

Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species

Half Year Report Form

Project Title	Recovering Ukraine's Lost Steppe: a Unique Opportunity
Country	Ukraine
Organisation	CABI Bioscience
Project Ref. No.	162/11/026
Report date	3 November 2002

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months 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).

Contact with Ukrainian military. The military side of this project continues to make good progress. By the end of September 2003 at least six meetings (varying in character from formal sessions and seminars to informal meetings) had been held with representatives from the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and Ukraine's National Institute of Strategic Research, three of them during the current reporting period (although a formal Advisory Panel has not yet been set up, the mood of the meetings is very positive, and Dr Minter is optimistic that establishment of the panel will follow soon). At the same time, preparations were being made for participation in a much bigger seminar being organized by Ukraine's MOD in October 2003, and for a stand (on the theme of the rôle of Ukraine's military in nature conservation, highlighting collaboration through the Darwin Initiative project) at "Protection Technologies 2003", an international exhibition to be held in Kiev in October 2003.

UK study tour for Ukrainian military. In May 2003 a group of four Ukrainians made a study trip to the UK. These were: Dr V.P. Hayova (Senior Scientist, M.G. Kholodny Institute of Botany, Academy of Sciences), Dr A.B. Kachynsky (Head of the Department of Ecological Policy, National Institute of Strategic Research), Colonel V.V. Kovalevsky (Head of the Department of Ecological & Radiation Safety, Deputy Chief, Department of NBC Protection Troops, General Staff of Ukrainian Armed Forces) and Mrs T.I. Krivomaz (Director, Master Consulting). The study trip to the UK was led by Dr D.W. Minter with the prime objective of seeing examples of conservation on military land. Thanks to superb efforts by the UK MOD, the group visited the following sites: Salisbury Plain Training Area, Defence Estates Headquarters Farnham, Porton Down, a former Atomic Weapons Establishment Site in Cardiff, and the Sennybridge Training Area. To emphasize constructive re-use of redundant military sites, the group also visited the historic ships and the Royal Armories Museum, Fort Nelson (Portsmouth), and HMS Belfast.

Experience of land-management for conservation. Dr Hayova stayed on to see examples of land-management practices altered to support conservation. Accumulated experience from several years of visits, not all attributable to the present project, but a payoff of long-term collaboration, has meant that by the end of September 2003, Dr Isikov and Dr Hayova had, either individually or jointly, through various visits, seen examples of land-management practices altered to support conservation in the following locations (in addition to the MOD sites already mentioned): Aldershot (felling of conifer woodland to encourage woodlarks & nightjars), the Cornish coast (grazing regimes to prevent scrub encroachment, channeling of visitors to "honeypot" sites), the Dorset coast, Dartmoor, Exmoor and the North Yorks Moors (channeling of visitors to "honeypot" sites), the Inner and Outer Hebrides (islander buyouts, maintaining rubbish-free coasts, concrake conservation), Snowdonia National Park (prevention of erosion on paths), the Yorkshire Dales (preservation of flower meadows) etc.

The reserve building at Opuk. Dr D.W. Minter (Project Leader) visited Ukraine five times during the reporting period. On the April visit he was able to see Opuk Reserve in Kerch, albeit only briefly because of exceptionally bad weather. Work on repairing the building designated as a visitors' centre at that reserve is taking longer than originally anticipated, but goes well. Many roofing timbers have now been replaced, and the whole building has been completely re-roofed. The entrance steps have been fully repaired, with a new concrete surround to the building, much new external rendering, and repointed chimneys. Some work has been done to improve the windows and window-frames. At the end of September 2003, however, the building's interior was still in need of a lot of work, and plans have made for that work to be carried out in the next period of the project.

Sustainable tourism, first developments. Villagers in Zavetnoye, the village nearest Opuk Reserve, have now begun to provide accommodation for visitors, and that accommodation has been used by project senior participants. The village and the adjacent reserve were also visited by mycologists from the *XIV Congress of European Mycologists* (see below) as planned. The villagers are being helped with feedback from project senior participants in how to present their accommodation. Discussions with villagers have revealed further possibilities for

accommodation, and these will be followed up during the next reporting period of the project. During the present reporting period, posters and pamphlets about Opuk Reserve were produced. These have been distributed locally in eastern Crimea, and accumulation of material for a reserve museum continues.

