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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, 2003 – March 31, 2004 Annual Report #1
<i>Project website</i>	N/a
<i>Author(s), date</i>	Dmitry Goloubovsky Lars Lachmann May 17, 2004

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-UNDP 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 monitoring at the three sites
 - inclusion of the entire area of the Dikoie Mire Important Bird Area (IBA) within the boundaries of the Belovezhskaya 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.
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- *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 operation plan has been adjusted slightly to allow for completion of engineering construction activities at Zvanets within one year, rather than spanning them across two years. This has an advantage in that all dams and weirs are built around the mire within approximately same time and start operating almost simultaneously, safeguarding the entire area at once.

Similar single-subcontractor one-go mode of implementation will be adopted for Dikoe, where construction is due to commence early April 2004.

Both changes in the operational plan have been mentioned in the first half-year-report, but since they do 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, project steering committee had convened to discuss the overall project strategy. PolesieGiprovodkhoz had been contracted to work out technical plans for Zvanets engineering construction, BelGiprovodkhoz had elaborated technical plans for modification of Selets operational rules and Dikoe engineering construction.

- *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.*

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.	Staff recruited as planned and in compliance with labour and tax guideline law of the Republic of Belarus and with UNDP recruitment procedures; details on names, duration of contracts, job-descriptions, etc. are available from the Project Manager on request.
0.2 – Hold steering committee meetings annually	First SC meeting held February 6, 2003 (see report in Annex 2)
0.3 – Hold management group meetings twice a year	Two MG meetings were held Sep 29, 2003 and February 10, 2004 (see report in Annex 3)
0.4 – Technical Report Production	Half-year technical report (2003) produced and submitted on time. The present annual report (2003-2004) has been delayed due to illness of Belarus Project Manager.
0.5 – Financial Reporting	Quarterly financial reports and finance claims delivered on time.

0.6 – Run management plan implementation training workshops	Between Sep 29 and Oct 3, 2003, 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).
Hydrological management Zvanets site:	
1.1 – Adjustment of the operating regulations and building of water-regulating structures at the Radostovo site	<p>In accordance with national procedures and in line with UNDP subcontractor selection guidelines, PolesieGiprovodkhoz was contracted to prepare a single engineering project for all hydrological construction activities at Zvanets. Another subcontract was issued to BrestMeliovodkhoz to carry out the actual construction on site.</p> <p>Rather than splitting the work between two years (as provided for in the original time plan), a decision was made to undertake all construction activities within one year. Aside from being cost-effective, the solution enables the team to obtain valuable monitoring data already next year, thus having enough time to make necessary adjustments until the project end.</p> <p>As of March 31, 2004, all major construction activities in accordance with the design plan have been completed. However, minor corrections/adjustments may be required to ensure full functionality. A total of 7 seven overflow weirs and 4 sand&gravel blocks were constructed (see map of Zvanets in Annex 5).</p> <p>Weir #1 – construction of the dam completed in October 2003. However, an error in hydrological calculations has resulted in the upper edge of the dam being around 20 cm higher than anticipated. As a result of spring flooding, the surrounding farming lands, where unauthorized traditional ploughing is practiced, were inundated during spring 2004. Consequently, the dam was damaged presumably by the farmers. As of March 2004, minor reconstruction of the dam was underway, funded by the District Environmental Inspection and the Drogichin District Drainage Works Company. The dam is expected to be rebuilt within June 2004.</p>
1.2 – Adjustment of the operating regulations and building of water-regulating structures at the Travy site	Weir #7 – construction completed, facilities operating as planned.
1.3 – Adjustment of the operating regulations and building of water-regulating structures at the Orekhovo site	Weir #6 – construction of a dam with a bypass connecting the Orekhov Canal with the discharge canal has been completed, the system operating as forecasted.

