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Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species

Annual Report

1. Darwin Project Information

<i>Project Ref. Number</i>	162/12/031
<i>Project Title</i>	Implementing urgent conservation actions in mesotrophic fen mires in Belarus
<i>Country(ies)</i>	Belarus
<i>UK Contractor</i>	RSPB
<i>Partner Organisation(s)</i>	APB-BirdLife Belarus (APB)
<i>Darwin Grant Value</i>	GBP 109,889
<i>Start/End dates</i>	April 1, 2003 / March 31, 2006
<i>Reporting period (1 Apr 200x to 31 Mar 200y) and report number (1,2,3..)</i>	April 1, 2004 – March 31, 2005 Annual Report #2
<i>Project website</i>	N/a
<i>Author(s), date</i>	Olga Stsepaniuk Lars Lachmann April 29, 2005

2. Project Background

- *Briefly describe the location and circumstances of the project and the problem that the project aims to address.*

Europe's largest fen mires Sporovo, Dikoe and Zvanets, situated in south-western Belarus within the Polesie region, were the focal areas of the first stage of an intervention to support the conservation of Polesian biodiversity, through the joint Darwin-RSPB- and UNDP-funded project "Management Planning for Conservation of Fen Mire Biodiversity in Belarus". In this project, management plans were prepared for the three sites and adopted by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of Belarus. As a result of the project, the capacity of the country to develop integrated management plans for specially protected natural areas has been significantly increased.

The present project supports the second stage of the work programme aimed to ensure conservation of these globally significant sites through implementation of the urgent measures recommended in these management plans.

3. Project Purpose and Outputs

- *State the purpose and outputs of the project. Please include your project logical framework as an appendix and report achievements and progress against it (or, if applicable, against the latest version of the logframe).*

The purpose of the project is to implement the most urgent activities called for in the management plans for Dikoe, Sporovo and Zvanets mires. This aim will be achieved through the following outputs:

- effective establishment and maintenance of project management structures
 - management of the hydrological regime at the three sites
 - implementation of a system of hydrological monitoring at the three sites
 - implementation of Aquatic Warbler (AW) monitoring at the three sites
 - inclusion of the entire area of the Dikoe Mire Important Bird Area (IBA) within the boundaries of the Belavezhskaya Pushcha National Park, and alteration of the boundaries of the buffer zone for this park
 - establishment of a Zakaznik (protected area) management structure for the Sporovo and Zvanets sites.
- *Have the outputs or proposed operational plan been modified over the last year, for what reason, and have these changes been approved by the Darwin Secretariat? (Please note that any intended modifications should be discussed with the Secretariat directly rather than making suggestions in this report).*

The initial operational plan has been adjusted slightly due to a delay in starting construction works at Dikoe. This was caused by difficulties in finding a suitable subcontractor to carry out the construction works. But ultimately, a solution was found with the administration of the National Park and the construction has been underway since August 2004. At present the activities are 90 per cent completed, the official acceptance of works is planned for the end of April 2005.

This change in the operational plan was mentioned in the half-year-report of October 2004, but since it does not affect outputs nor overall budget, there was no need for official approval by the Darwin Secretariat.

4. Progress

- *Please provide a brief history of the project to the beginning of this reporting period.*

As mentioned earlier under 2) Project Background, the project is a follow up of an earlier Darwin-RSPB-UNDP funded project "Management Planning for Conservation of Fen Mire Biodiversity in Belarus" (1999-2002). The current project actually commenced already on October 31, 2002, with funding provided by the Michael Otto Foundation, United Nations Development Programme and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. By April 2003, when Darwin funding officially set in, the project personnel had been recruited and the project steering committee had convened to discuss the overall project strategy. BelGiprovdokhoz had elaborated technical plans for modification of Selets operational rules and Dikoe engineering construction.

During the first year supported by Darwin funding the Project Management Group gathered twice (Sep 29, 2003 and Feb 10, 2004) to discuss the results achieved and to make decisions concerning further project activities.

A management plan implementation workshop was run by UK-based RSPB experts. The training was combined with an inspection trip around Zvanets and Sporovo (Sep 29 till Oct 3, 2003), during which the experts shared their opinions and experience with local subcontractors, project staff and representatives of the Ministry of Environment on the location of hydrotechnical facilities, methods of their construction, materials used, potential implications for local land-users, etc.

At Zvanets site: PolesieGiprovdokhoz prepared a single engineering project for all hydrological construction activities at Zvanets. All major construction activities in accordance with the design plan had been completed by Brestmeliovdokhoz till 31 March, 2004. The major construction activities were fulfilled within one year rather than over a longer period as originally planned (as stated in the Annual Report #1). Aside from being cost-effective, this solution enabled the team to obtain valuable monitoring data already the following year (2004/05). A total of 7 overflow weirs and 4 sand-&-gravel blocks were constructed.

At Dikoe site: A single engineering project for all hydrological management activities at Dikoe was prepared by Belgiprovdokhoz. A general contract for carrying out the actual construction on site was signed with the Belavezhskaya Pushcha National Park.

At Sporovo site: Repairs of the emergency sluice at Selets were started by the Ministry of Environment, as part of its co-funding towards the project. The new operational rules for Selets fish farm were elaborated and agreed with the stakeholders. However, the regional water user – Brestmeliovdokhoz had not approved the rules and proposed to amend them with account to the planned water discharge for wetting the cultivated lands. The amended rules were planned to come into effect after completion of the

repair works of the sluice and additional construction works at Yaselda which form part of the new rules system. The construction of the first planned dam at Yaselda started.