Delivery of equipment. During the present reporting period alone, three laptop computers, three desktop computers, one inkjet printer and one scanner were delivered to Ukraine for use by Colonel Kovalevsky, Dr Kachynsky, Dr Hayova and Ms Krivomaz. This compares with a promise to deliver five computers in the whole period of the project up to now.

Steppe conservation. Seed gathering and work on the experimental plots at Opuk reserve continued during the second year of the project. At the time of writing, some seed collection for this year continues, and by the end of the time when collecting is possible Dr Isikov expects to have gathered seeds of up to 35 species of steppe plants from a range of locations in southern and eastern Crimea. Some of that seed is being stored by Dr Isikov, and some at the "Raduga" medicinal plants farm. 12 km of an anti-fire belt around the reserve was ploughed, and anti-fire equipment was purchased. Two new barriers to control access to the reserve by motor vehicles were set up together with about 150 concrete posts marking the border of the reserve, and an information board was set up on the reserve. Further work was also carried out clearing rubbish from the reserve, particularly on and near the beach, and around the wells and springs. Expressing concerns to the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine about potential developments at Khomutovsky Steppe Nature Reserve (where Dr Heluta is managing grazing by 15 horses to control scrub encroachment) took a lot of time: it was a pity to be spending time fighting a rearguard action here rather than making progress. At the end of September 2003 Dr Heluta was preparing to visit the reserve to make a full assessment of the situation.

Other outputs. The *XIV Congress of European Mycologists* held in Yalta, Crimea (September 2003) took a lot of the time of Dr Isikov, Dr Hayova, Dr Andrianova, Dr Heluta and Dr Minter, all of whom were on the Organizing Committee. Ms Krivomaz was also involved in Congress work. The Congress, mentioned in the original proposal for this project although not strictly an output, was only possible because Darwin Initiative support over nearly ten years strengthened mycology in Ukraine sufficiently to make their hosting of it possible. The Congress was very successful, with over 140 participants from over 30 countries. A particularly significant outcome, filling a big hole in the world-wide infrastructure of mycology, was establishment of a new *European Mycological Association* (with support from the *International Mycological Association*, the *British Mycological Society* and national mycological societies of several other European countries). Dr Minter was appointed its first President and Dr Andrianova its General Secretary, with the Membership Secretary coming from Austria and the Treasurer from Greece. Three CDs (*Vorontsov's Who's Who*, *Electronic Distribution Maps of Georgian Fungi*, and *Mycology in Ukraine*) published to coincide with the Congress were distributed at the Congress. All contained significant amounts of data generated during Dr Minter's current and two previous Darwin Initiative projects in the former Soviet Union. One other output, involving very modest amounts of Darwin project money (because largely funded from other sources) was the participation by Ms Krivomaz in a myxomycete workshop in the Great Smoky Mountains (USA) in July 2003.

2. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments that the project has encountered over the last 6 months. Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will effect the budget and timetable of project activities. Have any of these issues been discussed with the Department and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

Dr Isikov has a major problem on the home front. His wife is suffering from cancer and has to travel in his company to Donetsk periodically for treatment. Her illness was known about a year ago, but even in April 2003 there was hope that she was in remission. This now seems less likely. Although he is a dedicated, hard-working and enthusiastic scientist, his wife's illness has meant he has not been able this summer to devote as much attention to the project as originally planned. Work in eastern Crimea is very dependent on him, and with the Congress now out of the way, Dr Minter is currently exploring ways to reduce this dependency.

Much time and effort consumed by a successful Congress. Neither a problem nor an unexpected development, but probably worth mentioning. Work for the Congress took a lot of time, energy and attention, particularly in July, August and September 2003. With the pressures of the Congress now over, Dr Minter plans to concentrate very strongly on resolving the questions of seed banks and planting on non-reserve land over winter 2003/2004, and anticipates real progress in these areas over the next six months.

No impact on the overall project budget is expected from these items.

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

All members of the Darwin Team in Ukraine send their thanks to the Darwin Initiative for its continued support of their work.

Please send your **completed form by 31 October each year per email** to Stefanie Halfmann, Darwin Initiative M&E Project Manager, Email: stefanie.halfmann@ed.ac.uk