

Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species

Half Year Report Form (due 31 October each year)

Project Ref. No.	162/12/031
Project Title	Implementing urgent conservation actions in mesotrophic fen mires in Belarus
Country(ies)	Belarus
UK Organisation	RSPB
Collaborator(s)	APB-BirdLife Belarus
Report date	Period from April 2004 to September 2004
Report No. (HYR 1/2/3/4)	Half Year Report #2
Project website	N/a

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).

Milestone/Progress

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

0.1 Project planning, monitoring, management and administration. Agreements between partners, terms of reference for Project staff, steering group and management committee.

No new staff recruited over the reporting period.

0.2 Hold steering committee meetings annually

The Project Steering Committee was held May 28, 2004, as planned.

0.3 Hold management group meetings twice a year

The first Project Management Group meeting coincided with the Steering Committee session.

0.4 Technical Report Production

Technical reporting (first annual report) produced as planned.

0.5 Financial Reporting

Financial report and claim for quarter June-September is slightly delayed due to Belarusian Project Manager's participation in RSPB "Building on Experience" training program which coincided with the reporting deadline. The financial report and claim for April-June was produced as planned.

0.6 Run management plan implementation training workshops

Between May 24 and 27, 2004, 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. 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 WORK

Zvanets site

1.1 Adjustment of the operating regulations and building of water-regulating structures at the Radostovo site

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 an error by the constructors. The Head of Zvanets Management Unit has had a series of meetings with the local community (personal meetings, school visits etc.) to ensure proper understanding of the project activities around the area. Now that the local people know what the exact purpose of the dam is and its height has been adapted (with active help of the local population), no aggravation in relationship is expected. Thus, the accidental flooding of unauthorized traditional agricultural land, that was caused by the initial crest height, has not created any lasting negative impact on the relationship between the project and the local community.

1.2 Adjustment of the operating regulations and building of water-regulating structures at the Travy site

Operating as planned (dam #7).

1.3 Adjustment of the operating regulations and building of water-regulating structures at the Orekhovo site

As agreed during the inspection visit of the RSPB experts and project team, 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 closing the existing major sluice on Orekhovsky Canal (no new construction necessary as implied in the review of the annual report) has in principle been cleared with the Ministry of Environment, Kobrin 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 spend on an annual basis by the Sovkhoz for pumping the excess water. The necessary paperwork is being compiled, for the Ministry of Environment to budget the extra funds.

Dams #6 and #1 are the only ones where continued water flow is expected. However, after nearly one year of operation the dams show no sign of erosion or disintegration. So the design has actually proved fairly resilient and durable. The dams where no/little water flow is expected were additionally fortified with more willows that were planted in the spoil below the bundles.

1.4 Building of water-regulating structures at the Kirov collective farm site

Additional field surveys and desk studies by the project hydrologist and Belgiprovodkhoz experts have asserted that construction of another sluice on the Orekhovsky Canal 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. Instead the solution proposed for the dam #6 in conjunction with closing of the existing major sluice across Orekhovsky Canal (as mentioned above in 1.3.) has been agreed by all relevant stakeholders as the best way to ensure optimal water supply. The project plan has been adapted to reflect this solution.

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

Operating as planned (blocks #3 and #4).

1.6 Closing of the unnamed amelioration system, located on the territory of Zvanets

Operating as planned (block #2).

1.7 Relieving the negative effect of the Novoselki fish-farm operation on the mire

By late July 2004, the existing Novoselki sluice had been upgraded to the necessary height (plus 80 cm) and the embankment fortified with the funding provided by Drogichin Environment Inspection. Operating as planned since (dam #4). The recent monitoring data reaffirmed that previously the bulk of the water coming into the mire via dam #6 would go straight out through the Novoselki sluice. The initial miscalculation was caused by a misunderstanding about the sluice's functionality - the sluice appeared to be non-adjustable (counter to what the team believed) due to specifics of its construction. But it was only discovered when the water started flowing into it. With the sluice raised, the water coming in would spread across the entire mire, thereby elevating the water table to a high enough level so as to prevent large-scale fires.

1.8 Diminishing the drainage effect of the Yamnik system on the mire

Not part of the project plan anymore (compare 1st annual report).

1.9 Building of water-retention structures on all of the mire drainage canals located within Zvanets

Operating as planned (dams #2, 3, block #1)

Dikoe site

1.10 Close the unsanctioned drainage system construction by the Krasny Partizan collective farm

As mentioned in the 1st annual report, the system had been legalised in the mean time and therefore cannot be closed any more. 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. To be able to regulate the water level and to avoid excessive drainage repair works at the existing sluices (##1-3) are expected to start in 4th quarter of 2004.

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

Repair works (sluices ##4-5) are expected to start in 4th quarter.

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 (compare 1st annual report).

1.13 Alleviation of the draining effect of the "Dikoie" peat extraction site drainage network

Construction works are proceeding as planned (dams #1-3).

1.14 Closing of the Viunovka drainage system

Construction works are proceeding as planned (dam #4).

Two dams are being constructed at Narev river (dam #5) and Motylev Rov canal (dam #6). The two dams were actually prescribed by the Dikoe management plan, and not by "new survey information" as the annual report review states. The only reason for dropping the two dams from the original application was lack of funding. However, savings made enabled the team to bring the two dams back into the work plan.