Hydrological monitoring was carried out at Zvanets and Sporovo by the project hydrologists and the local staff of the zakaznik management offices (ZMOs). Aquatic Warbler monitoring was undertaken during a series of site visits by the project experts to the sites. Monitoring data were collected and analysed.

A proposal on changing the boundaries of the Belavezhskaya Pushcha National Park was prepared and a respective decision by the Grodno Regional Executive Committee taken.

Management offices for Sporovo and Zvanets zakazniks were set up, in affiliation with the respective district environmental inspections of the Ministry of Environment. The Ministry of Environment committed itself to take over financing the offices after the project completion.

- Summarise progress over the last year against the agreed baseline timetable for the period and the logical framework (complete Annex 1). Explain differences including any slippage or additional outputs and activities.

<i>Milestone</i>	<i>Progress</i>
<i>Project management</i>	
0.1 – Project planning, monitoring, management and administration. Agreements between partners, terms of reference for Project staff, steering group and management committee.	As mentioned in the half-year report as of October 2004, Dmitry Goloubovsky left the position of the Project Manager to start his new employment with UNDP Belarus. The Project Information Officer Sergei Zuyenok was selected as IBA Officer with APB-BirdLife Belarus and also left the project. In accordance with the UNDP recruitment procedures and the tax obligations new staff was recruited. Olga Stsepaniuk was employed for the position of the In-Country Project Manager starting from Dec 1, 2004, and Alexey Minchonak was employed as Information Officer from 8 February, 2005.
0.2 – Hold steering committee meetings annually	The Project Steering Committee was held on May 28, 2004, as planned. (See report in Annex 2)
0.3 – Hold management group meetings twice a year	The first Management Group meeting coincided with the Steering Committee meeting (on May 28, 2004). The second meeting was held on November 23, 2004 (see report in Annex 3)
0.4 – Technical Report Production	Half-year technical report (2004) produced and submitted on time.
0.5 – Financial Reporting	Quarterly financial reports and finance claims delivered on time.
0.6 – Run management plan implementation training workshops	Between May 24 and 27 two UK experts from the RSPB (Norman Sills and Jim Glover) inspected the work done to date and ran a workshop on UK experiences with

	similar projects (see report in Annex 4). Norman Sill focused on the implementation of hydrological works, whereas Jim Glover focused on the work with stakeholders, especially with the local population.
Hydrological management	
Zvanets site:	As mentioned in the first annual report, the major constructions – 7 overflow weirs and 4 sand-and-gravel blocks - as per original design plan were built within the first year. Since then the project team has had opportunity to perform the necessary adjustments for optimizing functioning of the system of facilities built at Zvanets. No new constructions were built within the reporting period, the actions were aimed at correcting or strengthening the existing facilities (the weirs can be seen at the map in Annex5)
1.1 – Adjustment of the operating regulations and building of water-regulating structures at the Radostovo site	Weir #1 – As of late June 2004, dam #1 has been reconstructed at the originally planned level and has been operating as planned ever since. This dam had before erroneously been constructed too high due to an error by the constructors. The Head of Zvanets Management Unit had a series of meetings with the local community to ensure proper understanding of the project activities around the area. No aggravation of the relationship happened ever since. The dam is operating as planned. In order to maintain the weir in functional condition additional works aimed at fortifying the facility may be required in the future. As a result of site inspection held at the end of March, decision was made to additionally reconstruct the existing non-adjustable sluice(200 m upstream of weir #1) in order to make it adjustable. This will allow to discharge excess water from the mire quickly and prevent possible flooding. The works are planned to be completed till the end of December 2005, within the approved project budget.
1.2 – Adjustment of the operating regulations and building of water-regulating structures at the Travy site	Weir #7 –operating as planned.
1.3 – Adjustment of the operating regulations and building of water-regulating structures at the Orekhovo site	Weir #6 – (See Annex 17 “Photos”). According to recommendations of the RSPB experts, in June-July the crest of dam #6 was elevated by about 20 cm and solidified with cement to better withstand continuous water flow. The adjustment was done within the existing project budget. The dam has been operating as planned since. The possibility of providing optimal water level in the mire in dry years by partial closing of the existing major sluice on Orekhovsky Canal was discussed with the Ministry of Environment, Kobrin

	<p>Drainage Works Company (operating the sluice) and the adjacent Sovkhoz Dneprobugsky (land user). The proposed sluice adjustment would require an additional \$ 1,000 to be spent on an annual basis by Kobrin Drainage Works Company for pumping excess water from land located upstream and used for agriculture. The Ministry of Environment has planned for the allocation of the necessary funds starting from its budget in 2005, for the case that pumping becomes necessary.</p>
<p>1.4 – Building of water-regulating structures at the Kirov collective farm site</p>	<p>Weir #5 – operating as planned. Additional field surveys and desk studies by the project hydrologist and Belgiprovodkhoz experts have asserted that construction of an adjustable sluice on the Orekhovsky Canal (as implied in the first annual report) would only lead to excessive flooding of the closest adjacent part of the mire and agricultural lands without actually improving water supply to the mire. The decision was made not to build the sluice. The optimal water level will be ensured by the regulation of the existing major sluice at the Orekhovsky canal.</p>
<p>1.5 – Withdrawal of a part of the amelioration system from intensive agricultural use and construction of necessary water-retention constructions at the Novoselki site</p>	<p>Sand-&-gravel blocks #3 and #4 are operating as planned.</p>
<p>1.6 – Closing of the unnamed amelioration system, located on the territory of Zvanets</p>	<p>Sand-&-gravel block #2 is operating as planned (See Annex 17 “Photos”).</p>
<p>1.7 – Relieving the negative effect of the Novoselki fish-farm operation on the mire</p>	<p>Weir #4 (See Annex 17 “Photos”) is functioning as planned by the engineering project. By late July 2004, the existing Novoselki sluice had been upgraded to the necessary height (plus 80 cm) thus allowing for a higher elevation, and the embankment had been fortified with funding provided by Drogichin Environment Inspection. Operating as planned since. (See Annex 17 “Photos”). However, the existing facilities are placed 45 cm lower than the mire surface (it is impossible to place them higher due to the requirements of the fish-farm) and this will lead to a certain water loss. Therefore and because of the necessity to prevent flooding in the nesting period, decision was made to build additional sluice at Povitievsky canal within existing project budget.</p>
<p>1.8 – Diminishing the drainage effect of the Yamnik system on the mire</p>	<p>Not part of the project plan anymore. (The field surveys revealed that Yamnik drainage system is separated from the mire by a mineral island, thus producing no</p>

