

Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species

Half Year Report (due 31 October each year) 2004

Project Ref. No.	162/12/029
Project Title	Steppe Forward Programme: Training Conservationists for Mongolia's Future
Country(ies)	Mongolia
UK Organisation	Zoological Society London
Collaborator(s)	National University Mongolia
Report date	31 October 2004
Report No. (HYR 1/2/3/4)	2
Project website	www.steppeforward.com

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – September) 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).

Year 2 of the programme began on 1st May 2004

May 04

Agreed outputs:

- Two steering committee meetings held in May prior to the field courses
- Biobeers environmental networking group organised with presentation on landscape ecology. 70 people attended from NGOs, university, academy of sciences, government. Publicity for SFP.
- Met with newly appointed UK ambassador to Mongolia and discussed SFP objectives
- 1 Conservation Club 'environmental video afternoon'
- University Conservation Club participated in tree-planting for Earth Day; jointly organised a university forum to discuss environmental issues. Conservation Club Newsletter in preparation, exams and summer vacation delayed publication
- 20 students and park rangers selected for each of the 3 field courses.
- 3 Mongolian lecturers confirmed for the field courses

Other progress:

- Mongolian counterpart receives Whitley Award for International Nature Conservation to value of £30,000. This will comprise a large component of SFP's community outputs. Award publicised in UK and Mongolian National Press and on SFP and ZSL web sites
- 1 meeting of the University Conservation Club
- Student from previous SFP field course participated in one month WCS/RSPB bird survey
- Two vans rented to WCS for 1 month to raise additional \$1,225 SFP funds

Jun 04

Agreed outputs:

- SFP 3 wk field course in Little Gobi Strictly Protected Area on Census Techniques and Desert Ecology for 18 1st year undergraduates from NUM and 2 park rangers from Dalanzadgad. 2 visiting UK lecturers and 1 NUM lecturer taught on the course.
- Presentation to students by Dalanzadgad park headquarters
- No community meeting after field course
- Students produced project reports and presentations (See Field Course Report in post)
- Mongolian Journal of Biological Sciences Volume 2 number 1 published

Other progress:

- Mammal Society certified 2 day course training during Gobi field course

Jul 04

Agreed outputs:

- SFP 3.5wk field course on Research Design and Data Analysis at Lake Hovsgol National Park for 19 2nd year undergraduates from NUM and 4 National Park rangers from Hovsgol parks administration. Two visiting lecturers. No NUM lecturers
- Students produced project reports and presentations (See Field Course Report in post)
- Presentation to students by Hovsgol National Park staff
- No community meeting after field course
- Peer-reviewed paper on Gobi community survey in preparation
- 3 peer-reviewed articles in preparation from field course projects. Expected publication date June 05

Other progress:

- Students attended full day of research presentations by 20 GEF researchers at Hovsgol
- 2 students sponsored by English Nature to attend August field course
- 1 student sourced by SFP for work experience with BBC Natural History Unit
- 1 student participated on one month WCS/RSPB bird survey in July/August

Aug 04

Agreed outputs:

- 3wk SFP Behavioural Ecology field course at Erdensant for eleven 3rd year undergraduates from NUM. One visiting UK lecturer (second lecturer was sick and replaced by SFP staff). No NUM lecturers. No park rangers.
- Students produced project reports and presentations (See Field Course Report in post)

Other progress:

- During summer 2004, 7 students who attended 2003 Gobi field course gained experience on conservation related projects.

