

Eastern Himalaya and High ARCS Freshwater Biodiversity Assessment Evaluation Workshop, 22-26 March 2010, Kolkata, India

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The Eastern Himalaya Freshwater Biodiversity Assessment, an undertaking of the IUCN Freshwater Biodiversity Unit in Cambridge, was initiated in early 2009. The project funded by MacArthur Foundation is in collaboration with Zoo Outreach Organisation and is expected to be completed by December 2010. As part of the process of assessing the freshwater biodiversity ecosystem in eastern Himalaya, three faunal groups, namely, Odonata, Mollusca and fishes were chosen as representative taxonomic groups. The first step in the process was the conduct of a 5-day training workshop in IUCN Red Listing, Species Information Service (SIS) data entry programme and mapping on ARCVIEW in Kathmandu in July 2009 for a select group of experts with inclination and time to compile, map and assess the status of species in the three groups. After the five day training the species experts working on Odonates, Molluscs and fishes committed to assess the species status and collect species information to enter in SIS database and also to map the distribution of the species range. The estimated number of species of all three groups together came to around 800. The experts were provided passworded access to working sets in the SIS database for online access and data entry. On the seventh month from the Nepal training and as a follow up of the project, a peer-review workshop was organized at Ramakrishna Institute of Culture, Kolkata from 22 to 26 March 2010 to evaluate the data, maps and assessments. During this evaluation workshop, apart from the assessors, other experts were invited to go through the species information gathered in the last six months and the assessed status were discussed and finalized. Simultaneously, another project (EC funded HighARCS project) assessing the status of freshwater biodiversity in areas of India, China and Viet Nam was dealt with in the evaluation process. A total of 31 experts took part in the evaluation workshop representing, India, Nepal, Vietnam, Singapore and UK.

The first day programme started with a brief introduction about the project, IUCN categories and criteria, and the objectives of the review workshop. A discussion was initiated since the participants who did not attend the training programme at Nepal wanted to clarify some of their doubts and this discussion helped the group to get a holistic idea about the project and the assessment protocol. After the discussion the experts formed groups according to their expertise and the evaluated the assessed species and checked the distribution maps. The mollusc group had two assessors and 4-5 evaluators. They had a total of 215 species. The fish experts were divided into three sub groups since the total number of species to be assessed



was close to 500. A total of 13 experts shared their expertise to evaluate fish assessments. The odonate group had 5 experts to evaluate assessments of approximately 280 species. From the HighARCS component, there were three experts to evaluate aquatic plant assessments.

Each group had a data recorder who finalized the assessments on the SIS database online. Each group's inputs were projected on a screen through LCD projectors so that everyone in the group could read and comment. All comments were considered valid and discussed in the group before finalizing and entered into the SIS. The species was considered assessed until everyone in the group came to a consensus about the assessment of the species. Differences of opinion, if any were noted in the database as notes. Maps generated by the compilers were also evaluated to indicate known and inferred distributions of the species.

Since five days was not enough to complete the task, the evaluations will be completed after the workshop with different compilers and evaluators taking on specific responsibilities. It was decided that compilers and experts would contribute chapters and write up detailed reports after analysis for each group, based on the distributions, threats, conservation needs, action plans, etc. based on the analysis of distribution and threat maps generated from the entire exercise. The contents of the chapters will include overview of the fauna of Eastern Himalaya, conservation status of the freshwater biodiversity of Eastern Himalaya, patterns of species richness, major threats, and conservation recommendations. The report will also include the global status of the freshwater biodiversity, species diversity major threats to freshwater species, status of the species and situation analysis for Eastern Himalaya.

As a conclusion of the review workshop it was decided that the reports be submitted by the end of July including all maps and supporting references. All the participants were encouraged to continue with the research so as to add more information on species.

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