	relevant drainage effect on the mire).
1.9 – Building of water-retention structures on all of the mire drainage canals located within Zvanets	Weirs #2, #3 and sand-&-gravel block #1 - operating as planned. The recent inspection by the project experts revealed that the necessity may arise, to lower the weirs #2 and #3. The decision will depend on the dynamics of the water recession. The decision will be made as a result of field visits in 2005.
Dikoe site:	Location of the hydrological facilities being constructed or repaired can be seen on the map in Annex 6.
1.10 – Close the unsanctioned drainage system construction by the Krasny Partizan collective farm	As mentioned in the 1 st annual report, the system had been legalized before the project activities started and therefore cannot be closed. Instead, new operational rules for the area have been set up, allowing only grass cultivation, but prohibiting arable farming in order to allow a sufficient water level to be held in the system to avoid negative impacts on the adjacent mire. The new operational rules have been approved and agreed with all the land users. In order to regulate the water level and to avoid excessive drainage, repairs of the existing water engineering facilities (sluices ##1-3) will be implemented in 2005 by Pruzhany Drainage Works Company.
1.11 – Alleviate the draining effect on the Dikoie Mire of the Upper Yaselda drainage system by construction of dams at the VP-2 canal and the Yaselda canal	Reconstruction of the existing water regulation facilities (sluices ## 4-5) will be implemented in 2005 by Pruzhany Drainage Works Company.
1.12 – Maintenance of an optimal water level in the part of the Dikoie mire adjacent to the Upper Yaselda drainage system by means of pumping water from pond #8	Not part of the project plan anymore (pp.1.11 and 1.13 will secure the desired result).
1.13 – Alleviation of the draining effect of the “Dikoie” peat extraction site drainage network	Construction of dams #1, #2 completed, instead of dam #3 a retaining construction made of boards will be built in front of the existing culvert. Official acceptance of works is planned for the end of April 2005.
1.14 – Closing of the Viunovka drainage system	Construction works (dam #4) are 90 per cent complete. The inspection held by project hydrologists on 22-23 Jan’05 revealed necessity of additional actions for strengthening the weir that are going to be completed till the end of April 2005, and checked during official acceptance of works. According to the inspection results, the weir #4 at the Viunovka brook near Brovki village had been

	<p>constructed 250 m downstream from the projected site near the bridge across the road. The new location of the weir has been accepted by the hydrologists as it ensures the same backup water level as planned by the construction project.</p> <p>Costruction of two dams: at Narev river (dam #5) and Motylev Rov canal (dam #6), is 90 per cent complete. Official acceptance of works is planned for the end of April, 2005. The dams were prescribed by the Dikoe management plan. For financial reasons the activity was dropped from the original application. However, savings made during the first year enabled the team to bring the two dams back into the work plan.</p> <p>According to the results of inspection of 22-23 Jan'05, dam #5 at Narev river had been constructed 1.5 km downstream near Gluboki Kut village. The new location of the dam has been accepted by the hydrologists as it ensures the same backup water level as planned by the engineering project.</p>
<p>Sporovo site:</p> <p>1.15 – Repairs of sluice at Selets complex</p>	<p>Location of the hydrological facilities being constructed or repaired can be seen on the map in Annex 7.</p> <p>Repairs of Selets emergency discharge sluice are being completed by the Ministry of Environment, as part of its co-funding toward the project. Inspection of works will be possible after flood recession (May, 2005).</p>
<p>1.16 – Modification of Selets operating rules & regulations</p>	<p>Belgiprovodkhoz has elaborated the new operational rules for Selets fish farm with specific account of ensuring optimal water regime at Sporovo mire. The new rules prescribe that every spring, for providing sufficient discharge downstream Yaselda in order to ensure optimal water level during the breeding season, the water should be accumulated in fish-farm reservoir, not only during high-water years (as stated in the 1st Annual Report).</p> <p>The rules have been agreed with all the district land and water users. However, they will come into effect only after additional approval by the regional water user – Brestmeliovodkhoz; and after completion of the sluice repair works and construction of the facilities at Yaselda. The approval is going to be received till the end of May, 2005. See also p.1.17.</p> <p>The construction of the first dam across Yaselda was completed by June, 2004, with the funding provided by the Ministry of Environment through its Berioza District Inspection. However, in view of the huge water load and in order to solidify the construction even more, the designers and the project team have</p>

