

based ecotourism that can support local livelihoods and contribute to the conservation of the golden mahseer.

Over the 1-year programme, there were a total of 490 community training sessions and door-to-door interactions, reaching 11,984 community members, the River Guard Group conducted 1,062 patrols along 1,641 km of river, and we successfully identified and protected seven hatchling sites of the golden mahseer. Local communities along the Babai and Sharada Rivers have embraced their role as stewards of aquatic biodiversity. Their enthusiasm to continue as change agents and River Guard Group members reflects a deepening sense of ownership and pride. By advocating for the golden mahseer and broader riverine life, these communities are proving that conservation thrives not only through formal policy and legal protection, but through the active engagement of local people.

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New mature individuals and seedlings of the Critically Endangered *Magnolia zenii* discovered in China

The Critically Endangered Baohua yulan *Magnolia zenii*, a plant species endemic to China, has an extremely small population. It occurs only in Baohua Mountain National Forest Park in Jurong, Jiangsu Province. Li et al. (*Journal of Plant Resources and Environment*, 2024, 33, 98–105) reported 115 mature individuals and noted that seedlings were scarce. In new, comprehensive surveys across the species' range in 2024 and 2025 we discovered 30 additional mature individuals and abundant, previously unrecorded seedlings. In total, 145 mature trees and c. 640 seedlings are now known. The main associated plant species include *Phyllostachys edulis*, *Cyclobalanopsis glauca*, *Phoebe sheareri*, *Aphananthe aspera*, *Ilex cornuta*, *Trachelospermum jasminoides*, *Liriope spicata* and *Ophiopogon japonicus*.

Despite this new, larger estimate of population size, the conservation status of *M. zenii* remains critical. Large trees in particular are threatened by extreme weather events such as freezing rain and typhoons, invasive species and human disturbance, including damage by visitors and the legacy of past quarrying. Heavy scree and herbaceous ground cover restrict seed germination and seedling establishment. Invasion by the bamboo *Phyllostachys edulis* also needs to be addressed through manual removal, to ensure sufficient space for regeneration of *M. zenii*. Although our survey confirms that *M. zenii* is able to regenerate

naturally, there is ongoing habitat degradation, and targeted conservation strategies need to be formulated. A suitable habitat on the northern slope of Mount Baohua has been identified for potential reintroduction efforts.

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First record of the Indian star tortoise *Geochelone elegans* in Nepal

Recently, two subspecies of Indian star tortoise *Geochelone elegans* have been recognized: the southern Indian star tortoise *Geochelone elegans elegans* and the north-western Indian star tortoise *Geochelone elegans actinodes*. *Geochelone elegans* is categorized as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List and is in CITES Appendix I because of intense harvesting for the pet trade. The north-western Indian star tortoise is widely distributed in north-western India, including Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan and with a single record from Uttar Pradesh, and in Pakistan. Despite its broad distribution in the western part of the Indian sub-continent, there has previously been no verified record of the species in Nepal.

On 19 August 2025, author BRS and local residents reported seeing a tortoise with characteristic star-like carapace patterns in the Kailasheswor Community Forest, in Ward Number 6 of Janaki Rural Municipality, Kailali District, Nepal. The tortoise weighed c. 3 kg and the photograph indicated diagnostic features of *G. elegans actinodes*. It was released back into the forest with the assistance of the Dolphin Conservation Center in Bhajani, Kailali, and the Division Forest Office, Kailali. Community members reported multiple sightings in previous years, suggesting the species occurs naturally in this region. This record represents a northward extension of the known range of *G. elegans actinodes*, and highlights the need for targeted surveys to determine its distribution and population status in Nepal.

Given the high risk of illegal collection and trade, any newly confirmed populations require urgent conservation attention. The Nepal–India border is a major route in the