Sep 04

Agreed outputs:

- Ranger training practicals in Dalanzadgad did not take place. Reasons for this given in previous reports. Mainly due to difficulty of working with the Ministry of Nature and Environment
- Students presenting field course projects to the Biology Faculty over the course of 5 weeks

Other progress:

- Mongolian counterpart meetings with IPECON – Initiative For People Centred Conservation to arrange community work beginning October
- ZSL volunteer recruited to begin work in November for 12 months
- 6 pairs binoculars donated by RSPB International
- SFP participated in a two day workshop on vole poisoning in Mongolia and its effects on wildlife

Oct 04

Agreed outputs:

- None

Other progress:

- Field course report translated into Mongolian and submitted to Biology Faculty.
- Field course summary (in Mongolian) distributed to steering committee for discussion
- Two steering committee meetings held to discuss the 2004 field courses
- Mongolian counterpart begins community initiative work and training in Gobi
- SFP participated in a three day workshop on a management plan for gazelles in Mongolia.
- Successful grant application providing \$18,000 funding from World Bank for SFP to produce a Mongolian Bird Guide (total required is \$30,100)
- Agreement with Mongolian ornithologists to translate the Mongolian edition of bird guide
- Biobeers networking group presentation organised. 50 people attended
- 1 National Press Release in Mongolia
- Programme noticeboard updated. Large semi-permanent SFP poster produced for Faculty

May-Oct 04

- Training Mongolian counterpart in project management, funding applications and organisation
- 56 Notices on MongolBioweb
- Ongoing work on translation and production of Ecological Census Techniques Book.
- Mongolian Journal of Biological Sciences, article review, distribution and exchanges.
- £200 subscriptions raised from journal
- Web site updated

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 affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

Overall achievements during the past 6 months have been very good with most outputs met. A full field course report has been posted. Courses provide valuable training to students, input from UK lecturers is valued, courses are run in a well organised and efficient manner and students learn methods and subjects not otherwise taught at NUM but essential for development of conservation projects. SFP has received considerable funding to produce an international field guide for birds of Mongolia that will be published in 2 languages. It is set to become the standard ornithological guide for Mongolia and represents a considerable tool for conservation of Mongolian avifauna and generally in encouraging ornithology and nature clubs. Currently \$18,000 has been attained; another \$12,000 is being sought.

Funding has been attained for a young UK graduate to work on the programme based in Mongolia for one year from November 2004. This will help significantly with the heavy workload.

- **Government elections** – Staff at the Ministry of Nature and Environment remained unchanged following this summer's elections. This is bad news for all working within the conservation sector. Business deals will continue to take precedence over wildlife issues. Quotas for hunting and export of threatened species continue to increase despite indications that species are in serious decline. We had hoped to secure a partnership with Ivanhoe Mines (who may have political influence in the ministry) but this aspect to the project is on hold. Much of the ranger training and training herders as para-ecologists will continue through Jargal's Whitley Award (we have an agreement with the new local park staff for this) and is set to continue to 2005/6. Development and monitoring of local community conservation projects in the Gobi set to take place in June 04 will form part of the same project, an initial community assessment having taken place during 1 week in October.
- **Rangers** - Due to pre-election campaign duties in June, all except 2 rangers were withdrawn from the Gobi field course despite 5 rangers having been agreed at beginning May. We were only notified of this having reached the field site and so were unable to replace them. No rangers attended the Erdensant field course. This field site is not within a protected area and so rangers must come from central administration in Ulaanbaatar. Due to the elections, no-one was in charge at the Ministry for several months and so it was impossible to agree on rangers to attend. 2004 was problematical because it was an election year. We do not foresee the same problems for another 4 years!
- **Community meetings** – On completion of each field course SFP intended students presenting their project results to the community in each region. This proved to be impractical. It is impossible to organise local communities in advance for such meetings. We do stop and talk to the governor and environmental staff and it is suggested to maybe produce a series of laminated posters based on the previous seasons field work to display locally. Awareness of courses will also be improved during the community initiative and para-ecologist work in the Gobi region.
- **National University Mongolia lecturers** - In 2004 only one NUM lecturer attended one of the field courses. Six were supposed to attend according to a collaborative agreement signed by ZSL, SFP and NUM in Feb 04 and in June 04 we had finalised a different lecturer for each of the three courses. This is a very important issue and one which we are currently trying to resolve. Two steering committee meetings were held in October on this issue. There is a limited number of younger staff members prepared to teach new subjects and aware that teaching requirements need to change from