	<p>made a decision to fortify the crest with cement in 2005 (after the flood recession).</p> <p>As a result of working meetings of the project hydrologists, land and water users and the Ministry of Environment it was agreed that the final decision on constructing the second dam at Yaselda (mentioned in the 1st Annual Report) will be made after coordination and approval of the new operational rules and completion of the construction of the first dam. If according to the new rules the zakazniks will not be supplied with optimal water level, the necessity may arise, to build the second water regulation facility at Yaselda.</p>
1.17 – Monitoring of the implementation of operating guidelines for Selets	Monitoring of implementation of new operating rules is undertaken by BelGiprovodkhoz hydrology experts. As the new rules are not yet in effect (see point 1.16 above), the monitoring until now concentrated on surveying the existing hydrological situation.
<i>Hydrological monitoring</i>	
2.1 – Monitoring of water levels at the three sites	<p>Hydrological monitoring was carried out at two sites by project hydrologists and local staff of the zakaznik management offices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zvanets – 3 monitoring posts at weirs #4, #6, and #7, plus 5 posts along transect crossing the mire from south to north • Sporovo – 3 hydrological monitoring plots (additional 2 plots are envisioned upon completion of dam construction) • Dikoe – no hydrological monitoring to date (only baseline data) <p>(see for details on Aquatic Warbler and hydrological monitoring in Annex 8)</p>
<i>Species monitoring</i>	
3.1 – Monitoring of Aquatic Warbler Population density and breeding success at three sites	As planned, the Aquatic Warbler monitoring was undertaken as part of a series of field trips by project experts to the sites. Monitoring data have been collected and analysed (details on AW and hydrological monitoring are presented in Annex 8).
<i>Site protection through enhanced designation</i>	
4.1 – Elaboration of a Proposal on changing the boundaries of the Belavezhskaja Pushcha National Park to include the whole area of the Dikoe Mire IBA in the boundaries of the National	Implemented (See the 1 st Annual Report).

Park	
4.2 – Changing the boundaries of buffer zone of the Belavezhskaya Pushcha National Park to take account of the newly included Dikoe Mire IBA	The buffer zone of the Belavezhskaya Pushcha National Park has been included into the National Park as stated in the Decree # 460 of the President (27/09/2004).
5.1 – Set up Zakaznik Management Office	<p>Management Offices set up at Zvanets and Sporovo have been operating successfully. The officers have been working in close collaboration with the Ministry of Environment, drainage works companies and other relevant authorities to secure post-project funding of the offices, which will ensure long-lasting effect of the project activities. The actions of the officers proved effective not only in day-to-day actions for the conservation of the ecosystem but also in raising local awareness of the project activities and enhancing local understanding for the uniqueness of the project target territories.</p> <p>The work plans for the offices for January,1 –December,31, 2005, have been coordinated with the Ministry of Environment (See Annex 9).</p> <p>Some progress has been achieved by the Ministry of Environment in getting permission to post-project financing of the zakazniks' offices. In the Regulation of the Council of Ministers dd. 25/03/2005 # 321 it is stated, that the resources of the local environmental funds of the Ministry can be used for functioning of the state legal entities that manage zakazniks. But to ensure this, legal entities should be established on the basis of the existing management offices. Due to contradictions found in legislative acts that effect the process of the creation of a state environmental entity, a specific regulation of the Council of Ministers is required. At present the Ministry of Environment is considering opportunity of preparing such a document. But the process of its approval may take a long period of about a year or even more.</p>

- *Provide an account of the project's achievements during the last year. This should include concise discussion on methodologies and approaches by the project (e.g. research, training, planning, assessment, monitoring) and their consequences and impacts as well as results. Please **summarise** content on methodologies and approaches, and, if necessary, provide more detailed information in appendices (this may include cross-references to attached publications).*

The project progressed well during the second of the three years.

Among the major project achievements are:

- construction works at Zvanets as per originally designed plan have been completed (now the hydrologists are considering additional activities for optimizing the functioning of the system of the built facilities);
- the works at Dikoe are 90 per cent completed (acceptance planned for April);

- the zakazniks' management offices are functioning effectively, the work plans for the offices have been coordinated with the Ministry of Environment;
- the project team has convinced the Ministry of Environment in necessity to amend the legislation to provide the post-project funding of ZMOs by the Ministry, at present the Council of Ministers has to approve the relevant legislative act.
- the buffer zone of the Belavezhskaya Pushcha National Park has been included into the National Park area;
- the emergency sluice at the reservoir above the Selets fish farm has been repaired with funds from the Ministry of Environment.

These results have been achieved using the following methods and approaches:

-Planning and assessment:

As mentioned in the 1st Annual Report the engineering plans for the three sites were elaborated during the first year of the project. Since then the project team has been coordinating construction works at the three sites by means of regular field visits, inspection of the state of the built facilities, control of meeting deadlines as per the work plan; the project hydrologist and Belgiprovdokhoz experts visited the sites and gave recommendations on improvement or strengthening the facilities.

-Training:

Training performed in May 24 -27, 2004, by the RSPB experts Norman Sills and Jim Glover was very helpful for local subcontractors, project staff and representatives of the Ministry of Environment, as it gave them opportunity to learn foreign experience in this field. The training was combined with inspection during which the RSPB experts gave necessary recommendations on fortifying the built weirs so that they would serve for a long period.

- Monitoring:

Simultaneously with the construction, scientific monitoring was conducted, which concentrated on the one side on development of Aquatic Warbler populations as a key biodiversity indicator species of the project, on the other side on development of water levels before and after the construction of the hydrological facilities within the project.

