

# Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species

## Half Year Report Form

<b>Project Title</b>	Using saiga antelope conservation to improve rural livelihoods
<b>Country</b>	Russia and Kazakhstan
<b>Organisation</b>	Imperial College London
<b>Project Ref. No.</b>	12/028
<b>Report date</b>	31/10/03

### **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).**

The project started on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2003. We held the first project meeting in Elista, Kalmykia, on 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> April. The meeting involved participants from the UK, Kazakhstan, and Kalmykia, and was a very positive and successful event. On day one, we discussed project aims and objectives, reporting requirements and timetables. On day 2, we had a detailed discussion of protocols for the first fieldwork season, agreeing questionnaire formats and field techniques for saiga monitoring. The meeting generated local press interest, with participants being interviewed on local TV and a feature appearing in the local newspaper. The meeting was also reported in the CMS bulletin ([http://www.wcmc.org.uk/cms/pdf/Bulletin\\_17\\_en.pdf](http://www.wcmc.org.uk/cms/pdf/Bulletin_17_en.pdf)). Following the meeting, the project leaders had a series of meetings with important stakeholders, including the Kalmykian Vice-Minister for Natural Resources and Environmental Protection, who pledged full support to the project, and with officials from the Department of Game and Hunting Management and the Chernye Zemli Biosphere Reserve, our project partners.

In both countries, fieldwork was carried out according to the project timetable; in both Kalmykia and Betpak-dala team members carried out surveys in May of calving areas, to get information on saiga numbers, calving rates and reproductive ecology. In June-July, socio-economic surveys were carried out in villages in the saiga range area in both countries. These surveys examined public attitudes to saiga conservation and livelihood activities in the village, and acted as a platform for the future selection of village wardens.

Substantial delays in production of public awareness materials will be discussed below. A pocket calendar has been produced in Kalmykia, for use in the public awareness campaign planned for this winter. We have also carried out a number of other public awareness and dissemination activities in Kalmykia. There have been several newspaper articles on saiga conservation and the Darwin project. Local team members have given 3 interviews to local TV, explaining the work being done by the project. The team has been active in education, with team members Anna Lushchekina (Institute of Ecology & Evolution, Moscow), B. Ubushaev (Chernye Zemli Biosphere Reserve) and Iu. Arylov (Centre for Wild Animals of Kalmykia) giving lectures to students at the Kalmykian State University on biodiversity and saiga conservation. These activities have led to the formation of a team of students to work with us on the project. Lini Kuhl, project research assistant (Imperial College), gave talks at 2 schools in the Chernye Zemli region about the project's work while she was involved in fieldwork.

A French photographer (J-F Lagrot) came to the field site to photograph saiga births. His photographs have been used by the Darwin website and UNESCO, and will form the basis of an article in National Geographic (France). He has concluded an agreement with a production company to film our up-coming fieldwork season, the film to be shown on Canal+ in France and sold to America via the Marathon production company.

A progress meeting was held in Elista on 27<sup>th</sup> September - 2<sup>nd</sup> October, in which project leader A. Lushchekina reported back to our local collaborators about achievements in the first field season, and agreed the logistical arrangements for the next 6 months of work. Government officials again expressed their support for the project. Discussion of the selection of local wardens was included in the meeting and the Government helped us to meet one of the key hunters who is very knowledgeable about local conditions and local people. He offered his help in selection and maybe could be used as the local authority for managing a team of wardens.

Plans are now being finalised for our work for the next 6 months of the project, including biological surveys in the

rutting areas of Kalmykia and Kazakhstan, further socio-economic surveys and public awareness work, and dissemination of the results of our first socio-economic surveys. We have arranged a date for our first year workshop. This will be held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, in early April 2004, and will involve 3 days of work: Day 1: Presentation of project results so far to stakeholders (including Government officials & local NGOs); Day 2: Presentations by international experts on the lessons learnt from sustainable use projects elsewhere, and potential applicability to the saiga project; Day 3: Internal project review meeting.

Hence the project is fully on track, and is meeting the timetable laid out in the revised project proposal exactly.

**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?**

We have experienced difficulties in 2 areas: transfer of funds to Russia, and development of public awareness materials. As regards transfer of funds, the Institute of Ecology & Evolution (project leader in Russia) does not have a hard currency bank account into which grants can be transferred. It was undesirable to use Dr Lushchekina's personal account, both for audit reasons and because she would incur tax on the sums coming in. The usual method employed by the Institute in these circumstances is to link up with a private company, through the account of which funds are transferred, but with a 30-40% overhead removed off the top. This was clearly unfeasible for a Darwin project, this overhead would have made the project unworkable. We asked the Darwin secretariat for help and advice, but they could not help. Eventually we concluded an agreement with IFAW, an international NGO with an office in Moscow. They generously agreed to act as intermediaries for no charge. We have now successfully transferred one tranche of funding, but it has taken 5 months to set this transfer system up. This did not delay project implementation, but it caused severe difficulties for our project leader, who had to use her own money to cover expenses and delay paying our partners, which causes resentment and embarrassment early on in a project. We hope that now the problem is fully resolved.

The second problem is that the Darwin Secretariat has been unable to deliver us with high quality logos for use in printing t-shirts etc, and has not delivered any Darwin materials to us either. This means that we have experienced a delay of several months in preparing our public awareness materials. The materials were first requested in April, using the Secretariat's standard form. We had to chase them a number of times, the forms were lost, and finally in September the materials were despatched. They were received in Kazakhstan last week, 6 months after the first request, but have still not arrived in Russia. We will shortly be chasing the Secretariat yet again. A suitable electronic version of the logo has not been found. We are faced with the prospect of commissioning a design ourselves, which is expensive and surely unnecessary.

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

See above.

We think it would be good if Darwin could produce some guidance for project leaders as to best practice in the transfer of funds. This is presumably a common problem, and project leaders must be reinventing the wheel (with difficulty!) each time. The transfer of funds may not be a problem in all countries, but it is common to many of the countries in which projects work. A bit more proactive support would be very helpful.

We are not happy at the difficulties we have experienced in getting Darwin logos and other materials from the Secretariat; again surely every project team needs these for their work? We hope that the Secretariat resolves these problems soon. In previous years, there were high quality logos on the Darwin website for download, but I have been unable to find them this time, and noone at the Secretariat seems to know about their existence.

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](mailto:stefanie.halfmann@ed.ac.uk)