those of the Soviet era. All of these lecturers are on the steering committee and all are expected to teach the compulsory courses. After teaching a compulsory course, lecturers usually join research expeditions or conduct their own field work. This has resulted in no university staff being available to teach on SFP courses (apart from Gobi in June which we ran as a compulsory course). The university also agreed to pay a reasonable salary to each lecturer but then did not fulfil this commitment. Lecturers earn about \$100 per month and so they try and supplement their income during the summer by joining foreign research teams or acting as guides on wildlife tours. Although lack of Mongolian lecturers in no way affected the teaching provided for the students and rangers in 2004, it is impossible for NUM staff to appreciate the amount and quality of teaching unless they attend. We will resolve this issue within the next few months.

- **Student numbers** – The optimum number of participants on each course is about 25 (students and rangers combined). This number can be safely transported and provided with equipment and necessary supervision for effective training. Although field course applications are made from February onwards, many students leave for the countryside in summer and then do not return to Ulaanbaatar for the field course. This was most obvious on the final course in 2004. We are currently discussing with NUM ways to ensure students do attend courses once they have agreed to participate. We are looking at ways to make the courses compulsory and also to provide the students with credits for attending.
- **Conservation Club** – The Conservation Club has been progressing slowly. At the end of 2003 a core group of students were regularly attending meetings and participating in club activities, however they still need supervision. In January and February students were fully preoccupied with exams and the month long Tsaagan Saar holiday. In March SFP staff members were away for urgent and unforeseen personal reasons and in April/May the Club organised several activities before exams in May. It is clear that for the Club to function effectively it requires much more input. From November 2004 a ZSL volunteer is joining SFP for 12 months and one of her roles will be to have more involvement with the students and in particular to help co-ordinate activities of the University Conservation Club. We expect outputs to be met in 2005/06 but some of the outputs will inevitably be delayed from 2004.
- **Community outputs** – Some of the outputs specified in the baseline have not been met yet, specifically some of the community and ranger training activities. Although these outputs will be produced later than scheduled, the outputs should be achieved with support from the Whitley Award made to SFP project counterpart Jargal. The project is using experience and expertise of Mongolian staff from IPECON who have developed similar projects in the neighbouring provincial centre of Dalanzadgad. Since Jargal is teaching on field courses from June –September most community outputs will be produced from October to May.
- **Level of lecturer knowledge** – One of the biggest challenges facing SFP is to raise the standard of training amongst Mongolian undergraduates. No lecturers have skills necessary to implement successful conservation programmes, lacking any training in data analysis; most are incapable of writing a scientific article for a peer-reviewed journal. It is essential to improve training for undergraduates – who are future lecturers. Currently, the majority of lecturers provide very little initiative and motivation to their students. In 2004 we had some very capable students who would benefit tremendously from a higher level of teaching during their university curriculum.

Have any of these issues been discussed with the Darwin Secretariat and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

All of the above issues are as previously reported; no changes have been made. Following discussions with the NUM and ZSL in November it might be necessary to discuss some changes with Darwin Secretariat. Any changes would involve schedule and not funding

Discussed with the DI Secretariat: no/yes, in..... (month/yr)

Changes to the project schedule/workplan: no/yes, in.....(month/yr)

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

DI would like to send someone to assess and provide useful advice on the project in Spring 2005. We appreciate this input and agree that a mid-term review is the correct time to assess a project in order to provide advice that can be applied for the remainder of the project. For the monitoring to be most effective we suggest visiting at a time of year when some of the more significant programme activities are being conducted. In our case this is during field courses but this might be too late for a mid-term review.

If you were asked to provide a response to this year's annual report review with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan or budget should not be discussed in this report but raised with the Darwin Secretariat directly.

Please send your **completed form by 31 October each year per email** to Stefanie Halfmann, Darwin Initiative M&E Programme, stefanie.halfmann@ed.ac.uk. The report should be between 1-2 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message.**