

Project Update: January 2011

This update provides an overview of the findings of otter survey in 28 wetland sites of two watersheds – Pyaudikhola watershed in Chyangling hills and Kapringkhola watershed in Gaikhur hills of Gorkha district of Nepal using participatory methods (in-depth interviews, meetings and questionnaire surveys) and direct observations. Next step ongoing is camera trapping in these sites.

In Pyaudikhola watershed of Chyangling hills of Gorkha district, Aarukharka stream – a streamlet to Pyaudi stream and Pandel stream – a streamlet heading to Kamaltar Bazaar hold potential for presence of Eurasian otters. In Kapringkhola watershed of Gaikhur hills of Gorkha district, Kapring streamside joining the Marsyangdi stream nearby Dhikure Bagaar and inlet of Kapring stream near Tiwaritaar village amidst the Thulapakha community forest hold potential for presence of Eurasian otters.

In both watersheds, elder people informed that otters were commonly seen in the local streams amidst the deciduous forests around 20-25 years before, but nowadays one can hardly and opportunistically see otters. Some persons of local ethnic communities used to kill otters for meat and skin but not for commercial purposes. Opportunistically seen otters were chased, and if possible killed. Loss of habitat, particularly from human disturbance and drying up of water sources are the major causes of otter decline in these watersheds. The drying of water sources, in the context of a changing climate, has affected fish population and their migration due to lowering water level and availability, subsequently affecting otter habitat and diet.

As found in this survey, elder people and those engaging in wetlands for subsistence are somewhat familiar with otters but younger individuals are completely ignorant of the existence of otters. It makes the project team difficult to find right volunteers to help in survey in the community. Some elder people were mistakenly confused marten and mongoose with otters, as the external physical outline of these species are somewhat similar, and poor knowledge of these people on the morphological features of otters fuelled up this. In this context, around 165 community people obtained knowledge on otters, useful for enhancing their understanding and value of the otters.

Project website is established at www.ottersnepal.org or mirror links www.ottersnepal.co.cc or <http://otternepal.web.officelive.com> to disseminate project updates and information broadly. Otter news was published in the Kantipur Daily – a national magazine of Nepal.

Third and fourth volumes of the *Journal of Wetlands Ecology* (JOWE) have been published in collaboration with International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publication (INASP). All the articles are available in full text (PDF) in journal website www.nepjol.info/index.php/jowe - a service of Nepal Journals Online (NepJOL) – a project of INASP.