

3rd School in Aquatic Wildlife Biology and Conservation
At Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary
On 23rd – 29th February 2020

February saw the successful culmination of the third installment of the School in Aquatic Wildlife Biology and Conservation, jointly organized by the Uttar Pradesh Forest and Wildlife Department and Turtle Survival Alliance India Program and held in the Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary from the 24th to the 29th of February 2020.

Conducted under the guidance of the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) Shri Sunil Pandey, Field Director Dudhwa Shri Sanjay Pathak, support from the Conservator of Forests and Divisional Forest Officer of Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary Mr. G P Singh was instrumental in making this course a success, further cementing relations with the Forest Department and showcasing the importance of such partnerships first hand to the participants. This course was also generously supported by the Hemchandra Mahindra Foundation, Wildlife Trust of India and Wildlife Conservation Trust.

This course was initiated in 2018 with an aim to address the lack of awareness and knowledge about aquatic biology and provide education and training on research and conservation methods of wetland systems. Our ethos is to provide this training in an aquatic field environment in order to provide a more holistic understanding. With an aim to rotate the school across important wetlands, the first school was held along the Chambal River in the National Chambal Sanctuary and the second one in the Sohagi Barwa Wildlife Sanctuary adjacent to the Gandak River.

This year, a total of 15 participants from 8 different states across India attended the course. Also, for the first time this year, the School was attended by an international participant from Nepal. Similar to last year, the UPFWD were also able to arrange accommodation for participants within the Katarniaghat Wildlife sanctuary in Forest Department rest-houses to provide a more immersive experience so as to be able to teach them field methodologies within the context of field settings.

Activities such as boat transects, radio telemetry exercises, mark-recapture sampling, conservation story telling and proposal writing were some of the highlights of the course. Also, the star attraction of the course continued to be the annual release of captive bred Gharials into the Geruwa River, as part of the Forest Department's efforts to conserve this Endangered species. Based upon the general feedback from the participants, they were most pleased with the level of real-life field activities they were exposed to in comparison to theoretical explanations and staged demonstrations that they experience on a normal basis.

Participants were also lucky enough to have seen over 60 species of birds, along with several butterflies, reptiles and mammals.

At the end of the course, based upon private observations of the entire organization team and upon consulting with attending resource persons, a top performing participant was also selected. This participant was selected based upon their positive attitude towards the course, active engagement with other participants as well as resource persons and the commitment they displayed towards attending the course, where they overcame certain personal hurdles in order to attend the course.

We are thoroughly pleased to have been able to provide such opportunities to participants, especially for ones who may not necessarily have gotten the chance to be exposed to such field techniques or expertise at such an early stage in their careers.

The TSA India Program has been a long standing partner with the UPFWD and through courses like these, we are more than happy to showcase how working relationships can be nurtured and sustained between government and non-government organizations for the betterment of threatened Indian wildlife.