1.4 – Building of water-regulating structures at the Kirov collective farm site	Weir #5 – construction completed, facilities operating as planned. Outflow of water from the mire in the Dniepr-Bug Canal via discharge canal has been stopped. However, hydrological monitoring indicated that the amount of water retained by the weir is not enough to supply water to 100% of the adjacent mire. To achieve the maximum desired effect, an adjustable sluice needs to be constructed across Orekhovsky canal to raise water level in the discharge canal thereby ensuring sufficient water inflow for the mire. The issue is being further investigated and consultations are underway with the Ministry of Environment.
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	Discharge of water from the drainage system via drainage ditches into the Dnieper-Bug Canal has been stopped by sand&gravel blocks #3 and #4. Operating as planned.
1.6 – Closing of the unnamed amelioration system, located on the territory of Zvanets	Unauthorized drainage system has been shut down with sand&gravel block #2 to stop outflow of water out of the mire through drainage ditches.
1.7 – Relieving the negative effect of the Novoselki fish-farm operation on the mire	Weir #4 – construction of the weir at the bypass canal complete, with the water level raised 40cm as opposed the forecasted 120cm. However, water started to discharge via an adjustable sluice at the other end of the bypass canal. Now in order to raise the water level to the planned 120cm (needed to ensure sufficient level in the adjacent mire), the sluice needs to be upgraded to allow for a higher elevation and the embankment needs to be fortified. Additional costs are being calculated and necessary engineering planning will be undertaken duly. Works are expected to be completed within July 2004.
1.8 – Diminishing the drainage effect of the Yamnik system on the mire	The field surveys undertaken by Belgiprovodkhoz as part of preparation of the engineering design revealed that Yamnik drainage system is in fact separated from the mire by a mineral island, thus no feasible drainage effect on the mire is produced. Consequently, no actions were taken at the site.
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 – construction completed, facilities operating as planned.
<u>Dikoe site:</u>	In accordance with national procedures and in line with UNDP subcontractor selection guidelines, Belgiprovodkhoz was contracted to prepare a single engineering project for all hydrological management activities at Dikoe. A general contract was issued to the National Park Belovezhskaya Pushcha to carry out the actual construction on site. The engineering project has been completed. The National Park
1.10 – Close the unsanctioned drainage system construction by the Krasny Partizan collective farm	

	<p>is, in turn, going to subcontract hydrological construction to Pruzhany District Drainage Works Company that holds necessary licenses and has sufficient experience in such activities. Being the sole land user of the Dikoe mire, the National Park will ensure compliance with the agreed specification. Construction works are due to commence in late May 2004 (see map of Dikoe in Annex 6).</p> <p>Rather than splitting the work between two years (as provided for in the original timeplan), a decision was made to undertake all construction activities within one year. Aside from being cost-effective, the solution enables the team to obtain valuable monitoring data already next year, thus having enough time to make necessary adjustments before the project ends.</p> <p>As part of preparation of the engineering design plan, Krasny Partizan drainage system was found to have been legalized by the local authorities. Therefore, the project will review operational regulations for the facilities, to make sure the ground water is kept at the level needed for area's sustainability. Towards that end, the project will undertake repairs of the existing hydrotechnical facilities (##1-3), as they currently can't support the necessary water levels.</p>
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	<p>See 1.10</p> <p>As in 1.10, the project will undertake reconstruction of the existing water regulation facilities (## 4-5) with amendment of operational rules.</p>
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	<p>See 1.10</p> <p>This activity is going to be dropped, as pp. 1.10 and 1.11, according to the recent data, will be able to secure the desired result.</p>
1.13 – Alleviation of the draining effect of the “Dikoie” peat extraction site drainage network	<p>See 1.10</p> <p>3 water regulation facilities are envisioned (weirs #1-3).</p>
1.14 – Closing of the Viunovka drainage system	<p>See 1.10</p> <p>A water regulation facility is envisioned (weir #4).</p> <p>Though not initially included in the present project, the Narev river damming was called for in the management plan. However, for financial reasons the activity was dropped from the original application. The up-to-date survey information gathered by Belgiprovodkhoz indicates that this activity would be essential for the overall success of the Dikoe rehabilitation plan. In view of the savings achieved in activates 1.10-1.12, the project will undertake</p>