Monitoring of the Aquatic Warbler builds on a well-tested method already used in the preceding Darwin project on the elaboration of the management plans for these sites (1999-2002). Hydrological monitoring has only been established within the framework of the present project.

Both types of monitoring have been performed during the reporting period on the initially determined monitoring plots. Hydrological monitoring was performed regularly (from March to November), unlike the previous years when the water levels were measured only during the nesting period. (See Annex 8)

Monitoring data obtained at Zvanets in May, 2004, revealed the necessity of raising the crest of the dam #6 (near Orekhovsky canal) for slowing down decrease in the water level during the spring flood recession, raise the water level in the bypass canal of the fish farm by repairing a sluice. Thus, the data obtained had a practical effect.

- Maximum stakeholder involvement:

The project team succeeded in involving the stakeholders into each stage of the project implementation and the processes of planning and assessment, so that the project goals are at present realized as a common matter of all the parties involved.

- *Discuss any significant difficulties encountered during the year and steps taken to overcome them.*

No major difficulties that could compromise the project's delivery were encountered, although some constraints occurred that influence the terms of implementing specific activities;

- As the process of changing legislation is very slow, the progress in establishing legal entities on the basis of ZMOs is not rapid. During the joint meeting of representatives of the Ministry of Environment and the project team, the lawyers of the Ministry assured that the necessary measures are being taken towards preparing the required legislative document.

- The building of the first dam at Sporovo as per the amended engineering plan has not yet been completed due to the flooding. The filed visit for determining the scope of necessary works is planned as soon as the flood falls (presumably, May, 2005).

- The operational rules for Selets have not yet been officially approved by the regional water user - Brestmeliovodkhoz. In April the meeting is planned for discussing necessary amendments in the rules.

- *Has the design of the project been enhanced over the last year, e.g. refining methods, indicators for measuring achievements, exit strategy?*

N/A

- *Present a timetable (workplan) for the next reporting period.*

The workplan for April 2005 – March 2006 is presented in Annex 10.

5. Actions taken in response to previous reviews (if applicable)

- *Have you responded to issues raised in the review of your last year's annual report? Have you discussed the review with your collaborators? Briefly describe what actions have been taken as a result of recommendations from last year's review.*

Addressed in the half-year report of October 2004.

6. Partnerships

- *Describe collaboration between UK and host country partner(s) over the last year. Are there difficulties or unforeseen problems or advantages of these relationships?*

The RSPB has been actively involved in project implementation through a number of visits of the Head of European Programmes and Training Department Mr Norbert

Schäffer, European Country Programmes Manager Mr Mark Day, Country Programmes Officer for Poland and Belarus Mr Lars Lachmann, and a training visit by RSPB experts Jim Glover and Norman Sills. Taking into account employment of a new person for the position of the Belarusian Project Manager, the UK Project Manager proved very helpful in bringing the new employee up to date, through regular contacts and instructing, so that the project activities continued without delays.

Successful collaboration of the RSPB with APB-BirdLife Belarus gave start to a number of initiatives that were applied for or launched during the last year. Among them are:

- Initiative of APB-BirdLife Belarus in cooperation with UNDP Belarus, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and the Ministry of Education of Belarus on development of a Biodiversity Module for Inclusion in the Secondary School Curriculum in Belarus. The goal of the project is to raise the awareness of environmental issues in Belarus thus setting in place a generation more able to make better decisions in favor of good environmental management and future sustainable development. The project will aim at introducing the new biodiversity course in the 7th-8th grade of ALL biology special schools in Belarus (about 400 schools with some 12,000 students in each grade) and involve as much common schools as possible in teaching the new course. Funding not yet secured.
- The Forest Mapping Project (See next point for more detail)
- Greater and Lesser Spotted Eagle in Belarus 2005 – an initiative supported by the Frankfurt Zoological Society, aimed at learning the nesting and habitat use ecology of the Greater Spotted Eagles in Belarus and at studying the threat posed through hybridization of Greater and Lesser Spotted Eagles
- Application to Otto Foundation for supporting the project aimed at cleaning Sporovo mire from shrubbery and reeds by means of organizing annual mowing, thus creating optimal conditions for globally important biodiversity. Funding not secured.
- Project “Building on EU experience in local communities and administrations networking in conservation important areas in Belarus” within EU TACIS programme. The project is aimed at reviving the pre-transition partnership of local environmental initiatives and authorities through establishment of a network of local environmental clubs supported by local authorities, drawing on the EU experience. The project targets school teachers in rural areas (close to environmentally significant areas) who will play a key role in the establishment and functioning of local initiatives.

- *Has the project been able to collaborate with similar projects (Darwin or other) in the host country or other regions, or establish new links with / between local or international organisations involved in biodiversity conservation?*

APB and RSPB have been involved in the preparation of a GEF medium-sized project proposal on rehabilitation of 42,000 ha of degraded peatlands in Belarus at 17 sites. At present the project is being launched. The implementing agency of the project - the Ministry of Forestry - will work in close cooperation with APB-BirdLife Belarus and the main activities will be based on the experience of hydrological engineering obtained in the current Darwin project.

