

## Project Update: December 2009

Nepal's wetlands support significant species diversity and populations of globally threatened flora. Seventeen out of 20 endemic vertebrates found in Nepal – including eight fish and nine herpetofauna species – are wetland dependent (IUCN Nepal, 2004). A total of 182 fish species have been recorded in Nepal, including eight endemic species (Shrestha, 2001). Nepal's wetlands are equally important for flora. Wetland-dependent flora includes the plants that flourish well in wetland habitats such as marshes, swamps, floodlands, in rivers or river banks (Chaudhary, 1998). About 25% of Nepal's estimated 7,000 vascular plant species are wholly or partly wetland dependent. Twenty-six of the 246 angiosperm species are wetland dependent (Shrestha and Joshi, 1996). Of the 91 nationally threatened plants found in Nepal, 10 are dependent on wetlands. Nepal's wetlands hold several species of wild cultivars and wild relatives of cultivated crops. At least 318 wetland-dependent plant species have been recorded in the Terai wetlands alone. At least 254 amphibious/emergent species are found exclusively in aquatic habitats (IUCN Nepal, 2004).

A total of 187 mammal species have been recorded in Nepal (Shrestha, 1997). Among these, 27 mammal species have been formally protected under the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1973. Since then, the list of protected mammals has not been revised. Thirteen otter species lives in the world, five of them inhabiting Asia. Nepal holds three species, the Eurasian otter (*Lutra lutra*), the smooth-coated otter (*Lutrogale perspicillata*) and the Asian small-clawed otter (*Aonyx cinerea*) representing 1.6% of the mammals cited in the country (Houghton, 1987; Acharya and Gurung, 1994; Thapa, 2002; Kafle, 2007; Bhandari, 2008; Joshi, 2009; Bhandari and GC, 2008; Kafle, 2008).

Nepal has 75 districts and the presence of otters has been confirmed in 24 districts of Nepal covering both lowland and hilly regions. The Eurasian otter is recorded in 8 districts in the Terai region and 13 districts in the hilly regions. The Smooth-coated otter is recorded in 10 districts in the Terai region and 2 districts in the hilly regions. All three species of otters are recorded in two lowland districts: Kailali and Kapilvastu (pers. obs.); D. Gaire, (pers. comm.); Shrestha, 1997; Bhandari, 1998). This shows that the smooth-coated otter is distributed mainly in the Terai region while the Eurasian otter is distributed both in the Terai and hilly regions of Nepal.