<p><u>Sporovo site:</u></p> <p>1.15 – Repairs of sluice at Selets complex</p>	<p>construction of two water regulation facilities: one on the Narev river (weir #5) and the other on the Motelyv Rov Canal (weir #6).</p> <p>Repairs of Selets sluice are being undertaken by the Ministry of Environment, as part of its co-funding toward the project. The initial plan was for the project to fund this activity. Now that the Ministry of Environment has taken over the task, the project money will be used to contribute to the construction of two necessary dams across Yaselda to ensure necessary hydrological regime is retained in Sporovo (see map of Sporovo in Annex 7).</p>
<p>1.16 – Modification of Selets operating rules & regulations</p>	<p>Also, see 1.16</p> <p>In accordance with national procedures and in line with UNDP subcontractor selection guidelines, Belgiprovodkhoz was contracted to amend Selets fish farm operational rules and guidelines, with a view to balance out the water level in the Sporovo mire. The new rules, agreed with all stakeholders, now prescribe that water be accumulated in fish-farm reservoir throughout spring, to provide sufficient discharge downstream Yaselda in order to ensure optimal water level in the Sporovo mire during the breeding season. In dry years, however, increased discharge into the mire could compromise fish production by the fish farm. Thus, the following new solution was agreed with all stakeholders to balance out the needs of the mire and the fish farm:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - in high-water years: the fish farm accumulates excess water in the reservoir and fish-ponds, limiting discharge into Yaselda to avoid flooding of the mire. For the reservoir to be able to accumulate water to its maximum level, the emergency discharge sluice has to be repaired (under implementation by the Ministry of Environment). - in low-water years: discharge from the reservoir is completely stopped, allowing only seepage water to flow into the river. In these conditions, the water level in the mire could drop as low as 30 cm below the surface. In order to ensure optimal water regime in the dry years, two overflow dams are going to be constructed at the Yaselda riverbed (underway with funding provided by the Ministry of Environment for the first dam; the second one will be constructed in 2005 using project funds). <p>Thus, the new rules agreed by the stakeholders will take effect only after Selets sluice repairs (expected end of 2004) and Yaselda dam (expected end of May 2004) have been completed.</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.
Hydrological monitoring 2.1 – Monitoring of water levels at the three sites	Hydrological monitoring was carried out at two sites by project hydrologist and local staff of zakaznik management offices: <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) (see for details on AW and hydrol. monitoring in Annex 8)
Species monitoring 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 analysed (details on AW and hydrological monitoring are presented in Annex 8). Results are to be published in Acta Ornitologica (paper is provided in Annex 9).
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 4.2 – Changing the boundaries of buffer zone of the Belavezhskaya Pushcha National Park to take account of the newly included Dikoe Mire IBA 5.1 – Set up Zakaznik Management Office	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. The issue will be tackled as part of the general re-zoning effort undertaken by the Administration of the National Park for the entire Pushcha. Considering the size of the area in question, the process is expected to take another year or so. Finalization of the activity has taken longer than planned due to unexpected administrative constraints. Note: the activity has been mistakenly reported as completed in the first six months progress report. Management offices for zakazniks Sporovo and Zvanets set up, in affiliation with the respective district environmental inspections of the Ministry of Environment. These consist of a ZMO director and an assistant. The offices will be financed with project funds until project end. Subsequently, the Ministry of Environment has committed itself to take over the funding (see respective letter in Annex 10).

- *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 first of three years.

The management structure of the project has been set up and is running well.

The main task of the project is the construction of water regulation facilities at the three project sites Zvanets, Sporovo and Dikoe to restore a close-to-natural hydrological situation. On each site this involves two steps: the development of an engineering plan and the actual construction of the facilities. Work at the Zvanets site has been finished almost 100%, and for the two other sites the engineering plans have been completed, whereas construction will take place during the coming second year of the project. This means that roughly two thirds of the hydrological construction work has already been achieved during the first year of the project. All of this work has been undertaken by subcontractors very familiar with the subject.

Alongside the construction work, scientific monitoring is conducted, which concentrates on the one side on the development of the populations of the key biodiversity indicator species, the Aquatic Warbler, on the other side on the development of the water levels on the sites before and after the construction has taken place.

Monitoring of the Aquatic Warbler is an ongoing activity that 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 in the framework of the present project. Monitoring points have been set up and the workforce for regular reading of the water levels has been provided within this project. Both monitoring activities form an integral part of the project to insure the measures taken really achieve the expected results and to give the opportunity to adjust the construction work if necessary.

In two cases (see above, weirs #1 and #5 at Zvanets) hydrological monitoring revealed the need for adjustments to the facilities built earlier, and thus has already proved effective.

