



**Darwin Initiative Main/Post/D+ Project
Half Year Report
(due 31st October 2018)**

Project reference	24-015
Project title	Community Conservation of Chitwan National Park's freshwater ecosystem and Gharials
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Nepal
Lead organisation	Zoological Society of London
Partner(s)	Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC), National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) and Himalayan Nature (HN)
Project leader	<i>Hem Sagar Baral (Nepal Project Leader)</i>
Report date and number (e.g., HYR3)	<i>31 October 2018, HYR2</i>
Project website/blog/social media etc.	https://www.zsl.org/conservation/regions/asia/community-conservation-of-chitwan-national-park%E2%80%99s-freshwater-ecosystems

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – Sept) against the agreed baseline timetable for the project (if your project has started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up to end September).

ZSL has been coordinating with DNPWC at a central level through the Project Coordination Committee led by the Deputy Director General of DNPWC. At a site level, a Project Management Unit (PMU), led by the Chief Conservation Officer of Chitwan National Park (CNP), is coordinating the work of all project partners. ZSL also ensures coordination with project stakeholders including the buffer zone management committees and user committees, as well as with wider local communities

Most of the project activities planned for this reporting period have been completed as planned, and coordination among the partners has continued to improve with the PMU meeting regularly to facilitate effective project implementation.

ZSL has built a strong relationship with DNPWC and other project partners including site-based units of the Nepal Army and local communities. The project agreements signed in Year 1 with NTNC and HN for implementing the project activities on the ground have been continued.

Progress against the outputs

Output 1: Improved river ecosystem management delivered through improved management plans and environmental policy based on a robust Gharial and riverine ecosystem monitoring programme

During this reporting period, one MSc student has been shortlisted to conduct research in the river ecosystem, and three further MSc students will be recruited from DNPWC, and potentially other relevant institutions. All MSc students will work under the PhD student supported by the project, affiliated with the University of Oxford, who will be carrying out research on gharial conservation in CNP. (Activity 1.2 – *Delayed*). The Gharial and River Monitoring Guidelines prepared in year 1 are under review and will be finalised by the next reporting period (Activities 1.9, 1.11 – *Ongoing*). A consultant has been identified and will be hired by 1st November 2018

to draft the river ecosystem management plan for CNP. ZSL has been coordinating with DNPWC, NTNC and HN to prepare the content of the management plan (Activities 1.10, 1.11 1.12 – *Ongoing*).

Output 2: Threats to fish stocks and gharials are reduced through protection provided by 10 Community-Based Anti-Poaching Units (CBAPUs) patrolling sensitive riverine zones in the Narayani and Rapti watersheds to protect the area from unsustainable fishing, poaching and other damaging and unsustainable uses of the river.

Gharial Guard Groups (CBAPUs) formed in year 1 are being continuously supported. These CBAPUs periodically carry out patrolling, in coordination with CNP, in the Rapti and Narayani rivers to control unsustainable fishing, poaching and other harm to river ecosystems and gharials. ZSL and NTNC are providing technical support to the CBAPUs and National Park to build their joint capacity in gharial monitoring and river patrolling. (Activity 2.4 – *Ongoing*).

Output 3: Increased post-release survival of Gharial's from the Chitwan Gharial Conservation Breeding Centre (GCBC) delivered through implementing improved husbandry and release protocols, and post-release monitoring.

Discussion is underway with CNP management and international crocodile experts regarding improving GCBC infrastructure to increase egg laying. A visitor centre was renovated in GCBC in the previous reporting period, which has improved the visitor experience. Consultations with authorities at CNP and crocodile experts are underway to identify strategies to increase egg laying in GCBC (Activity 3.2- *Ongoing*). The current egg collection practices from the wild are under review by a panel of crocodile experts. A revised guideline based on the current review will be drafted during the next reporting period (Activity 3.3 – *Slightly delayed*). ZSL has been coordinating with DNPWC, NTNC and GCBC-CNP to prepare gharial husbandry and release guidelines. Consultation with experts from ZSL's London Zoo is underway (Activity 3.4 – *Ongoing*).

Output 4: Food security of local communities improved through implementing sustainable fishing and reducing the dependence of local communities on fishing through generating sustainable aquaculture livelihoods.

Three additional communities were identified, and women led committees were established to manage and operate community fish ponds. Two women-led committees were set up in Budi Rapti Buffer Zone Users Committee and one in Khagendramalli Buffer Zone Users Committee. Seed money has been provided to all three newly formed committees. In total, the project has supported the establishment of eight community fish pond management committees. Two of these committees have now started harvesting the fish and selling them in local markets. The project supported these committees to identify potential markets where their fish would command a high price and facilitated committees to access these markets (Activity 4.5 – *Complete*). A total of 162 local community members, those with valid licenses for fishing in CNP and members of community fish pond management committees, were trained in sustainable fishing and gharial conservation. Two separate training sessions were organised, one at Sauraha and one at Nawalpur. The training sessions were provided by experts from the Fisheries Development Centre, Bhandara and covered sustainable fishing practices and their importance; and the role of gharials and other aquatic fauna in maintaining a productive and stable river ecosystem, which can support community livelihoods (Activities 4.6, 4.8 – *Ongoing*). Locations for establishing the drop-in centres in upstream communities have been identified (Activity 4.7 – *Ongoing*).

2a. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months. Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

The project has been successful in recruiting one PhD student, despite thinking that this would not be possible. In addition to Output 1 this student is expected to support the achievement of Output 3. The PhD student along with the EDGE Fellows and MSc students will help produce an ecological baseline for gharials and their ecosystem, as well as estimate vital population parameters including the survival rate of released gharials.

During project implementation, effective coordination among project partners and concerned stakeholders has repeatedly emerged as being vital, and hence we have invested heavily, during the early stage of this project, in our partnerships and in collaboration with local communities.

The importance of simultaneously supporting livelihoods while engaging communities in conservation has also been made clear through the success of the project aquaculture initiative. By combining fish pond construction and management with awareness raising on gharial conservation we have already observed anecdotal positive changes in the attitudes of local community members towards gharials.

2b. Have any of these issues been discussed with LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

Discussed with LTS: No

Formal change request submitted: No

Received confirmation of change acceptance No

3a. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g., more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year?

Yes No Estimated underspend: £

3b. If yes, then you need to consider your project budget needs carefully. Please remember that any funds agreed for this financial year are only available to the project in this financial year.

If you anticipate a significant underspend because of justifiable changes within the project, please submit a rebudget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a rebudget so please ensure you have enough time to make appropriate changes if necessary.

4. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to Darwin's management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

None to report.

If you were asked to provide a response to this year's annual report review with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document. Additionally, if you were funded under R24 and asked to provide further information by your first half year report, please attach your response as a separate document.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but **should also be raised with LTS International through a Change Request.**

Please send your **completed report by email** to Eilidh Young at Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk. The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 22-035 Darwin Half Year Report**