Among other projects connected with the current one is a GEF PDF-B Project aimed at conservation and sustainable management of globally valuable biodiversity in the unique Polesie Region. The project, again developed and promoted by APB and RSPB, will help improve the quality of key policies for important productive sectors such as agriculture, forestry, and flood defense in parallel to strengthening of institutional capacity at key protected areas of Polesie. It will also assist the Government of Belarus in strengthening cooperation with Ukraine on establishment of the trans-boundary Pripjat-Stokhid-Prostyr reserve. This PDF-B project is a preparatory project for a full sized GEF project on the same subject. The application for this full size project is currently being prepared.

The Forest Mapping Project financed by Jensen Foundation and initiated by the BirdLife Forest Task Force and APB is also an initiative connected with the present project. The purpose of the initiative is to scan the national forest database as well as other specialized national databases (such as rare bird or flora databases) for forests of probable High (or Higher-than-average) conservation value. By providing a national overview of where High Conservation Value Forests (HCVFs) are located and concentrated, it will be possible to take these values better into account during planning of forestry activities.

Collaboration between APB BirdLife Belarus and Wetlands International Russia Programme resulted in a field seminar-excursion that took place on 7-11 October, 2004, in Belarus. The seminar was aimed at exchanging experience on the planning and implementation of peatlands rehabilitation projects in Russia and Belarus. (See Annex 11 for details)

Members of the Belarusian project team have been involved in the BirdLife International Aquatic Warbler Conservation Team (AWCT) for many years. This team brings together all experts working on this species and the protection of its fen mire habitat. The practical experience, especially in terms of breeding population monitoring, management planning and hydrological restoration of the APB representatives is most valuable within this team. Once a year with funding from the RSPB this expert group meets to do practical fieldwork and exchange experience. Thus, the relevant Belarusian experience could be spread to other European countries and projects, amongst others an EU LIFE project in Spain and to the Aquatic Warbler conservation work in the Ukraine.

This year's field visit in June 2006 will include the project territories in Belarus. The work of the AWCT is presented on www.aquaticwarbler.net.

The Polish BirdLife Partner OTOP, with support from the RSPB, has developed a similar conservation project to safeguard the German and Polish population of Aquatic Warblers. This project has been submitted for funding to the EU LIFE Nature programme in late 2005. Belarusian experts from the Darwin project were heavily involved in the development of this project and will take part in the advisory group of this project, if it receives funding approval.

Since April 2005, the BirdLife International/CMS (Bonn Convention) International Aquatic Warbler Conservation Officer has taken up his post, based at APB-BirdLife Belarus and managed by the APB Conservation Director (Chief Technical Advisor of the Darwin project). His post was created to support the implementation of the International Memorandum of Understanding for the Conservation of Aquatic Warbler under the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and is funded by the German Otto Foundation for a period of three years.

His job is to build on the experience of APB gathered during the Darwin projects in Belarus and to support conservation activities for Aquatic Warblers and fen mires in other countries of the species' range.

7. Impact and Sustainability

- *Discuss the profile of the project within the country and what efforts have been made during the year to promote the work. What evidence is there for increasing interest and capacity for biodiversity resulting from the project? Is there a satisfactory exit strategy for the project in place?*

In Belarus the project is perceived as a joint effort of the Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species, the RSPB, Michael Otto Foundation, the UNDP, the Ministry of Environment and APB to preserve the biodiversity of the unique fen mires in Belarus. The indicator species of the biological diversity at the mires – Aquatic Warbler – is well-known by the old and young owing to regular appearing of the video clips over the national television channels.

During the year, the project team strived to accentuate on the explanatory work with the local communities at the project's target sites. This is necessary to ensure careful attitude of the locals to the biodiversity, non-destructive actions towards the newly built hydrological facilities, realization of the global importance of the unique treasures of the Belarusian nature.

The zakaznik management offices created within the project at Zvanets and Sporovo sites have been highly appreciated by the Ministry of Environment and are planned to be used by the Ministry as sample structures for the creation of a network of 35 offices for the management of zakazniks of international importance.

The two Darwin projects have laid the foundation for the GEF-funded peatland Project. Another full-size GEF-funded initiative, now in its PDF B stage, was initiated by the

Ministry of Environment and APB to achieve sustainable management of key sites in the Polesie region through improvement of forestry, land use and hydrology policies. (See point 6 for more details).

The Ministry will take over the financing of the two new management offices and will thus guarantee the sustainability of the project achievements. Two of the three project sites feature also as project sites of the upcoming GEF Polesie project mentioned above. Further work has to be done to ensure a sustainable vegetation management system that deals with the threat of increasing succession of the sites (second phase of the implementation of the site management plans). Several sound ideas for sustainable systems have already been put forward and two project applications to secure funding for the setup of these systems had been submitted, but have been unsuccessful to date. Further work will be done to secure funding for these measures.

8. Post-Project Follow up Activities (max 300 words)

This section should be completed ONLY if your project is nearing completion (penultimate or final year) and you wish to be considered to be invited to apply for Post Project Funding. Each year, a small number of Darwin projects will be invited to apply for funding. Selection of these projects will be based on promising project work, reviews to date, and your suggestions within this section. Further information on this scheme introduced in 2003 is available from the Darwin website.

- *From project progress so far, what follow-up activities would help to embed or consolidate the results of your project, and why would you consider these as suitable for Darwin Post Project Funding?*
- *What evidence is there of strong commitment and capacity by host country partners to enable them to play a major role in follow-up activities?*

Within the current project the urgent recommendations of the management plans for the three key remaining fen mires in Europe are being addressed. However, to ensure the long-term existence of the mires as habitats for their unique biodiversity it is necessary to also implement the other recommendations of the management plans:

- prevention of overgrowth by bushes and reeds through implementation of a sustainable mowing regime with the help of modern equipment adapted to its use on fen mires and by cooperation with the local land users.
- Enabling the use of biomass derived from site management as fuel for local power plants, which need to be adapted for biomass use
- Development of sustainable low-key tourism at the project sites to provide for additional valuation of the sites and their biodiversity
- Preparation of an application to include the sites into the list of Natural World Heritage Sites.