The other objectives of the project (setting up management structure for zakazniks, enlarging borders of the National Park) require negotiation and lobbying activity of the project implementation team. Thus, the project team spends a lot of effort convincing local stakeholders and government agencies (National Park administration, Ministry of Environment) to achieve these objectives. In this process, a lot of synergy between the present project and other projects implemented or prepared by APB, RSPB and UNDP becomes effective: These are the initiatives

- to implement the Bern Convention and its Emerald Network in Belarus,
- to adapt Belarusian nature conservation legislation according to international conventions and European standards (with one aim being the establishment of management units for all zakazniks of international importance),

- a planned project to renaturalise a drained fen mire (Diki Nikor) adjacent to Dikoe fen mire,
- and the development of two large GEF projects envisioning the sustainable use of peatlands throughout the country
- and the sustainable management of key sites in the Polesie region, including forestry, land use and hydrology policies.

Being very successful in this area of work, Alexander Kozulin, the scientific director of the present project, received the highly prestigious Marsh Award for Bird Conservation on 27 January 2004 in London/UK (see Annex 11), to honour his successful personal and professional dedication towards the protection and restoration of fen mires and the globally threatened Aquatic Warbler in Belarus.

RSPB and APB are specifically trying to enhance the capacity of APB to take on an active role in the development of Belarusian national policies and legislation for nature conservation through regular exchange of knowledge and the development of relevant projects (Emerald Network project, Project Conservation Laws Belarus). Positive effects of these activities on the current project are e.g. the (not yet official) commitment of the country's president and the minister of environment towards the setting up of management units for all internationally important protected nature reserves, as they are set up in a pilot manner within the present project.

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

No major difficulties (ones that could compromise delivery of the project purpose) were encountered during the reporting period. However, the project was not free of difficulties:

- Damaged weir #1 (Zvanets) needs to be reconstructed.
- Adjustable sluice at weir #5 (Zvanets) needs to be upgraded to ensure proper functioning of the weir.
- With the new regulations for Selets fish farm, it turned out to be impossible to guarantee a sufficient flow out of the fish farm in dry summers, unless two dams across the Yaselda River are constructed, which were not envisioned in the initial project plan. This could be made possible, because the Ministry of Environment is taking over the repair of the emergency sluice at the reservoir above the fish farm, which originally was planned to be paid for from the project budget.
- Changing of the boundaries of buffer zone of the Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park to include the Dikoe mire has not yet been completed due to administrative constraints (also see activity 4.2 in table above).
- The project plan had to be adjusted to reflect the changes made based on the engineering plans for Zvanets and Dikoe (see activities 1.8 for Zvanets and 1.12 and 1.14 for Dikoe).
- Ministry of Environment needs to officially approve ZMOs as part of its structure and budget post-project funding. Zvanets and Sporovo pioneer in establishment of management units for zakaznik-level reserves in the country. The process is new to the country and it is taking more time and effort than initially anticipated.

- *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 2004 – March 2005 is presented in Annex 12.

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.*

N/A

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?*

RSPB has been intensively involved in project implementation through two visits of then UK Project Manager Aidan Lonergan and six visits of his successor, UK Project Manager Lars Lachmann, and one training visit by RSPB experts Jim Glover and Norman Sills. UK PM keeps regular contact with Belarus PM, to ensure continuous feedback re. on-the-ground actions.

On a more general note, cooperation between the UK and the host country partners (RSPB and APB) is very close and extends to a number of other projects and initiatives, as e.g. the development of the Emerald Network of the Bern Convention in Belarus or advocacy for an adaptation of Belarusian nature conservation law to standards of International Conventions and of EU legislation.

- *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 has been involved in the preparation of a GEF medium-sized project proposal on rehabilitation of 40,000 ha of degraded peatlands in Belarus. The project, led by the Ministry of Forestry, will build on the rehabilitation strategy implemented within the current Darwin project by adopting similar hydrological engineering approaches.

Another full-size GEF-funded initiative, now in its PDF B preparatory 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. The present Darwin project will serve as co-funding towards the full project stage of the above intervention.

Project applications for restoration of Diki Nikor and Osveya wetlands, currently under consideration by donors, will also build on the rehabilitation strategy and participative approaches developed in the course of the present Darwin project.

