, primarily from human activities such as water-based infrastructure development and intensive river resource use.

Through this second Rufford Foundation-funded project in the Koshi River, we strengthened our capacity to link scientific research with conservation actions. While implementing the planned activities, we also identified opportunities to extend conservation awareness beyond the original project scope. Thereby, we conducted an additional awareness program in the Chitwan landscape, where River Dolphins are frequently recorded. Positive feedback has been received from the community people and students highlight the value of evidence-based conservation and awareness programs to other dolphin habitats across Nepal.

Despite facing challenges such as delays in obtaining research permits, prolonged monsoon conditions and unprecedented flooding during October, we completed all planned activities and achieved the intended project outcomes. We are grateful for the guidance and support provided by The Rufford Foundation, particularly Jane, throughout the project period. Leading ahead, scaling-up River Dolphin research and conservation efforts in other river systems and waterscapes remains a key priority for our future work.

Idea Wild generously supported the River Dolphin Conservation Project by providing essential field equipment, including one Steiner Marine binocular, one Panasonic LUMIX FZ80D compact digital camera, and two HUGEROCK rugged handheld GPS units. This equipment will be handed over to River Guard members who will be using it in the field-level activity to promote systematic data collection.