These follow up activities are needed to ensure the long-term sustainability of the sites, which are the last remaining large habitats of their kind in Europe. The use of biomass as fuel and the new system of land management planned as a follow up of this project would provide an example that could be replicated in large areas of Belarus and similar sites in Poland, Ukraine and Russia.

The project team around the host-country partner APB-BirdLife Belarus and the organizations gathered around it during the implementation of the current project are very well placed and capable to implement these follow up activities. Co-funding would be available from various other projects that resulted out of the successful Darwin projects in Belarus (see under point 6), which in turn is a proof of the capability of APB-BirdLife Belarus to run large scale conservation projects.

We consider this outline as very suitable for Darwin Post-project funding and would very much appreciate to be invited for Post-project funding.

9. Outputs, Outcomes and Dissemination

- *Explain differences in actual outputs against those agreed in the initial 'Project Implementation Timetable' and the 'Project Outputs Schedule', i.e. what outputs were not or only partly achieved? Were additional outputs achieved?*

All the outputs planned have been delivered in the reported period. TV coverage of project activities was provided by two TV appearances of project personnel on republican television channels (1st National TV channel and STV (Minsk TV channel – broadcasted to all regional centres)) and two appearances on regional and district TV channels, during 3-10 min interviews, which were connected with the project activities. Besides, the project experts were broadcasted over the Belarusian republican radio (two talks) and district radio (one talk), during the conversations enlightening the project activities (see Annex 12 for details).

- *Provide details of dissemination activities in the host country during the year, including information on target audiences. Will dissemination activities be continued by the host country when the project finishes, and how will this be funded and implemented?*

The dissemination activities included the press release, a number of TV and radio appearances, speeches of the project team members at the press-conferences. The project poster with the map of Zvanets mire reflecting the hydrological system was printed and at present is being disseminated. The dissemination activities will continue after the project finishes due to collaboration with the projects that have started lately. E.g., TACIS project implemented by APB aims at establishing a network of pupils' clubs in the different areas of Polesie including the target territories of our projects. An agreement has already been reached with the TACIS project team concerning highlighting of our project activities through this network.

- Please expand and complete Table 1. **Quantify** project outputs over the last year using the coding and format from the Darwin Initiative Standard Output Measures (see website for details) and give a brief description. Please list and report on appropriate Code Nos. only. The level of detail required is specified in the Guidance notes on Output Definitions, which accompanies the List of Standard Output Measures

Table 1. Project Outputs (According to Standard Output Measures)

Code No.	Quantity	Description
4A/B	3 undergraduates	Three undergraduate students (the same as in the first year) received hydrological and AW monitoring training during 2004 field season (see Annex 13 for reports)
4C/D	2 postgraduates	Two postgraduate students (different from the first year) received monitoring training during 2004 field season (see Annex 14 for reports)
6A/B	10 Belarusians	Training in management plan implementation (see Annex 4 for the reports of the RSPB experts)
15B	1 press release	General information concerning the project and the planned visit of the RSPB experts is provided in the press release, resulted in several publications in newspapers (see Annex 15)
18C	4 local TV programmes	Project activities were highlighted during TV interviews with project Chief Technical and Scientific Advisor Dr. Alexander Kozulin, Sporovo office Manager Vadim Protasevich (see Annex 12)
19C	3 local radio programme	Project activities and partnerships were highlighted during three radio interviews: with Chief Technical and Scientific Advisor Dr. Alexander Kozulin, Information Officer Sergei Zuyenok, Head of Sporovo Management Office Vadim Protasevich (see Annex 12)
15C	One national press release in the UK	One national publication produced by RSPB Country Programmes Officer Mr. Lars Lachmann, giving an overview of the activities for biodiversity conservation in Belarus (see Annex 16)

- In Table 2, provide full details of all publications and material produced over the last year that can be publicly accessed, e.g. title, name of publisher, contact details, cost. Details will be recorded on the Darwin Monitoring Website Publications Database. Mark (*) all publications and other material that you have included with this report.

Table 2: Publications

Type *	Detail (title, author, year)	Publishers (name, city)	Available from (e.g. contact address, website)	Cost £
Poster*	“Zvanets” Zakaznik (Ramsar Site, IBA)”	RUP “Belkartography”, Minsk	APB, P.O. Box 306, Minsk 220050, Belarus	N/A
Scientific journal article	Breeding ecology of Aquatic Warbler <i>Acrocephalus paludicola</i> at Dikoe fen mire, Belarus. Alexander Kozulin, Lyubov Vergeichik, 2005	Vogelwelt	Mr.Martin Flade (2 e-mail addresses): Martin.Flade@LAG S.Brandenburg.de ; swinter@fh- eberswalde.de	N/A
Newspaper article	Conserving for Yourself and Future Generations. Vladimir Piven, 2005	“Drogichinski Vestnik”, Drogichin	17 Sentiabria Str., of. 3, Drogichin, Brest region, Belarus Editors ++375 1644 20263	N/A
Journal article	Working for Belarus, Lars Lachmann, 2005	RSPB, RSPB Fellow News, issue: Spring 2005, p. 4	Jonathan Wright, RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Beds, SG19 2DL, UK	N/A
Jubilee publication	Pripyet-Heimat des Seggenrohrsängers	Unsere Vision ist klar. Jubilee publication of the Michael Otto Foundation for Environmental Protection, pp. 16/17, 2004	Michael Otto Stiftung für Umweltschutz, Wandsbeker Str. 3- 7, 22179 Hamburg, Germany	N/A

10. Project Expenditure

- Please expand and complete Table 3.