The project has benefited a great deal from the good cooperation with UNDP established in the course of the previous Darwin intervention. UNDP has been providing co-funding and administrative support for a number of other projects and applications (Diki Nikor, Emerald pilot project, please refer to pages 9/10 for more details). Similarly, a lasting relation has been forged with the Michael Otto Foundation that has contributed financially to the present project, as well as funded additionally the position of an International Aquatic Warbler Conservation Officer to oversee implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding for the Conservation of the Aquatic Warbler.

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?*

The project is perceived as a valuable joint international initiative by Darwin Initiative, UNDP, Michael Otto Foundation, RSPB, Ministry of Environment and APB. The logos of project partners appear on all project publications, i.e. press releases, posters, etc.

The project has underscored the need for a more streamlined approach towards management of nature protected areas (zakazniks), thereby providing an impetus for the Ministry of Environment to initiate an ambitious move to review national conservation legislation and set up the Emerald Network of the Bern Convention in Belarus. The issue has been brought to the attention of the Belarusian president, who specifically referred to the need of establishment of management units for all nature protected areas of international importance.

The two Darwin projects have laid the foundations for the two GEF-funded interventions aimed at rehabilitation of degraded peatland across Belarus and sustainable management of biodiversity sites in Polesie.

The Ministry of Environment has already confirmed its commitment to fund the management units of Sporovo and Zvanets zakazniks beyond the present project. Similar commitment expected towards maintenance and repairs of the hydrotechnical facilities constructed within the present project.

APB-led or –initiated activities for the conservation of Belarusian peatlands, fen mires and for the Aquatic Warbler have during the past 6 years achieved a great degree of awareness for these issues amongst the Belarusian population. The Aquatic Warbler is known to about 60-80% of all Belarusians with access to television. Reader's letters and interviews in national newspapers from sources outside APB and the project's immediate surroundings repeatedly referred to Aquatic Warbler and mire restoration.

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?*

N/A

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 of the outputs planned have been delivered in full. TV coverage of project activities was provided by three TV appearances of project personnel on 1st National TV channel and CTV (Minsk TV channel) during 5-10 min interviews which gave brief overview of project objectives, activities and partnerships (see Annex 14 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?*

In its first year, the project was promoted through one press release (see Annex 13) that was distributed both nationally and locally (see Annex 15 for list of targeted print media), as well as a series of national TV and radio appearances (see Annex 14 for details). Furthermore, the project work (focus on Zvanets actions) was highlighted in a poster (see Annex 16) that was distributed around Zvanets mire. A similar approach is going to be adopted in the second year.

- *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 received hydrological and AW monitoring training during 2003 field season (see Annex 17 for reports)
4C/D	2 postgraduates	Two postgraduate students received monitoring training during 2003 field season (see Annex 18 for reports)
6A/B	10 Belarusians	Training in management plan implementation (see Annex 4)
15B	1 press release	General information about the project and proposed actions provided in the press release, resulted in several publications in newspapers (see Annex 13)
18C	3 local TV programmes	Project activities were highlighted during TV interviews with project Chief Technical and Scientific Advisor Dr. Alexander Kozulin (see Annex 14)
19C	2 local radio programmes	Project activities and partnerships were highlighted during two radio interviews with Chief Technical and Scientific Advisor Dr. Alexander Kozulin (see Annex 14)
11B	1 paper submitted to peer-reviewed journal	"Factors affecting fluctuations of the Aquatic Warbler <i>Acrocephalus paludicola</i> population of Belarusian mires", Alexander Kozulin, Lyubov Vergeichik, Yazep Stepanovich. Acta Ornitologica, Vol. 39 (2004) No.1 <i>in print</i> (see article in Annex 9)
15C	One national press release in the UK	One national press release produced by RSPB on the event of Project Chief Scientific and Technical Advisor Dr. Alexander Kozulin being awarded the Marsh Award for Bird Conservation (see Annex 11)