The overall management of the site and maintenance of the water regulation facilities at the Dikoe site will be undertaken by the National Park Administration, since Dikoe has officially been incorporated in the National Park.

Sporovo site

1.15 Repairs of sluice at Selets complex

Repairs of Selets sluice are proceeding as planned.

Also, see 1.16

1.16 Modification of Selets operating rules & regulations

Putting into action the new operational rules for the Selets fish-farm are on hold, pending the completion of sluice reconstruction.

The construction of the first dam across Yaselda was completed by June with the funding provided by the Ministry of Environment through its Berioza District Inspection. The dam has been operating since the commissioning. However, in view of the huge water load and in order to solidify the construction even more, the designers and the project team have made a decision to fortify the crest with cement next year (when water is low enough).

The specifics of the second dam proposed are still under deliberation by the project team and all stakeholders involved. The final decision is expected to be made at the next Project steering committee meeting.

The review of the annual report states, that it is fortunate that savings on the project budget have been made to allow these two dams (plus two more at Dikoie, see 1.14) to be built. Fact is, that these two dams only became essential to the project after the planned new operational rules for the Selets fish-farm had to be adapted. This adaptation at the same time allowed for the savings necessary to guarantee the project's success.

1.17 Monitoring of the implementation of operating guidelines for Selets

No monitoring was undertaken yet (see 1.16).

HYDROLOGICAL MONITORING PROGRAMME

2.1 Monitoring of water levels at the three sites

Hydrological monitoring has been conducted as planned. The hydrological monitoring also includes checking the state of the hydrological facilities to detect any serious erosion damage. To date no such damage has been detected.

SPECIES MONITORING PROGRAMME

3.1 Monitoring of Aquatic Warbler Population density and breeding success at three sites

As planned, the AW monitoring was undertaken as part of a series of field trips by project experts to the sites. Monitoring data have been collected and are being analysed.

SITE PROTECTION THROUGH ENHANCED DESIGNATION

4.1 Elaboration of a Proposal on changing the boundaries of the Belavezhskaya Pushcha National Park to include the whole area of the Dikoe Mire IBA in the boundaries of the National Park

Done.

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 issue is being tackled in the course of regular meetings of the project team with the National Park Administration and other relevant authorities.

5.1 Set up Zakaznik Management Office

Management Offices set up at Zvanets and Sporovo have been operating successfully. The officers have been working closely with the Ministry of Environment, local drainage works companies, other relevant authorities to secure post-project funding toward maintenance of the hydrotechnical facilities constructed by the project. They are also working in the field of awareness raising and environmental education with the local population. The Ministry of Environment in the meantime is investigating possibilities for legalizing the management offices within its structure.

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?

The project performed well throughout the last 6 months. No major difficulties have been encountered so far.

The start of construction works at Dikoe was slightly delayed by the difficulties in finding a suitable construction company that can carry out the works. But ultimately, a solution was found with the Administration of the National Park and the construction has been underway since August.

No budget or timeplan implications are expected.

In the following, we are addressing additional issues raised by the reviewers of the first annual project review, that have not already been answered above.

Hydrological management in vast wetlands, like Zvanets, is complicated by a range of issues, including geological and hydrological specifics, water supply, climatic changes, etc. It is extremely difficult to set the hydrology of an affected mire back to normal within just one year. So the project has been fine-tuning and readjusting its approach over the reporting period. The viability of the whole complex of proposed

solutions will thus be put to test next spring. But based on the most recent hydrological data, the team expects all hydrological targets to be met.

The review of the annual reports raises concerns about the longevity of the dams constructed based on the report of the RSPB expert. Some dams have been fortified by planting additional willows and reeds. In two occasions, the decision has been taken to fortify a dam with cement (Zvanets dam #6 and at Sporovo). All of these amendments could be done at very low costs within the existing project budget and without big technical effort. The RSPB expert has in the meantime visited the sites again and has expressed his confidence in the stability of the facilities (his report will be included in the next annual report).

The students and postgraduates who have received training over the course of the project have been involved in all project-related monitoring and data analysis under close supervision of the project experts. They will use the new skills and data obtained as part of the training to prepare their respective diploma theses.

The methodology of this project, as well as the training provided within the project is very beneficial to other projects and areas in Belarus, thus, providing a very effective leverage effect. Several project proposals for restoration and recreation of wetland sites requiring similar hydrological techniques have been prepared, including a medium sized GEF project on the restoration of 42,000 ha of degraded peatlands.

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

No. No changes are proposed to the agreed work plan.

Discussed with the DI Secretariat: no

Changes to the project schedule/workplan: no

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

Please note the following changes in project staff:

UK staff: Mark Day has taken over the role of UK project supervisor from Aidan Lonergan, who had changed position within the RSPB, since 1st June 2004.

Belarus staff: APB project manager Dmitry Golubovsky starts his new employment with UNDP in Belarus from 1st November 2004. APB has already announced the position of the project manager and plans to recruit a successor by early December 2004. Until then Dmitry Golubovsky has agreed to cover for the work on this project.

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.

Our response to the points raised in the review of the 1st annual project report is included in the above half-year report.

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.**