Table 3: Project expenditure during the reporting period (Defra Financial Year 01 April to 31 March)

Item	Budget	Expenditure	Balance
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- Highlight any recently agreed changes to the budget and explain any variation in expenditure where this is +/- 10% of the budget.

It has been agreed in communication with the Darwin Secretariat that the overspent in office costs will and can be made up for by a corresponding saving in the rent, heating and overheads budget line.

As already pointed out in the last finance claim of the reporting year, there is a considerable underspent in the "others" budget line. This is connected mainly with underspending on the line - "Other costs: Subcontract work- Dikoe site". Because the

subcontractor - "Belavezhskaya Pushcha" National Park - has not met the schedule of the repair and construction works and has not fulfilled his obligations on time we were unable to pay the final instalment for the costs of these activities. Completion of the works had to be postponed until 15 April 2005, and transfer of the money is only possible after the official acceptance of works.

11. Monitoring, Evaluation and Lessons

- *Discuss methods employed to monitor and evaluate the project this year. How can you demonstrate that the outputs and outcomes of the project actually contribute to the project purpose? i.e. what are the indicators of achievements (both qualitative and quantitative) and how are you measuring these?*

During the reporting period the same methods, as in the previous year, were employed to monitor and evaluate the project implementation. They include: facilitation of better coordination of the stakeholders involved in management and conservation of natural resources, ensuring continuous review of the progress by the representatives of the project donors, implementing recommendations and suggestions given by them on points to be improved. Among the tools for monitoring are the continuous update of the work plan, field visits, regular reporting.

The key indicators of achievements are the condition of the AW population, water levels at the target project territories (See Annex 8 for the report on the results of the monitoring of the two indicators).

At Zvanets mire the population size has stabilized and at present sustainable increase in the density is observed; at Sporovo mire owing to the taken measures the population size is gradually increasing without abrupt falls that had been observed earlier; at Dikoe mire the population size is at stable low level.

It is envisioned that due to future increase in water level during the nesting period, the density of red-toothed shrews will be significantly reduced, thus reducing the rate of egg and nestling predation and allowing increased breeding success.

Monitoring at Zvanets shows that ground the water level across the bulk of the mire has elevated (both near hydrotechnical facilities and across the mire) as a direct result of the construction of overflow weirs. The monitoring data obtained in 2005 show that the water level at the mire is 10 cm higher than in 2004. It is expected that in 2005 decrease of water level will be much slower than in 2004.

As construction of the dam across Yaselda at Sporovo has not yet been completed, water level in the mire has not changed significantly.

It is envisioned that in 2005 completion of works on optimization of the water levels will lead to the end of the decline in Aquatic Warbler population size. To achieve an increase in the population of Aquatic Warblers specific actions on vegetation management – regular mowing and shrubbery removal - are necessary.

- *What lessons have you learned from this year's work, and can you build this learning into future plans?*

During the reporting period no unforeseen or critical situations occurred that could influence the project implementation strategy. Instead, the project team became reassured in correctness of the initially chosen approaches and methods of the project realization.

For example, hydrological monitoring data obtained at Zvanets in May, 2004, revealed necessity of raising the crest of dam #6 (near Orekhovsky canal) for slowing down decrease in the water level during the spring flood recession, as well as raising the water level in the bypass canal of the fish farm by repairing the sluice. As a result of timely and coordinated actions, according to preliminary inspection of March, 2005, the aim has been achieved:

- the water level at the part of the mire adjacent to the bypass canal has been raised till the projected level;
- it is expected that the raised dam #6 will decrease the speed of the fall of water level in the mire.

In order to ensure sustainable effect of the project results, the project experts will continue hydrological monitoring at Sporovo and Zvanets on systematic basis; in 2005 hydrological monitoring at Dikoe will be started as soon as construction works are completed.

12. OPTIONAL: Outstanding achievements of your project during the reporting period (300-400 words maximum)

As a result of the work of APB-BirdLife Belarus and its UK partner organisation, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), supported by the Darwin Initiative, the hydrological regime of the three unique fen mires in Belarus has been improved for breeding Aquatic Warbler, the only globally threatened songbird species of mainland Europe. The restoration of the original hydrological regime will be completed during 2005. –. Recently obtained monitoring data show that at the monitoring plots the density of breeding Aquatic Warblers is kept at a stable high level (80-100 males per 100 ha). As a result of the Darwin funded project, the decline of the species has now been stopped at these three sites, which hold together around 70% of the species' world population.

■ I agree for ECTF and the Darwin Secretariat to publish the content of this section

In this section you have the chance to let us know about outstanding achievements of your project over the year that you consider worth highlighting to ECTF and the Darwin Secretariat. This could relate to achievements already mentioned in this report, on which you would like to expand further, or achievements that were in addition to the ones planned and deserve particular attention e.g. in terms of best practice. The idea is to use this section for various promotion and dissemination purposes, including e.g. publication in the Defra Annual Report, Darwin promotion material, or on the Darwin website. As we will not be able to ask projects on an individual basis for their consent to publish the content of this section, please note the above agreement clause.