- 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 * (e.g. journals, manual, CDs)	Detail (title, author, year)	Publishers (name, city)	Available from (e.g. contact address, website)	Cost £
Poster*	"Let's Save Aquatic Warbler Together"	Minsk	APB, P.O. Box 306, Minsk 220050, Belarus	N/A
Newspaper article	"Conserving Polesie Mires", by Sergey Zuyonok, 2003	"Kultura", Minsk, Belarus	Chicherina str. 1, Minsk 220029, Belarus Tel: +371 17 289-34-66	N/A
Magazine article	"Conserving the Aquatic Warbler" by Sergey Zuyonok, 2004	"Lesnoe I Okhotnichie Khozaystvo", Minsk, Belarus	Pryamaya str. 24, Minsk 220089, Belarus Tel: +375 17 222-71-71	N/A
Scientific journal	"Factors affecting fluctuations of the Aquatic Warbler <i>Acrocephalus paludicola</i> population of	Acta Ornitologica, Warszawa, Poland	Museum @ Institute of Zoology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Wilcza 64, 00-679 Warszawa, Poland	N/A

	Belarusian mires", Alexander Kozulin et.al, 2004 (<i>in print</i>)		Tel/fax: +48 22 629-63- 02	
Newspaper article	"We should take care of our natural wealth", by Sergey Zuyonok, 2004	"Rodnaya Pryroda", Minsk, Belarus	Khoruzhey str. 31a, Minsk 220002, Belarus Tel: +375 17 286-04-64	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)

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

N/A

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?*

The project progress has been evaluated based on the results of monitoring of water levels and aquatic warbler populations. Now, baseline hydrological data are available for all the three sites. Continuous hydrological monitoring is carried out at Zvanets and Sporovo, where hydrotechnical construction has been undertaken. Since no construction has so far started in Dikoe, no follow-up monitoring has been implemented.

Monitoring at Zvanets shows that ground 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.

As repairs of Selets sluice and construction of the dam across Yaselda at Sporovo have not been completed as of yet, water level in the mire has not changed significantly.

Since construction works at Zvanets proceeded well into the AW breeding season, no improvements in AW population were visible in 2003. The same holds true for Sporovo and Dikoe.

For more details on the results of the monitoring of the two key indicators for project success (water levels and numbers of Aquatic Warblers) see Annex 8.

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

This year's hydrological data indicated that the engineering construction completed to date at Zvanets is able to provide enough water to the mire during high-to-mid-water years. In low water years, these measures are enough to provide around 70% of the mire with water. In order to achieve maximum result, an adjustable sluice should be constructed at Orekhovsky canal in the western section of the mire (near Kirov collective farm site), which will enable full supply of water to the mire. Preliminary consultations are underway with the Ministry of Environment to fund construction. Final decision will be made upon further surveys and consultations with RSPB hydrologists.

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

The future of mainland Europe's rarest songbird, the aquatic warbler, is looking brighter as a result of the work of APB-BirdLife Belarus and its UK partner organisation, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), which has been supported by the Darwin Initiative since 1999.

The aquatic warbler is now a star species for Belarus. It features on the republic's national postage stamps and is the emblem of APB, the BirdLife International partner for Belarus, which has as one of its priorities furthering the conservation of this little striped brown bird and its fen mire habitat.

In the last century, nearly all of Europe's fen mires where the aquatic warbler was breeding were drained, and it is now a globally threatened species. Its main retreat is the country of Belarus, which holds 70% of the remaining world population, nearly all of them concentrated in only three big mire sites.

During a three year project funded largely by the Darwin Initiative conservation oriented management plans for these three sites were developed together with all local stakeholders. The implementation of the agreed actions of these plans started in 2003 and is the focus of another three year project, that again could count on the support of the Darwin Initiative.

During the first year of this project, the hydrology of Zvanets fen mire, with 16,000 has the biggest of the three project sites, could be completely restored and further degradation has been stopped. Similar actions for the other two sites have been prepared and will be implemented in 2004.

Already now, in the second year of the project a 5-10% increase of the world population of aquatic warbler can be expected thanks to optimised conditions in the world's largest breeding site of this rare species.

APB's conservation director Dr Alexander Kozulin is one of the leading figures of this recent conservation success. For these outstanding achievements, he has been rewarded the prestigious Marsh Award for International Bird Conservation in January 2004.

Receiving the award, Dr Kozulin said: “The story of the aquatic warbler is a nice example of how much can be achieved when people from different countries and organizations join together with one noble goal: to protect nature.”

■ **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.